



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in
Strategie di Comunicazione
Classe LM-92

Tesi di Laurea

Nordic Minimalism Meets Mediterranean Expressiveness: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Fashion Branding Communication on Instagram

Relatore

Prof. Maria Grazia Busà

Laureando

Minja Pavlović

n° matr. 2141722 / LMSGC

Anno Accademico 2025 / 2026

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Italiano

Il/La sottoscritto/a dichiara che il presente elaborato è frutto di lavoro originale e non è stato presentato, in tutto o in parte, per il conseguimento di un titolo accademico presso altre Università, italiane o straniere.

Dichiara inoltre che tutte le fonti e i materiali utilizzati per la redazione della tesi sono stati correttamente indicati nel testo e riportati nella sezione Riferimenti bibliografici, e che le eventuali citazioni testuali sono chiaramente riconoscibili tramite esplicito richiamo alla pubblicazione originale.

Il/La sottoscritto/a si impegna altresì a non aver fatto uso improprio di strumenti di intelligenza artificiale generativa (Large Language Models o simili) per la redazione della tesi. L'eventuale utilizzo di tali strumenti, a supporto della stesura o dell'elaborazione, è stato limitato ad attività ausiliarie e viene dichiarato in modo trasparente all'interno del testo, nel rispetto degli standard di integrità accademica.

English

The undersigned hereby declares that this thesis is the result of original work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for the attainment of an academic degree at any other Italian or foreign university.

The candidate further declares that all sources and materials used in the preparation of the thesis have been duly acknowledged in the text and listed in the Bibliographical References section, and that any direct quotations are clearly identifiable through explicit reference to the original publication.

The undersigned also confirms that no improper use has been made of generative artificial intelligence tools (Large Language Models or similar) in the writing of this thesis. Any use of such tools, when employed as auxiliary support, has been transparently acknowledged within the text, in full compliance with academic integrity standards.

Firma dello studente / Student's signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Tabrobut', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	6
1. Literature Review	7
1.1. Intercultural Perspective on Brand Communication	7
1.1.1. High-context and Low-context Communication.....	7
1.1.2. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions	8
1.1.3. Culture and Contemporary Branding.....	10
1.2. Cultural Branding and Identity Construction	11
1.3. Cultural Aesthetics in Fashion	13
1.3.1. Nordic Minimalism	13
1.3.2. Mediterranean Expressiveness.....	15
1.4. Semiotics and Visual Communication.....	18
1.4.1 Barthes’ Denotation and Connotation.....	18
1.4.2. Kress and van Leeuwen: The Grammar of Visual Design	20
1.4.3. Visual Communication on Instagram	22
1.4.4. Visual Consumption and Brand Meaning.....	25
1.5. Sentiment Analysis in Digital Branding.....	26
2. Methodology.....	29
2.1. Research Approach	29
2.1.1. The Quantitative Method – Sentiment Analysis.....	29
2.1.2. The Qualitative Method – Visual Semiotic Analysis	30
2.2. Data Collection.....	34
2.3. Limitations and Ethical Considerations	37
3. Analysis Results	39
3.1. Sentiment Analysis Results	39
3.2. Visual Semiotic Analysis Results	45
3.2.1. Denotative and Connotative Patterns.....	45
3.2.2. Color Patterns	51
3.2.3. Perspective Patterns.....	55
3.2.4. Composition Patterns.....	60
3.2.5. Social Configuration and Brand Visibility	63
4. Case Studies of Selected Instagram Posts.....	68
4.1. Summary of Findings	71
5. Discussion	73

5.1. Nordic Minimalism and Mediterranean Expressiveness as Cultural Communication Styles	73
5.2. Interpersonal and Compositional Meanings: Emotional Distance versus Emotional Involvement.....	75
5.3. Emotional Tone of Textual Communication.....	76
5.4. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Fashion Communication.....	77
5.4.1. Uncertainty Avoidance.....	77
5.4.2. Individualism vs. Collectivism.....	78
5.4.3. Masculinity vs. Femininity.....	79
5.4.4. Power Distance.....	80
5.5. Confirmation of Hypotheses and Integration of Results.....	81
6. Conclusion	83
References.....	87
Appendices.....	1
Appendix A – Sentiment Analysis Coding Sheet for Nordic Brands.....	1
Appendix B – Sentiment Analysis Coding sheet for Mediterranean Brands.....	3
Appendix C – Semiotic Analysis Coding Sheet for Nordic Brands.....	6
Appendix D – Semiotic Analysis Coding Sheet for Mediterranean Brands.....	12
Appendix E – Instagram Posts from Nordic Brands’ Official Accounts.....	18
Appendix F – Instagram Posts from Mediterranean Brands’ Official Accounts	23

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Hofstede's cultural dimensions scores of 31 sample countries (Yoo & Lee, 2019)	9
Figure 2: Elegant Woman in Red Sequin Evening Dress (Rondon, 2025).....	22
Figure 3: Sentiment percentage comparison.....	40
Figure 4: Average neutral, positive and compound scores	42
Figure 5: Example of controlled and aesthetically reduced communication in Toteme post (To12); Source: Instagram	43
Figure 6: Example of controlled and aesthetically reduced communication in Filippa K post (Fi2); Source: Instagram	43
Figure 7: Example of expressive communication in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do3); Source: Instagram	44
Figure 8: Example of expressive communication in Zeus+Dione post (Ze5); Source: Instagram	44
Figure 9: Example of minimalist aesthetic and visual restraint in Toteme post (To3); Source: Instagram.....	46
Figure 10: Example of minimalist aesthetic and visual restraint in Filippa K post (Fi6); Source: Instagram.....	46
Figure 11: Example of minimalist aesthetic and visual restraint in By Malene Birger post (By3); Source: Instagram	47
Figure 12: Example of visual and narrative richness in Desigual post (De4); Source: Instagram	48
Figure 13: Example of contemporary art and traditional design mixture in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do7); Source: Instagram	48
Figure 14: Example of the use of landscape and religious symbolism in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do4); Source: Instagram	48
Figure 15: Example of combining fashion with nature in By Malene Birger post (By7); Source: Instagram.....	49
Figure 16: Example of combining a historical element with a contemporary piece in Zeus+Dione post (Ze8); Source: Instagram.....	50
Figure 17: Comparative visual overview of Nordic and Mediterranean brands' color aesthetics on Instagram.....	52
Figure 18: Example of the use of cold tones in Filippa K post (Fi5); Source: Instagram	53

Figure 19: Example of the use of warm tones in Zeus+Dione post (Ze9); Source: Instagram.....	54
Figure 20: Comparison of color-related visual features of Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts.....	54
Figure 21: Example of a long shot paired with a minimalist background in By Malene Birger post (By5); Source: Instagram	55
Figure 22: Example of a long shot paired with rich ambient in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do2); Source: Instagram	56
Figure 23: Example of the use of low-angle perspective in By Malene Birger post (By4); Source: Instagram	57
Figure 24: Example of eye-level perspective paired with minimalist aesthetic in Filippa K post (Fi1); Source: Instagram	57
Figure 25: Example of eye-level perspective paired with vivid imagery in Desigual post (De7); Source: Instagram.....	58
Figure 26: Example of offer gaze combined with emotional expressiveness in Dolce & Gabbana post; Source: Instagram	59
Figure 27: Comparison of perspective-related visual features of Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts	59
Figure 28: Example of disconnection of elements in Desigual post (De11); Source: Instagram.....	60
Figure 29: Example of fragmented visual composition in Toteme post (To10); Source: Instagram.....	61
Figure 30: Example of an ambience-centered composition in Toteme post (To7); Source: Instagram.....	62
Figure 31: Example of model-centered composition in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do5); Source: Instagram	62
Figure 32: Comparison of composition-related visual features of Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts	63
Figure 33: Comparison of results regarding social configuration in Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts	64
Figure 34: Example of a group scene and sociability in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do1); Source: Instagram	65
Figure 35: Example of a group scene and reduction in By Malene Birger post (By10); Source: Instagram	65

Figure 36: Comparison of results regarding brand visibility in Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts	66
Figure 37: Example of subtle brand visibility in Zeus+Dione post (Ze2); Source: Instagram	67
Figure 38: Case study of a Nordic brand's post To4	68
Figure 39: Case study of a Mediterranean brand's post Do11	70

Abstract

This thesis aims to examine how the culturally specific aesthetic values of Nordic minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness manifest in the digital communication of fashion brands on Instagram. The research focuses on the relationship between culture, visual communication and branding strategies through a comparative analysis of Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brand posts.

The theoretical framework of the work is based on Hall's theory of high-context and low-context communication, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Barthes' semiotic approach, as well as Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design. The research combines quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the visual and textual elements of Instagram posts. The quantitative part of the research includes sentiment analysis of the textual descriptions (captions) of the posts using the VADER model, in order to examine the differences in emotional tone between the two regional groups of brands. The qualitative part is based on semiotic and visual analysis of posts, using Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation, as well as Kress and van Leeuwen's categories related to interpersonal and compositional meanings, such as color, social distance, gaze, framing and visual salience.

The research results show consistent differences between the Nordic and Mediterranean styles of fashion communication. Nordic brands more often use minimalist compositions, neutral palettes, emotionally restrained expressions and visually controlled spaces, building an identity through subtlety, clarity and implicit luxury. In contrast, Mediterranean brands more often rely on expressive aesthetics, intense colors, dynamic poses and culturally recognizable symbols, creating richer narrative and sensory atmospheres. The sentiment analysis results additionally show that Mediterranean brands have a higher level of positive emotional expressiveness in textual descriptions compared to Nordic brands.

The thesis demonstrates that the communication of fashion brands on Instagram is not only a promotional tool, but also a space for the reproduction of wider cultural values and communication patterns through visual and textual strategies. At the same time, the research indicates that these differences should not be seen as absolute oppositions, since the global visual conventions of contemporary digital fashion culture simultaneously shape both groups of brands. The thesis offers a better understanding of the intercultural communication of brands and shows the relevance of semiotic and intercultural theories for the analysis of contemporary digital media.

Introduction

Throughout history, fashion has never been only a way of dressing or aesthetic expression. Instead, it has served for a long time as an important form of cultural communication through which identities, social values and symbolic meanings are constructed. Contemporary fashion brands do not exclusively sell products, but shape certain lifestyles and cultural narratives through visual and textual strategies. Especially in the digital environment, the communication of fashion brands is becoming more and more based on visual storytelling, atmosphere and symbols that go beyond the functionality of the clothes. Social networks, and Instagram in particular, have allowed fashion brands to directly shape audience perception through carefully constructed images, short text descriptions and aesthetically consistent visual identities.

Today, Instagram represents one of the most important platforms for fashion branding communication, because it is based primarily on the visual presentation of content (Tamara, Heriyati, Hanifa, & Carmen, 2021; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Unlike traditional media, Instagram enables continuous and direct communication with the audience through images, video content and interactive formats (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In such an environment, visual elements such as color, composition, perspective, facial expression of the model or organization of space become important bearers of meaning. At the same time, the textual descriptions, i.e., captions of the posts contribute to the emotional tone of the communication and additionally shape the brand identity (Chowdhury, 2024; Jeong, Chung, & Kim, 2022). In this way, the digital communication of fashion brands functions as a combination of visual, textual and cultural codes through which certain social values and ideas about identity, luxury, emotions and lifestyle are transmitted.

Contemporary fashion branding communication is increasingly analyzed through interdisciplinary approaches that connect marketing, visual studies, semiotics and intercultural communication. In this context, culture has a particularly important role, as it affects the way brands construct meaning, represent emotions and establish a relationship with the audience (De Mooij, 2010). Visual communication is not universal, but depends on cultural norms, social values and dominant communication styles of a particular society (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Hall, 1976). Therefore, different cultural contexts can lead to the development of different fashion branding communication strategies, even within the same global digital platform.

A particularly interesting example of such differences can be seen in the comparison of Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands. In contemporary culture, Nordic aesthetics is often associated with minimalism, functionality and simplicity of form (Rousi, 2023; Skou & Munch,

2016). Scandinavian fashion identity is characterized by neutral color palettes, reduced compositions, focus on materials and quality, as well as the absence of visual excess. In contrast, Mediterranean aesthetics is more often associated with expressiveness, rich visual narratives, intense colors, decorativeness and emphasized emotionality (Trocchianesi, 2019). In the Mediterranean context, fashion often functions as part of a wider cultural atmosphere linked to history, local identity, sensuality and social life.

Although the differences between Nordic and Mediterranean aesthetics are often intuitively recognized in popular culture and the fashion industry, academic research that systematically analyzes their digital communication patterns remains relatively limited. In particular, there is a lack of research that links intercultural communication theories with the visual analysis of fashion brands' Instagram content. Most previous studies focus either on the marketing of luxury brands, or on influencer culture, or on general social network strategies, while culture-specific differences in the visual organization of meaning are less often analyzed through a combination of semiotic and intercultural approaches. Precisely for this reason, the goal of this research is to examine how the culturally specific aesthetics of Nordic minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness shape the digital communication of fashion brands on Instagram. The focus of the research is on the textual and visual elements of the posts, their emotional tones, as well as on the broader cultural patterns that such communication reproduces. The research seeks to show that Instagram posts by fashion brands represent more than promotional content – they are also a space of cultural representation.

The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on a combination of intercultural and semiotic approaches. The first important theoretical support is Edward T. Hall's (1976) theory of high-context and low-context communication. Hall distinguishes cultures that rely more on implicit meanings, symbolism, and context from those that prefer direct, clear, and explicit communication (Hall, 1976). Within this paper, the Nordic cultural context is viewed as closer to the low-context communication style, while the Mediterranean context is analyzed as relatively more high-context oriented. However, Hall's model is not used as a rigid classification, but as a framework for understanding different degrees of symbolic density and expressiveness in communication. In addition to Hall's theory, the research relies on Geert Hofstede's (2001) model of cultural dimensions. A special focus is placed on the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity and power distance, because they enable the analysis of how cultural values are reflected through the digital communication of fashion brands. Hofstede's approach contributes to understanding the

relationship between visual strategies and broader social patterns, such as relationships to authority, emotional expression, individuality or status.

The semiotic framework of the research is based on Barthes' (1977) concepts of denotation and connotation, as well as on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual design. Barthes' theory makes it possible to distinguish between the literal and symbolic levels of the image's meaning, which is particularly relevant in the analysis of fashion as a cultural system of signs. Visual elements such as colors, clothing, accessories and space do not function only as aesthetic details, but produce cultural connotations associated with luxury, identity, sensuality or social status. Kress and van Leeuwen further develop a social-semiotic approach through the concept of "grammar of visual design," according to which elements such as colors, social distance, vertical angle, model's gaze, framing and visual salience shape the interpersonal and compositional meanings of an image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Their model is particularly useful for analyzing Instagram communication, as it enables a systematic study of how the visual organization of content constructs the relationship between brand and audience.

Methodologically, the research combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. The analysis includes Instagram posts of selected Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands, whereby the visual content is analyzed through semiotic categories based on Kress and van Leeuwen's model, as well as through analysis based on Barthes' concepts of denotative and connotative meanings. In addition to visual analysis, the research also includes sentiment analysis of captions of selected Instagram posts using the VADER model, in order to examine the emotional tonality of communication and its relation to visual strategies.

The thesis starts from the assumption that there are systematic differences between Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands in the way of constructing identity, emotions and cultural meanings through Instagram communication. It is expected that Nordic brands will more often use minimalistic, emotionally restrained and visually reduced communication strategies, while Mediterranean brands will emphasize expressiveness, narrative and emotional openness. In addition to the theoretical contribution, the research also has practical significance in the field of digital marketing and fashion branding communication. Understanding cultural differences in digital communication can help fashion brands adapt their strategies more effectively to different markets and audiences. In the era of globalized digital communication, the ability to balance between global trends and local cultural identities becomes one of the key challenges of contemporary fashion branding.

The structure of the thesis is organized into several parts. After the introduction and research questions, the thesis presents a literature overview and a research methodology. Then follows the analysis of visual and textual elements of Instagram posts of selected fashion brands, after which the results are presented, and then interpreted through Hall's and Hofstede's theories, as well as through the semiotic approaches of Barthes and Kress and van Leeuwen. At the end of the thesis, the conclusions of the research, its limitations and potential directions for future research in the field of intercultural fashion branding communication are provided.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The goal of this research is to examine how the culturally specific aesthetic values of Nordic minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness are manifested in the digital communication of fashion brands on Instagram. The research focuses on the textual and visual elements of the posts in order to identify systematic differences in brand communication between the two cultural contexts.

In accordance with the theoretical framework of Hall's intercultural communication styles, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Barthes' denotation and connotation and Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, the research poses the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: How are the cultural aesthetics of Nordic minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness manifested in the visual communication of fashion brands on Instagram?

RQ2: How do interpersonal and compositional meanings (according to Kress and van Leeuwen's model) differ between Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands?

RQ3: Are differences in visual communication also reflected in the emotional tone of textual descriptions of Instagram posts?

RQ4: To what extent does the digital communication of fashion brands reflect communication styles and cultural dimension scores characteristic of Nordic and Mediterranean societies?

Visual and textual patterns are expected to show systematic differences between Nordic and Mediterranean brands, which can be interpreted with respect to Hall's intercultural communication styles and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Therefore, the research suggests the following hypotheses:

H1: Nordic fashion brands are more likely to use visual strategies associated with minimalism, including greater social distance, neutral color palettes and simple compositions.

H2: Mediterranean fashion brands more often use visual elements that signal emotional expressiveness, such as dynamic poses, warmer interpersonal relationships and vivid colors.

H3: Textual descriptions of Mediterranean brands will exhibit a higher level of positive emotional intensity (compound score) compared to Nordic brands.

H4: There will be consistency between visual expressiveness and sentiment scores, indicating that digital communication reflects culturally specific styles of emotional expression.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Intercultural Perspective on Brand Communication

Brand communication does not arise in a cultural vacuum, but is shaped by broader social values, communication styles and culturally specific ways of constructing meaning. Theories of intercultural communication, especially Hall's (1976) concepts of high-context and low-context communication, as well as Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, provide an important framework for understanding how culture affects the textual and visual strategies of brands. In the context of digital fashion communication, these theoretical approaches enable the analysis of the way in which broader cultural patterns of emotional expression, social relations and identity are reflected through the aesthetics and narratives of posts on social networks.

1.1.1. High-context and Low-context Communication

Acknowledging the cultural differences and inclinations of multiple countries, including their own, allows brands to effectively communicate the intended message and sustain favorable connections with their customers (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Edward T. Hall (1976) describes how different societies communicate, and in this sense, he distinguishes between high-context and low-context cultures.

High-context cultures rely on implicit communication, body language, shared cultural knowledge and cultural symbols to convey and understand meaning (Hall, 1976). Thoughts and emotions are rarely explicitly communicated, and the meaning in these cultures is derived from context and relationships between people; thus, outsiders can find it difficult to understand (Hall, 1976). Low-context societies, on the other hand, place a higher value on clear messages and direct, explicit communication where the meaning is contained within the words themselves (Hall, 1976). With respect to Hall's theory, Nordic countries, such as Sweden, Norway and Denmark, are often categorized as low-context cultures that favor explicit communication with minimalist, straightforward messages (Djursaa, 1994; Adair, 2003). Earlier studies have predominantly classified Mediterranean countries as high-context (Rosenbloom & Larsen, 2003), exemplifying communication in which priority is given to implicit meanings (Hall, 1976).

However, Kittler et al. (2011) criticize the dichotomous classification between low-context and high-context cultures, as it oversimplifies cultural variation and reduces cultural differences to two extremes. Kittler et al. (2011) argue that the two oppositions should rather be seen as “two poles in the continuous scale of meaning”, suggesting a middle-context position of different cultures alongside this continuum, which some researchers have already incorporated in their studies. For instance, Shao & Hill (1994) position Italy and Spain at the high end of the medium group, and Dozier et al. (1998) mention Spain as an example of a middle-context culture. Italian, Spanish and Greek communication style in this sense can be observed as more high-context compared to Scandinavian communication, but they should not be considered as typical examples of high-context cultures.

Therefore, Hall’s model is used only as a theoretical framework in this research, and not as a rigid classification system. Even though Hall’s low-context/high-context concept has become less applicable in recent years (Kittler, Rygl, & Mackinnon, 2011), it remains relevant for understanding different tendencies in communication styles influenced by social and cultural norms.

1.1.2. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

While Hall’s theory largely focuses on communication styles and contextuality, Hofstede’s (2001) model of cultural dimensions offers a broader framework for understanding how cultural values shape social behavior and communication practices. In Hofstede’s theory, cultural dimensions refer to cross-cultural differences in organizational and national context, and they are defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, 2011; Žemojtel-Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023).

Hofstede (2001) mentions six dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, power distance, long-term vs. short-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint. In this research, only four out of six dimensions will be mentioned, since they are particularly relevant for the Nordic vs. Mediterranean context and are generally considered the most “classical” (Žemojtel-Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023). The first one is the uncertainty avoidance (UAI) dimension, which indicates a country’s preference for rules and structure, as opposed to ambiguity and change. Nordic countries generally display lower uncertainty avoidance scores (see Figure 1), which may be associated with greater tolerance

toward ambiguity and less reliance on rigid symbolic structures in communication. Mediterranean countries, characterized by higher uncertainty avoidance scores, may rely more on familiar cultural symbols, recognizable narratives and stable identity references in brand communication. Another relevant dimension, individualism vs. collectivism (IDV), shows that communication in Northern Europe emphasizes self-expression and personal choice, exemplifying individualistic values, while Mediterranean countries position themselves in the middle, with Italy, Spain, and Greece more often highlighting family, community, and tradition as collectivist values. Collectivist cultures may use social media to create and maintain closely linked networks, and communication could be directed towards enhancing social connectivity, as opposed to individualistic, weakly connected cultures (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). The masculinity vs. femininity (MAS) dimension positions Nordic countries lower on the scale, describing them as "feminine" societies with flexible gender roles and good quality of life, and Mediterranean societies are considered more "masculine" since they often stress ambition, material success and clear-cut gender roles. The last one is the power distance (PDI) dimension, used to indicate (in)equality in power distribution across society (Hofstede, 2001). Nordic countries display a very low power distance and have a high degree of equality among people. Consequently, Nordic brands favor egalitarian, inclusive communication. Mediterranean brands might refer to prestige and social status more often, since these countries have medium power distance (Hofstede, 2001). The scores of these six countries in the cultural dimensions mentioned are listed in Figure 1 below.

No.	Country	UAI	IDV	MAS	PDI
1	Australia	51	90	61	38
2	Austria	70	55	79	11
3	Belgium	94	75	54	65
4	Canada	48	80	52	39
5	Chile	86	23	28	63
6	Czech Republic	74	58	57	57
7	Denmark	23	74	16	18
8	Estonia	60	60	30	40
9	Finland	59	63	26	33
10	France	86	71	43	68
11	Germany	65	67	66	35
12	Greece	112	35	57	60
13	Hungary	82	80	88	46
14	Ireland	35	70	68	28
15	Italy	75	76	70	50
16	Japan	92	46	95	54
17	Luxembourg	70	60	50	40
18	Mexico	82	30	69	81
19	Netherlands	53	80	14	38
20	New Zealand	49	79	58	22
21	Norway	50	69	8	31
22	Poland	93	60	64	68
23	Portugal	104	27	31	63
24	Republic of Korea	85	18	39	60
25	Slovakia	51	52	110	104
26	Slovenia	88	27	19	71
27	Spain	86	51	42	57
28	Sweden	29	71	5	31
29	Switzerland	58	68	70	34
30	Turkey	85	37	45	66
31	United States	46	91	62	40
	Average	69.06	59.45	50.84	48.74
	Minimum	23 (Denmark)	18 (Rep. of Korea)	5 (Sweden)	11 (Austria)
	Maximum	112 (Greece)	91 (United States)	110 (Slovakia)	104 (Slovakia)

Figure 1: Hofstede's cultural dimensions scores of 31 sample countries (Yoo & Lee, 2019)

Hofstede's cultural dimensions represent an important theoretical framework for understanding how cultural values influence patterns of communication, identity and social relationships. Although the theory was originally developed in the context of organizational and cross-cultural communication, its concepts can also be useful for analyzing contemporary digital and visual brand communication. In the context of the fashion industry, Hofstede's approach allows one to see how broader cultural patterns are reflected through aesthetics, emotional tone and identity representation strategies on social media.

1.1.3. Culture and Contemporary Branding

In this thesis, the term “fashion branding communication” refers to communication strategies employed within the process of constructing and maintaining a fashion brand identity. As branding is deeply rooted in cultural symbolism, values and aesthetic preferences of a certain society, brand communication can often be observed as a reflection of the cultural system in which it occurs (De Mooij, 2010).

Marieke de Mooij (2010) notes that “most elements of consumer behavior are culture-bound, and so are the marketing strategies that marketers develop”. This means that cultural values shape both how consumers interpret messages conveyed by brands and how brands shape their own communication in order to align it with dominant social norms and expectations. In this sense, an intercultural perspective in brand communication does not exclusively refer to direct interactions between different cultures; it can also contribute to cross-cultural comparison and the analysis of how culture-specific values shape communication styles and brand representations (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Fashion brands are particularly appropriate for such analysis, as their communication heavily relies on visual elements, aesthetic and symbolic meanings. In accordance with Marieke de Mooij's ideas, differences in how Nordic brands communicate minimalism and how Mediterranean brands communicate expressiveness can be seen as manifestations of wider cultural contexts.

These distinctions in communication become particularly visible on digital platforms, as they are based on visual communication that enables brands to express specific cultural aesthetics using images, videos and narrative elements. Social media allow for global distribution of content, but at the same time, they are a “powerful personalization tool” and encourage brands to maintain a recognizable cultural identity to differentiate themselves from competitors in the global market (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Research on international

marketing shows that successful global campaigns often combine marketing strategies with culture-specific elements that cultivate local values and aesthetic preferences of the audience (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013).

From an intercultural perspective, differences in visual communication are more than aesthetic choices – they represent different ways of expressing cultural identity. Therefore, Hall's and Hofstede's ideas offer a theoretical foundation for understanding how cultural specificities influence style and brand communication structure. These frameworks can be used to observe how intercultural differences shape not only the emotional dimension of brand communication, but also its visual and textual elements. By integrating Hall's and Hofstede's perspectives, it is possible to systematically analyse how Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands reflect cultural and societal values in the digital environment.

1.2. Cultural Branding and Identity Construction

In recent decades, there has been a shift in the way people see brands. Instead of viewing brands as just labels and reducing them to their material markers, such as logos, packaging, and designs, it has become clear that brands primarily adopt a role of cultural actors that express and contain cultural meanings. In order to understand how brands communicate online, it is necessary to take into consideration a theoretical approach that integrates identity, culture and visual representation. The works of Douglas B. Holt, David Aaker and Jonathan Schroeder demonstrate how brands use cultural codes and visual strategies to construct brand identity, which will be important for analyzing how fashion brands communicate their cultural aesthetics within the digital marketplace.

According to Holt (2004), collective identities are shaped by a brand's ability to carry cultural meanings. Holt argues that "... the brand's value resides in the specifics of the brand's cultural expression ... and the particular expression of these contents in the communication" (Holt, 2004). Rather than relying on a product's functionality, brands are being formed around different cultural beliefs and movements. In the cultural branding theory, Holt (2004) argues that brands become relevant when they address cultural anxieties sewn into the collective consciousness of the nation and connect with consumers on a larger scale by offering symbolic solutions. Thus, a brand behind the product is far more than a label – it is an ideology, a

narrative, a way of living and an identity. Holt's view is particularly relevant in the context of this thesis as it sees brands as creators of cultural styles, rather than simply as transmitters of visual trends. A Nordic clothing line, for example, may employ a minimalist design and functionality as an aesthetic choice, but in reality this choice conveys cultural standards for rationality, restraint and understated elegance. Similarly, a Mediterranean brand's use of bold colors and illustrative narrative scenes is a cultural code associated with emotion, vitality and sociability. Therefore, as much as the difference between Nordic minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness is of a visual and aesthetic nature, it also represents an ideological contrast.

While Holt underscores the cultural dimension of a brand, Aaker (1996) provides a clear structural dimension to brand identity. As stated by Aaker, brand identity is "how a brand wants to be perceived" and involves a set of associations that a company wants to create or maintain (Aaker, 1996). Two of the four brand identity perspectives Aaker mentions are the "brand as person" perspective, referring to the brand's overall personality (i.e., genuine, energetic, rugged) and the "brand as symbol" perspective, which refers to visual imagery and metaphors (Aaker, 1996). These perspectives are especially relevant in the digital communication analysis domain, as brand identity becomes increasingly affirmed on Instagram through consistent visual style, the choice of models and locations, the emotional register of communication and language tone in captions. Using these aesthetic characteristics in a particular way, minimalist Nordic brands choose to be associated with identity attributes such as calm and sophistication, while expressive Mediterranean brands evoke associations with passion and history, which shows that visual analysis becomes an analysis of the "brand as person" and "brand as symbol" perspectives. Brand identity is not static and it is constantly reproduced through digital content. Instagram feed, in this sense, can be seen as an identity archive, as a set of carefully created representations that construct the cultural positioning of a brand.

Schroeder (2002) highlights that, in contemporary culture, branding is first and foremost a visual phenomenon. A new, twenty-first-century kind of economy – the "image economy" – left a lasting impact on how brands operate, as today images play a central role in the formation of meanings and values, and therefore they are directly responsible for economic success (Schroeder, 2002). Schroeder mentions the concept of "brand culture", referring to cultural dimensions and codes of brands, such as history, images, myths, art, and theatre, which complement the visual rhetoric of brands and influence brand meaning and identity (Schroeder, 2008). The importance of images in marketing is particularly evident in the fashion industry, since it heavily relies on aesthetics – photographs and campaigns act as visual narratives that

communicate brand identity and allow consumers to interpret its symbolic values. Schroeder's perspective is crucial for the methodological framework of this thesis, as it justifies the focus on analyzing visual elements such as composition and colors. In an image-dominated digital environment such as Instagram, brands use carefully orchestrated images to convey aesthetic and cultural messages, making image analysis relevant for understanding modern brand communication.

Holt, Aaker and Schroeder's theories create a cohesive theoretical framework that contributes to an understanding of the process of cultural construction of an identity for fashion brands via their digital communication strategies. The analysis of Nordic Minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness is both a descriptive comparison of stylistic choices and an investigation into how fashion brands position themselves culturally through visual and textual means, which may also represent a larger system of cultural meaning.

1.3. Cultural Aesthetics in Fashion

1.3.1. Nordic Minimalism

In the 1950s, Nordic minimalism stepped onto the international scene and was recognized as a lifestyle philosophy and a manifestation of Nordic cultural and societal ideals: functionality, democracy and affordability (Rousi, 2023). It developed alongside sociopolitical ideals in Scandinavian countries, especially after World War II, when it practically served as a counter to capitalist Western economies and the unsatisfied, demanding consumers they created (Basak, 2021). Around this period, social equality and functionalism started to leave their mark on daily life and design in Scandinavia.

Norman (2004) mentions three levels of emotional reaction to design: visceral, referring to sensory reactions to colors and textures; behavioral, implying functionality and usefulness; and reflective, which includes meaning, culture, identity and social values (Norman, 2004). Nordic minimalism clearly emphasizes two of these – behavioral and reflective levels – as it underlines functionality and the fact that form should support function, while also aligning with dominant social ideas about life and identity. In the Nordic approach to design, aesthetic value

emerges from simplicity and practicality, compared to luxurious approaches that insist on ornamentation and visual extravagance.

Minimalist tendencies are a consequence of Nordic consumers' preference for practicality and comfort, as well as their conviction that goods should be functional and serve everyday purposes. This mindset is embodied in particular cultural concepts, such as the Swedish idea of "lagom"¹, celebrating moderation and balance, and the Norwegian and Danish concept of "hygge"², which refers to minimalism and coziness as a way of life and reflects the "less is more" perspective. Although Geert Hofstede categorizes Northern European countries as highly individualistic (Hofstede, 2001), ideas of "lagom" and "hygge" show a collectivist attitude toward social equality and anti-elitism, which is also reflected in design principles that strive for affordability and discreet elegance. Scandinavian cultures' appreciation of personal autonomy is often associated with modesty and discretion in public settings rather than the display of social status through material symbols.

This cultural trend is further linked to the Scandinavian notion of Janteloven (Law of Jante), which promotes social modesty while discouraging the display of an individual's success and superiority (Basak, 2021). Janteloven, as an informal set of social norms, shapes preferences that favor subtle personal style expression over obtrusive status signaling and logomania³. Thus, rather than being a general collectivist mindset, Nordic minimalism in fashion is influenced by a culturally inherent egalitarianism that shapes how luxury is communicated through subtle design and visual restraint. Minimalistic aesthetic is a purposeful communication strategy in this context that simply embodies sustainability and rationality, and not the lack of style. As Italian designer Massimo Vignelli put it, "*Minimalism is not a style. It is an attitude, a way of being, it is a fundamental reaction against noise, visual noise, disorder, vulgarity. Minimalism is a pursuit of the essence of things, not the appearance*" (as cited in Basak, 2021).

In their article, Skou and Munch mention nature, societal models and minimalist aesthetic as the most reappearing themes in Nordic design (Skou & Munch, 2016), and this could also apply to the fashion industry. Here, Nordic minimalism emerges through neutral color palettes, simple silhouettes, absence of decorative elements and natural materials, such as

¹ Swedish word "lagom" translates to "just the right amount, sufficient, moderate, suitable, not too little, not too much" in English (Barinaga, 1999).

² Norwegian and Danish word "hygge" is described as a word for "a quality of cosiness (= feeling warm, comfortable, and safe) that comes from doing simple things such as lighting candles, baking, or spending time at home with your family" (Jensen, et al., 2018).

³ Logomania refers to "a fashion design in which a brand's logo is conspicuously repeated across an article of clothing" (Poon, 2023).

wool, cotton and linen, associated with longevity and ecological responsibility. The idea is that design should encourage longevity of use instead of impulsive shopping (Fletcher, 2014). Therefore, aesthetic reduction is more than a visual strategy – it is strongly connected to the Nordic cultural tendency towards sustainability and long-term use of the product. Instead of seasonal, trend-oriented fashion, durability and ethical production are a priority, which underlines the importance of ecological awareness and responsibility towards nature in Nordic cultures. Clean, simple forms in Scandinavian designs are linked to egalitarianism and the need to make these designs accessible to everyone (Skou & Munch, 2016). Above all, Scandinavian consumers are motivated by quality and they seek quiet luxury⁴ rather than displaying obvious luxury symbols (Sijbers & Ershov, 2025). Scandinavian fashion brands tend to practice visual communication that respects these principles. They use clear compositions, natural lighting and restrained stylization in order to draw attention to the quality of the product instead of putting symbolic status markers in the spotlight.

On digital platforms such as Instagram, Scandinavian ideals are communicated through minimalistic visual narratives that blend plain backgrounds, neutral tones and short, informative product descriptions. Such content serves as a kind of brand communication influenced by culture, where visual restraint and references to quality, sustainability and functionality contribute to the meaning of the product. Fashion labels like Toteme, Filippa K and By Malene Birger frequently use minimalistic imagery in their ads, on Instagram feeds and websites. In a Toteme Instagram post, for example, one might notice a model dressed in neutral tones, photographed on a simple background, with a short caption that simply describes the product without emotional appeal. Such content directs attention to the product while demonstrating cultural values of restraint and sophistication. In this case, functionality and longevity prevail over trend-oriented aesthetics.

1.3.2. Mediterranean Expressiveness

The historical context of Mediterranean expressiveness can be traced back to the long tradition of visual culture in ancient Greece and Rome, when Greek and Roman artists defined what harmony is and developed a system of proportions. Later styles, especially during the Renaissance and Baroque periods in Italy and Spain, introduced elements of drama, color saturation and rich ornamentation to the Mediterranean expressive artwork. In the twentieth

⁴ Quiet luxury is an aesthetic centered on minimalism, without a presence of conspicuous logos or branding. Its consumers prefer quality and minimalism over the quantity of products purchased (Sijbers & Ershov, 2025).

century, modern fashion industries developed their own national identities owing to influential fashion designers such as Giorgio Armani and Valentino Garavani in Italy and Cristóbal Balenciaga in Spain. The emergence of the “Made in Italy” concept redefined Italy’s historical and artistic heritage in the context of modern design (Segre Reinach, 2015). As such, Mediterranean expressiveness represents the intersection of Mediterranean artistic traditions, climate and social characteristics, as well as the current trends in modern luxurious branding.

The Mediterranean visual aesthetic is described as deliberately expressive, with the intention to demonstrate the complexity of ideas associated with Mediterranean cultural narratives and emotional intensity (Trocchianesi, 2019). Consequently, these aesthetic representations transformed visual communication into an expression of a collective identity. The Mediterranean visual codes differ from the Nordic aesthetic minimalism by the use of layers, decorative elements and bright colors that reflect the climate and the region of the Mediterranean. Bright blues, whites, yellows, oranges and greens resemble the Mediterranean landscape, encompassing sunlight, sea, rocks, plants and architecture, and they “... are able to transmit the richness and the complexity of a place” (Trocchianesi, 2019). These colors not only serve decorative purposes, but they also act as semiotic tools that provide an observer with a sensory experience of the region’s environment. In accordance with the visual semiotic theory (Barthes, 1977), color representation within a cultural context can display connotative meanings of warmth, vitality, social openness and hedonism, where the visual aesthetic serves as the medium to express and transmit cultural ideas.

Narrative structure plays a key role in conveying Mediterranean aesthetic – communication around brands frequently develops illustrated narratives that connect past and present, tradition and modernity, and private and public domains. Such an approach can be understood through the concept of high-context culture by Edward T. Hall, stating that the meaning of the message is not necessarily limited to the literal contents of the message but instead includes the context of the message, alongside numerous cultural references and symbol systems (Hall, 1976). It can be said that sociocultural patterns in the Mediterranean are predominantly implicit, based on emotion and cultivated through culturally based experiences. Cultural concepts such as Italian “dolce vita⁵”, Spanish “alegría de vivir⁶” or Greek “kefi⁷” exhibit motivational elements related to celebrating life, creating social connections and living

⁵ Italian expression “dolce vita” means “sweet life” or “good life” in English, and it connotes “a life of indolence and self-indulgence” (Mendes, 2015).

⁶ Spanish phrase “alegría de vivir”, inspired by the French phrase “joie de vivre”, translates to the “joy of living” or “zest for life” (Valenzuela, 2026).

⁷ “Kefi” in Greek means “the spirit of joy, passion and enthusiasm” (Maios, 2017).

everyday life intensely. These cultural ideals are not merely descriptive lifestyles but rather representative of a culture-based approach to the collective enjoyment of shared space in the form of food, family and socializing. Therefore, scenes that illustrate this approach can be found in fashion advertising campaigns that portray family gatherings, family-style dinners, celebrations, outdoor activities and interaction between models. Clothes are not shown in isolation, but as a part of social dynamics and emotional ambience. Fashion can, therefore, serve as a means of participating in a cultural narrative, and not only as an object of consumption (Entwistle, 2015).

Mediterranean luxury is strongly connected to cultural heritage and craftsmanship that has developed over many generations of family workshops and local textile techniques (Segre Reinach, 2011). The continuity between past and present is often visually expressed by the use of religious iconography, mythological references, baroque motifs, floral ornaments, architectural details and traditional fabrics. For example, in the Greek fashion context, items often reference ancient mythological elements, such as draped silhouettes inspired by chiton and peplos⁸, golden details that indicate divinity and design features found on ancient pottery as examples of eternity, a harmonic universe and an ideal beauty. Italian fashion often includes religious symbolisms (e.g., saints, gold details, the Sacred Heart, architecture resembling church interiors) to reference Catholic iconography or art from the Baroque period. In this way, the brand establishes a relationship between luxury and religion and history. Likewise, high-end Spanish clothing may reflect the elements of folklore, flamenco tradition or historical textile techniques such as embroidery and lace, demonstrating local identity through different types of artistry (Entwistle, 2015). The use of traditional materials, handcrafted objects and decorative elements functions as visual reminders of culture and carriers of the cultural meaning. Luxury brands also tend to highlight their own brand heritage, constantly referring to their founders, archives and iconic products, to improve emotional bonds with customers and enhance credibility (Zanola, Stachel, & Greco, 2025). In this sense, history serves as legitimizing capital (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

In digital space, particularly on Instagram, Mediterranean expressiveness is represented through the use of warm tones, high-contrast imagery, dynamic compositions and detailed, emotionally-charged descriptions. In addition to creating a visual spectacle that depicts the product, such visual communication provides an opportunity for cultural experience. Therefore,

⁸ The chiton and peplos were the main garments worn by women in ancient Greece. Both were made from rectangular pieces of fabric, secured with pins (fibulae) and typically fastened at the waist with a belt to form a bloused effect known as the kolpos.

Mediterranean fashion aesthetic functions as a form of cultural branding (Holt, 2004), in which identity is built through visual evocation of collective memory, space and the way of life. Dolce & Gabbana's campaigns are a good example of using the Mediterranean's cultural brand to create an immersive brand identity. Through the combination of religious symbols, Sicilian architecture, family scenes and theatrical stylization, Dolce & Gabbana creates visually complex images and emotionally charged narratives that associate the brand with values of passion, tradition and cultural pride. In such campaigns, luxury is not represented in a minimalistic manner, but as an expression of cultural extravagance and emotional intensity.

It is important to note that Mediterranean fashion, although visually expressive, also shares certain features with the Nordic market in terms of quality and longevity of the product. However, while the Nordic model uses visual simplicity and subtlety to express quality, the Mediterranean approach communicates quality through decorativeness and cultural symbolism. In this sense, one could make a distinction between two different aesthetic strategies of luxury: one based on discretion and quiet sophistication, and the other on narrative and emotional intensification.

1.4. Semiotics and Visual Communication

1.4.1 Barthes' Denotation and Connotation

Barthes' (1977) semiotics theory is based on the assumption that meaning is built on two levels of signification and that all arts contain two messages: a denoted message and a connoted message. The first, denotative level describes what is directly shown in the image, the photographic "analogue", and in visual content analysis, this usually involves identifying objects, people, clothes, colors and surroundings. The second, connotative level, refers to the cultural and symbolic meanings connected to the image's denotative elements. According to Barthes, connotations are not an inherent part of images, but develop through the audience's interpretations, or as Barthes calls it, the "coding of the photographic analogue" (Barthes, 1977). The coding depends on the cultural codes the audience shares within a certain society, and precisely because of this, the same visual elements can have different interpretations in different cultural contexts.

When it comes to the arts, Barthes explains that painting's precision in depicting people, objects or landscapes is always interpreted as a specific style of a painter and thus it conveys connotative meaning by default, while the art of photography is more direct in denotation and it is „read as the very sign of objectivity” (Barthes, 1977). However, Barthes adds, even photographs carry connotative meanings through the selection of the frame, composition, lighting, colors and textual elements (Barthes, 1977). In the essay *The Rhetoric of the Image*, Barthes further explains that advertising images often contain multiple connotative codes that operate simultaneously, and these can be cultural, symbolic or aesthetic, forming a complex meaning system (Barthes, 1977). In fashion photography, for example, certain photography styles, location choice, model's position or stylization of clothes can create a specific narrative or emotional atmosphere that goes beyond simply displaying the product's function. Here, Instagram images function as modern visual “texts”, in which denotation refers to a represented component (product, model, clothes), and connotation encompasses cultural and emotional messages the brand is sending, such as tradition, luxury, passion or sophistication. Barthes' framework enables systematic analysis of visual content, and it can be useful for understanding how a message is constructed and communicated, especially in a cross-cultural context.

An important aspect of Barthes' theory refers to the connection between visual and textual messages. Barthes (Barthes, 1977) argues that advertising text often controls the interpretation of images through the process called anchorage, where textual elements like titles, slogans and product descriptions can “banish” possible meanings of the image, leading the audience towards a more flattering interpretation. Anchorage is the most frequent function of linguistic message and it has “a function of elucidation”, Barthes adds, but only to certain signs, and not to the total message (Barthes, 1977). Since visual content on social media is usually accompanied by post descriptions or captions, this process is extremely important as textual elements can highlight some aspects of the image and directly influence its connotative meaning in this way.

Barthes's semiotic perspective provides a clear distinction between what is literally displayed in the image and the cultural meanings of it. Understanding the difference between denotation and connotation, as well as the role of anchorage, offers a framework for analyzing the way in which fashion images create and control meanings and how the combination of visual elements and textual captions shapes content's interpretation. In the context of this research, Barthes's model serves as the theoretical foundation for identifying and interpreting cultural and emotional meanings constructed through visual and textual elements in fashion brands' social media posts.

1.4.2. Kress and van Leeuwen: The Grammar of Visual Design

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) further develop semiotic analysis within the framework of social semiotic theory by introducing a “grammar of visual design” as a tool for reading images in multimodal settings.

The authors distinguish three basic metafunctions of visual communication: representational meanings, interpersonal meanings and compositional meanings (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Representational meanings refer to what is shown in the picture, i.e., to people, objects and actions. Interpersonal meanings focus on the relationship between the depicted subject and the observer, while compositional meanings include the way visual elements are organized within the frame and the way the composition directs the interpretation of meaning.

Within interpersonal meanings, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) highlight the importance of elements such as gaze, social distance and vertical angle, referring to the perspective the observer has in relation to the subject of the image. A model's direct gaze towards the camera can create a sense of connection and involvement for the viewer, while the absence of a gaze often produces greater distance. Social distance is shaped through the shot and the subject's distance from the camera, with close-up shots suggesting intimacy, and long shots formality and emotional distance. Vertical angle can further shape relations of power, equality, or inclusion between the model and the audience.

Compositional meanings refer to the way in which the elements are organized within the image, “leading the viewer towards the most important elements” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) mention the concepts of visual salience and framing. Visual salience refers to the elements that attract the most attention through color, lighting, contrast, size or position in the frame, while framing indicates whether the elements are presented as connected or separate. In this way, the composition not only organizes the aesthetics of the image, but also the way in which the observer interprets the relationships between subjects, space and visual symbols.

Authors state that the visual grammar is not universal – rather, it is culture-specific and differently understood in distinct cultures (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). For example, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), colors can convey emotional, symbolic and cultural associations, influencing the way the audience interprets visual content. The meaning of color depends on the social and cultural context in which it is used, which is why the same colors can have different connotations in different cultures. In fashion brands’ visual

communication, colors can contribute to the creation of an impression of warmth, distance, luxury, spontaneity or formality. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) point out that the choice of palette, the intensity of colors and their mutual relationship participate in shaping the overall atmosphere of the image and the emotional tone of the communication. In the context of fashion communication, colors do not function only as decorative elements, but also as carriers of culturally coded meanings and identity values.

While Kress and van Leeuwen's approach focuses on specific technical elements within the image to examine how they contribute to the overall meaning, Barthes' semiotic approach aims to uncover the duality of the meaning within a whole image as a result of its various stylistic elements. These two approaches complement each other, as Barthes' (1977) distinction between denotative and connotative meaning can also be applied to fashion images. In the example image below (see Figure 2), denotative meaning refers to the visual features of a woman wearing a red evening gown. The red color could symbolize many things, depending on the different cultural backgrounds of those who interpret it, including power, sensuality or social standing. As such, while the image shows a woman who wears a red gown at the denotative level, there are also connotative meanings attached to attire based on cultural associations with the color red, luxurious fabric and confident body posture.

Depending on the cultural context, color red could, for example, signify femininity, desire or danger, luxurious fabrics can be a sign of celebration, wealth and high social class, and a confident stance and direct gaze might be used to convey empowerment, autonomy or fear. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) note that elements such as color, perspective and composition are semiotic resources shaped by the community that uses them, and therefore they carry culture-specific meanings. When a single figure appears in a red dress placed at the center of a monochrome background, as in the image below, the combination of the color red, a slightly lower angle, focus on the subject and its central positioning in the image might give the impression of dominance, emotional distance or exclusivity without providing the viewer with any textual information.



Figure 2: Elegant Woman in Red Sequin Evening Dress (Rondon, 2025)

In this research, Kress and van Leeuwen's model will be applied selectively, focusing on interpersonal and compositional meanings most relevant for cross-cultural interpretation rather than on a fully technical image analysis. Special attention will be dedicated to visual elements such as color, social distance, vertical angle, gaze, visual salience and framing. This approach allows visual features to be interpreted not as purely aesthetic choices, but as communicative strategies that reflect broader Nordic and Mediterranean cultural aesthetics, thereby supporting the cross-cultural analysis developed in the methodological section (see 2.1. Research approach).

1.4.3. Visual Communication on Instagram

In recent years, Instagram has become a leading visual platform (Rosdiana & Indrawati, 2025). Its rich visual ecosystem, such as feed-based, square, or vertical format options, along with tools such as stories, carousels and video reels, allows brands to create visually cohesive content and lead audiences through narrative elements (Dibda & Ahmad, 2025). Studies indicate that the way in which brands apply different visual elements has a direct impact on

audiences' perception of the brand, user engagement and the emotional connection established with the audience via social media (Tamara, Heriyati, Hanifa, & Carmen, 2021; Carpio-Jiménez, Suing, & Ordóñez, 2024; Bárbara Castillo-Abdul, Pérez-Escoda, & Núñez-Barriopedro, 2022).

Visual imagery is crucial in shaping brand perception on social media, especially on platforms like Instagram that are dominated by visual communication (Tamara, Heriyati, Hanifa, & Carmen, 2021). Global fashion brands' Instagram posts analyzed by Carpio-Jiménez, Suing & Ordóñez (2024) provide strategic evidence showing that the use of color, framing, and composition all have an impact on brand aesthetics. The research highlights color palette as a fundamental aspect of a brand's visual language, and deviations from the corporate palette weaken aesthetic coherence (Carpio-Jiménez, Suing, & Ordóñez, 2024). Moreover, even the way in which visual elements are combined with captions contributes to defining the brand's personality and increases the amount of user engagement (Tenca, 2022). Castillo-Abdul et al.'s (2022) study on luxury brands confirms that Instagram is not only a distribution channel, but also a medium using visuals, stories and semiotic concepts to create the brand's narrative.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theoretical framework, especially the part about interpersonal and compositional meanings, presents a clear, structured method for the interpretation of meanings encoded in visual materials. These concepts are directly applicable to Instagram content, where images are carefully composed to convey brand identity and narrative. Research on how fashion brands use Instagram (Carpio-Jiménez, Suing, & Ordóñez, 2024; Tenca, 2022) shows that these visual principles are actively applied: color palettes help to develop the aesthetic of a brand, perspective creates a sense of proximity or distance, and composition balances various visual elements used in storytelling. By incorporating Kress and van Leeuwen's semiotic approach with the specificities of Instagram, it will be possible to construct a solid theoretical foundation to study the visual imagery of brands on Instagram.

Apart from the platform's formal characteristics, it is also important to consider how Instagram shapes the audience's visual perception through feed structure. While images in traditional advertising media are observed in isolation, Instagram profiles represent "photo sequences" where users can observe individual posts and their layout within the overall brand profile at the same time (Manovich, 2017). Lev Manovich (2017) sees Instagram as a platform where aesthetic strategies are developed at the level of the entire feed, and the repetition of colors, photography styles and compositions contributes to the formation of recognizable brand identity. Manovich argues that establishing a single look and "the consistent use of a strong visual style" are the most important strategies for gaining recognition (Manovich, 2017). A

single image, in this way, acts as both individual content and part of the visual structure, contributing to brand perception.

The way in which users consume the content on social media is also connected to visual communication on Instagram. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) show that social media users make quick judgments about the content they see while scrolling through the feed, often in a matter of seconds, which affects how much credibility they ascribe to an influencer or a brand. Therefore, visual elements like image enhancement and composition play an important role in drawing attention, as they lead the viewer towards the most important parts of the image (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In the fashion industry, Instagram is especially important as it allows brands to combine aesthetic product representation with emotional and aspirational communication elements. According to Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), the visual content of fashion brands often creates aspirational ideas about lifestyle associated with the brand, strengthening the emotional connection between the brand and the public. In addition to showing products, photographs also portray surroundings and scenography that contribute to the creation of a symbolic brand universe.

The narrative dimension of Instagram content adds another layer to visual communication. Brands try to communicate emotion, identity and values their audiences can relate to by constructing narratives and introducing a human dimension to their content (Dibda & Ahmad, 2025). Carousel, reels and stories' functionality allows brands to tell stories through multiple images or videos that form sequential visual narratives (Peña-Acuña, 2025). Annous' research shows that coherent visual narratives can contribute to audiences' perception of emotional closeness and foster deeper loyalty (Annous, 2023). Using multimodal formats, brands manage to capture public attention quickly and build affective bonds with the audience, seeking to establish a culturally resonant brand image by assembling emotionally charged micro-stories about their products and services (Peña-Acuña, 2025). The omnipresence of visual narratives on social media today is not a coincidence. As digital environments are characterized by information overload and short attention spans, there has been a need for a "more cognitively accessible alternative" (Zhang, Ji, Cao, & Xiao, 2026). Visual storytelling allows the viewer to process information immediately through their senses, and therefore, results in faster understanding and improved persuasion compared to text-based methods (Zhang, Ji, Cao, & Xiao, 2026). In this way, social media platforms promote brand identity formation through an ongoing stream of visual content, helping users form an overall cohesive and authentic representation of the brand through the images they see.

Instagram can be seen as a space where a combination of aesthetic, narrative and semiotic elements forms visual brand identity. As stated by Jonathan Schroeder, contemporary branding highly depends on brands' ability to manage visual representations and create meanings that the audience can interpret (Schroeder, 2002). As visual content is a dominant means of communication on Instagram, content analysis requires an approach that involves an understanding of platform characteristics, visual principles and semiotic meanings, where Kress and Van Leeuwen's ideas enable systematic examination of visual strategies that brands use to shape their identities and communicate with publics.

1.4.4. Visual Consumption and Brand Meaning

Living in a "visual information culture", we are exposed to a vast array of images every day, and yet we are little aware of their significance or even the skills needed to interpret them (Schroeder, 2002). In his book *Visual Consumption*, Schroeder (2002) seeks to examine how consumers utilize not only the products they purchase, but also how they decode many forms of visual representation and visual imagery that are used by brands, through advertising or promotions, to communicate their brand identity and meaning to consumers.

Today, images are as valuable as they have ever been – brands are built on the meaning attached to their visual symbols, corporate images are seen as strategic assets, and products serve to convey preexisting images, rather than being a source of the meaning (Schroeder, 2002). Schroeder explains that, from a consumer perspective, images dominate the Web, transforming the Internet into a visually rich environment (Schroeder, 2008). The image-oriented online logic moves marketing from problem solving to image management, and therefore marketing success depends on the brand's ability to create and distribute visual signals that provide meanings of status, trust, taste or lifestyle (Schroeder, 2002). This visual turn in marketing is variously referred to as the attention economy, the aesthetic economy and the experience economy (Schroeder, 2008).

Schroeder (2002) argues that the primary function of marketing is to provide meanings for consumers, to help them "make sense of the world" and connect these meanings to their identities. According to Schroeder (2002), visual representations are symbolic environments that shape how individuals perceive themselves and others, influencing identity, social comparison and consumption patterns. Schroeder points out that even when consumers realize that an image is only a part of a marketing campaign strategy and is not "real", it still influences

their perception of the world (Schroeder, 2008), and gives individuals a sense that they know places and people they have never seen before (Schroeder, 1998). Therefore, due to their powerful influence, Schroeder (2008) argues that marketing images play both cultural and persuasive roles and contribute to consumers' contemporary reality.

As already discussed in 1.2, brands frequently refer to cultural codes and dimensions to influence brand meaning in the marketplace (Schroeder, 2008). The Internet fosters this process by turning every webpage, social media post or e-commerce screen into a visual arena where brand stories are told and reinforced (Murray, 2000; Schroeder, 2002). In this way, digital backgrounds enable brands to effectively communicate their cultural identity and values via visual media, and in turn, consumers derive meaning from those visual symbols and develop their own social and cultural capacities through their experience with visuals (Schroeder, 2002). The use of Schroeder's approach in this study facilitates the empirical integration of visual semiotics with cultural and emotional interpretations of brand images on Instagram, allowing for a systematic comparison of how culturally diverse visual styles convey different cultural meanings.

1.5. Sentiment Analysis in Digital Branding

Social media offer rich opportunities for analyzing how brands use text to communicate emotion and identity. In the last decade, sentiment analysis has been increasingly applied for the analysis of social media content. Sentiment analysis refers to various computational methods used for detecting and classifying the emotional tone of written text, employing sentiment polarity to evaluate content as positive, neutral or negative (Pang & Lee, 2008; Liu, 2012). Originally, it was developed to analyze public opinion towards different entities, while today it is frequently used in marketing communication, identifying how emotions and linguistic choices shape brand identity and consumer perception (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014).

In a branding context, sentiment analysis can evaluate not only user-generated content (e.g., comments, reviews) but also the brand's communication (e.g., captions, short descriptions, slogans, narrative content). Sentiment analysis enables the identification of the patterns of repetitive emotional expression in a vast amount of textual data, which makes it particularly suitable for social media analysis (Liu, 2012). The latest research shows that the

text-based material produced by brands on social media contains strategic emotional elements that guide how consumers perceive and relate to brands (Chowdhury, 2024). Jeong et al. (2022) argue that human tone-of-voice and positive, emotionally charged texts increase perception of intimacy with the brand and its accessibility, whereas corporate tone-of-voice, i.e., neutral and informative tone, might seem more distant and official (Jeong, Chung, & Kim, 2022).

Furthermore, cultural norms and aesthetic values are crucial in shaping emotional expression in brand communication (De Mooij, 2010), and in this sense, sentiment analysis can help understand cross-cultural differences in digital branding. While low-context culture brands might use more neutral, informative and restrained language, high-context culture brands are more likely to use emotionally charged narratives, metaphors and implicit references (Hall, 1976). Similarly, Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions illustrate how values such as individualism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, or power distance influence how emotions are articulated in persuasive messages. Hall's and Hofstede's theories imply that emotions are expressed differently in distinct societies, and distinctions in cultural values are considered the main reason for this.

The application of lexical sentiment analysis models that are adapted specifically for social media is especially relevant in digital branding. The model that will be used in the analysis of Instagram captions is the VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner) model (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014), designed precisely for short online texts. Hutto & Gilbert explain the model as a "parsimonious rule-based system" that combines a lexical approach with a set of linguistic rules to identify the emotional tone of short texts (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014). Such models take into account the special characteristics of digital communication, such as short sentences, informal tones, simple syntax and implicit emotional signals, which make the VADER model suitable for the analysis of Instagram captions. VADER is frequently used in digital marketing and social media communication research, since it enables the systematic analysis of the emotional tone in brand messages.

In fashion branding, it is essential to recognize that emotional tone functions as a social and cultural construct rather than as a universal psychological experience (Ahmed, 2014). It represents a culturally coded practice, and therefore, sentiment analysis can evaluate not only the emotionally charged language as positive or negative, but it can also identify culturally specific styles of emotional expressions (Mohammad, 2021). For example, Nordic brands are expected to have a neutral or slightly positive sentiment in their Instagram posts and captions, typically reflecting minimalism and emotional restraint. Mediterranean brands tend to use highly expressive, positive, emotional language to convey the values of passion and heritage.

Thus, sentiment analysis enables analysis of how language can act as a cultural indicator of broader aesthetic and social values within branding strategies.

2. Methodology

This study aims to explore how Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands construct their brand identities through digital communication on Instagram, with a specific focus on visual and textual strategies that reflect cultural aesthetic values. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative sentiment analysis with qualitative visual semiotic analysis of brands' Instagram posts.

2.1. Research Approach

A mixed-methods approach, i.e., a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, is applied in this thesis to examine both culture-specific emotional tones and visual meanings in Instagram content. In this way, the research seeks to connect measurable emotional patterns in textual communication to a deeper analysis of visual and cultural meanings, thereby enabling a more comprehensive perspective on the contrast between Nordic minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness in contemporary fashion brand communication.

2.1.1. The Quantitative Method – Sentiment Analysis

The quantitative component of the research is based on sentiment analysis, which examines the emotional tone of textual communication in Instagram captions, slogans, short narrative texts and product descriptions.

Sentiment analysis offers observable indicators for emotional orientation in texts (positive, neutral or negative) and therefore enables the comparison of emotional expression patterns between Nordic and Mediterranean brands. The quantitative analysis employs the VADER model developed by Hutto & Gilbert (2014) and implemented in the Python programming language. As already discussed in 2.5, VADER is a lexicon-based and rules-oriented tool developed specifically for sentiment analysis of social media content. This research uses an existing Python script available on the Internet, into which previously cleaned Instagram descriptions (plain text without hashtags, mentions and other characters that do not carry clear semantic meanings) are inserted. The program automatically generates sentiment scores, i.e., positive, neutral, negative and compound scores. The compound score represents

the total normalized sentiment value of the text and it is aggregated at the level of the individual brand for the comparative analysis, varying from -1 to +1, where -1 represents the most negative sentiment, 0 is neutral sentiment and +1 indicates the most positive sentiment. The compound score of a text should be equal to or lower than 0.5 to be considered negative, between -0.5 and 0.5 to be considered neutral and equal to or higher than 0.5 to count as positive. Automated sentiment scores are interpreted as indicators of linguistic emotional tendency rather than as definitive psychological measures.

For transparency and replicability, sentiment analysis results are organized in two coding sheets – one for Nordic and one for Mediterranean brands - both containing post identification data, brand in question, brand’s country, posting date, cleaned caption, polarity scores, compound scores and categorized sentiment values. This structure allows systematic comparison across brands and facilitates integration with qualitative semiotic analysis. The sample of the sentiment analysis coding sheet for Nordic brands is available in Table 1, while complete sentiment coding sheets are provided in [Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#).

Post ID	Brand	Country	Date	Caption (cleaned)	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Compound	Sentiment
Do1	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	1.1.2023	The essence of sartorial Italian tradition. Captured by in front of typical Italian cafés and portraying a refined aesthetic vision of classic and modern together. Discover the Men's Collection at the link in bio.	0.00	0.94	0.06	0.25	Positive
Do2	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	2.4.2023	Optimism, joy and freedom. is the face of the new campaign. Discover the new floral fragrance at the link in bio and on.	0.00	0.64	0.37	0.91	Positive
Do3	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	9.7.2023	In every facet, the creations exude Italian artisanal expertise and wisdom of authentic. These pieces echo the rich history and mesmerizing beauty of Puglia, becoming an eternal homage to the region's captivating charm. Necklace and bracelet in yellow, pink and white gold Rubellite with multicoloured tourmalines, precious sapphires and amethysts. Necklace in yellow, pink and white gold with Rubellite tourmalines. Earrings in yellow gold with kunzites, emeralds and Rubellite shaped like flowers.	0.00	0.75	0.26	0.97	Positive
Do4	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	2.10.2023	DEVOTION Uncover the tantalizing delectable notes of the new bright gourmand fragrance by. Discover more at the link in bio.	0.00	0.62	0.38	0.89	Positive

Table 1: Sentiment analysis coding sheet sample

2.1.2. The Qualitative Method – Visual Semiotic Analysis

The qualitative method in this research consists of a semiotic analysis of visual content, as it relies on the theoretical perspectives of Roland Barthes (1977) and Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) visual grammar.

The visual semiotic analysis includes Barthes’ distinction between the denotative level of meaning, i.e., a descriptive interpretation of elements in the picture, and connotative level of meaning, i.e., the interpretation of cultural, aesthetic and symbolic meanings contained in visuals. In addition, Kress and van Leeuwen’s visual grammar model is selectively adapted to

systematically identify visual patterns relevant for the interpretation of cultural meanings in digital brand communication. The analysis focuses on three key visual elements – color, perspective and composition – which are operationalized through different subcategories.

Color is observed through color palette (neutral, balanced or vivid palette), color saturation (low, medium or high) and color temperature (cold, balanced or warm tones). Although Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) recognize the importance of color as a semiotic resource, they do not offer a precise color classification, but mostly point to dimensions such as color differentiation (e.g., monochrome or varied palette); color saturation, ranging from full color to the absence of color; and color hue, referring to the cold-warm continuum. Therefore, in this research, for the sake of greater analytical relevance for the comparative analysis of Nordic and Mediterranean brands, the adjusted subcategories of neutral, balanced and vivid palette; low, medium and high saturation; and cold, balanced and warm color temperature will be applied. According to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory, color saturation affects the emotional intensity and modality of an image. Highly saturated colors appear energetic, emotionally emphasized and visually dominant, while lower or medium saturation contributes to the impression of control, calmness and aesthetic restraint. Color temperature or “color hue”, as mentioned by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), affects the emotional experience of an image and the atmosphere it constructs. Warm tones often create a feeling of intimacy, energy and sensuality, while cool tones can contribute to the impression of distance, calmness and rationality. Subcategories adapted in this way could more accurately reflect the dominant aesthetic tendencies of the observed posts.

Perspective involves the analysis of the relationship between the subject and the viewer, including social distance (long shot, medium shot or close-up), vertical angle (low angle, eye-level or high angle) and gaze (demand, which means that the subject is looking directly at the camera, or offer, referring to the absence of the subject's gaze). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) refer to social distance as a metaphor for the interpersonal distance between the subject in the image and their observer, whereby long shots provide a sense of impersonality by displaying the model in a larger environment or narrative rather than in an intimate way, as close-ups do. Medium shot is considered a “social” distance (2006) and represents the most neutral distance from the viewer. Regarding the vertical angle, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) point out that power relations between the viewer and the subject of the image are reflected in the angle from which the images are taken. The use of an eye-level angle indicates equality and a neutral relationship between the observer and the subject, and suggests that there is no dominance or subordination between the two parties. The use of high angle in an image could imply the

superiority of the viewer, as they "look down" on a subject in the image. Conversely, a low angle might imply the viewer's inferiority, as the subject in the image "looks down" on them. Finally, the type of gaze used in an image could determine the type of interpersonal relationship that the subject develops with the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The use of a demand gaze occurs when the subject makes eye contact with the observer, creating a symbolic interaction between the two parties and inviting emotional involvement. An offer gaze means that the subject does not make eye contact with the observer, which demonstrates that the model is an object of observation and does not make eye contact with the observer.

Composition includes framing (connection or disconnection of the elements) and visual salience (product-centered, model-centered or ambience-centered). According to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory, framing refers to the extent to which elements within an image display a sense of connection, whereby the connection between elements within a frame expresses a degree of unity and coherence, and disconnection between elements in an image creates the impression of distance and fragmentation. Visual salience refers to the distribution of attention within the image, that is, to the element that is visually most prominent through size, position, contrast, lighting or composition (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The salience subcategory has been adapted for the purpose of this research and a more systematic results overview, as fashion images usually focus either on a model, a product or an ambience. Therefore, in the analysis, a post can be classified as model-centered, where a model is the most prominent element in the image; product-centered, with a product as the most dominant feature; or ambience-centered, which shows space as the main component.

In addition to the categories taken from Barthes and Kress and van Leeuwen's theoretical basis, two additional operational variables were introduced into the coding sheet: social configuration, which can be marked as 'individual', 'group' or 'not applicable', and brand visibility, which can be classified as 'visible', 'subtle' or 'absent'. These categories are not explicitly defined within the aforementioned theoretical models, but were introduced as an analytical supplement in order to more accurately record the aspects of visual communication that are considered relevant to the research question. The variable social configuration enables the identification of the way models are presented in the visual space (individually or in a group), while brand visibility records the degree of presence of brand marks within a specific post. Their inclusion contributes to a more detailed and contextually sensitive analysis.

In this research, two coding sheets – one for the Nordic posts and one for the Mediterranean posts – are also used to conduct qualitative semiotic analysis. Each Instagram post is first described on a denotative level, through a neutral and descriptive display of visual

elements, after which the interpretive meanings derived from those elements are recorded in the connotation column. In parallel, categories taken from Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar are coded in a standardized way, thereby enabling the identification of recurring patterns. It is important to note that Kress and van Leeuwen's model is not used with the intention of a detailed formal analysis of images, but rather with the aim of connecting visual characteristics with cultural implications and communication strategies that brands use, emphasizing the interpretative potential of visual elements. In this way, the coding sheet functions as a structured analytical framework that connects descriptive and interpretive insights, enabling a consistent and comparable analysis of visual communication across different brands and cultural contexts. However, not all categories are necessarily present in every post, as some images might display only a product, an object, an ambience or a model without showing their face, where categories of social configuration or gaze are not possible to analyze. The partial sample of qualitative analysis coding sheet for Nordic brands can be seen in Table 2, while the complete qualitative coding sheets are available in [Appendix C](#) and [Appendix D](#).

Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature
The image shows a model's face photographed against a neutral background. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Balanced colors and the absence of heavy makeup and conspicuous jewelry connote a minimalist aesthetic and functionality, while the focus on the model's face suggests intimacy.	Individual	Absent	Balanced	Medium	Warm
The image shows a model wearing sunglasses. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Balanced colors and the absence of heavy makeup and conspicuous jewelry can be connected to simplicity and quiet luxury. The model's gaze at the camera behind sunglasses suggests confidence, distanced exclusivity and urban fashion style.	Individual	Absent	Balanced	Medium	Warm
The image shows a model's body from the shoulders to the thighs, with her arms behind her back and leaning against a wall, wearing a black one-shoulder dress, photographed against a white background. The model shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Neutral colors and a monochrome outfit might connote visual restraint and quiet luxury. The model's relaxed pose suggests comfort, spontaneity and confidence. The absence of the model's face suggests emotional restraint and detachment. The color black might imply power and elegance, while the one-shoulder design suggests controlled sensuality.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced
A model wearing a long, dark, oversized grey coat, black pointed boots and a black leather purse is photographed on a white background. The model wears little or no makeup and a pair of earrings.	Neutral colors of the outfit and the absence of heavy makeup might connote a minimalist aesthetic, functionality and quiet luxury. Oversized coat suggests comfort and urban style, while black leather purse and boots suggest power, elegance and quality.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Cold

Table 2: The qualitative analysis coding sheet sample

The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods is carried out in the interpretive phase of this research, in the Discussion chapter. Sentiment analysis provides measurable indicators of emotional tone in textual communication, while semiotic analysis explains how these emotional tendencies are visually constructed. The cultural interpretation, based on Hall's (1976) concepts of low-context and high-context communication styles and Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, will reveal cultural meanings integrated in visual communication. Rather than treating the methods independently, sentiment analysis results are compared with identified visual patterns to examine whether linguistic emotional tendencies correspond to broader aesthetic and intercultural communication styles. This integrative step allows for triangulation of findings and strengthens the interpretive validity of the research.

2.2. Data Collection

With the intention of conducting a comparative analysis of visual and textual brand communication, the research relies on a time-based sample of Instagram content that enables comparison of Nordic and Mediterranean approaches to digital fashion branding. The data collection process was designed in a way that provides methodological consistency, cultural comparability and analytical relevance in accordance with research questions.

The sample includes six fashion brands in total, divided into two regional groups: 1) The Nordic group consists of Toteme (Sweden), Filippa K (Sweden) and By Malene Birger (Denmark); The Mediterranean group includes Dolce & Gabbana (Italy), Desigual (Spain) and Zeus+Dione (Greece). The brands included in the research were selected using the purposeful sampling method, which is one of the most commonly used sampling strategies in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Unlike probabilistic or random sampling, whose goal is statistical representativeness of the entire corpus, purposeful sampling implies a conscious selection of analysis units that are particularly relevant to the research problem and that can provide a detailed analysis and the most information about the investigated phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In this research, the purposeful sampling method was used to form a sample of fashion brands that represent two different cultural and aesthetic tendencies: Nordic minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness. The selection process was carried out through several successive stages in order to reduce the level of subjectivity and ensure the consistency of the sample.

The first phase referred to the determination of the geographical and cultural framework of the research. The Nordic group consisted of brands originating from Sweden and Denmark, while the Mediterranean group consisted of brands from Italy, Spain and Greece. These countries were chosen because in existing literature they are often associated with different communication styles, cultural values and aesthetic traditions, which is relevant for the theoretical framework of the work based on Hall's communication styles and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. After defining the cultural groups, in the second stage of selection, specific criteria for the brand selection were applied. The first criterion was an active and continuous presence on Instagram. This meant that the brand published content regularly and had a sufficient number of available posts in the analyzed time period in order to be able to conduct a qualitative and quantitative analysis. Brands with inactive profiles or irregular posting were not included in the sample.

The second criterion referred to the existence of a clearly recognizable and consistent visual identity. Since the goal of the research was the analysis of fashion communication patterns, it was necessary for the brands to show a certain degree of aesthetic consistency through colors, composition, photography style, the way the models are presented and the overall atmosphere of the posts. This criterion made it possible to analyze stable communication strategies, rather than random or mutually unrelated posts.

The third criterion was the international visibility and developed digital presence of the brand. Brands that actively communicate with a wider international audience in English and use Instagram as an important part of their branding strategy are included in the research. This enabled the research of contemporary fashion communication in the context of global digital culture, and not exclusively local or market-limited brands.

Only after applying the previous criteria was the aesthetic and cultural relevance of brands taken into account for the research problem. Nordic brands were chosen due to their association with minimalist aesthetics, functional design, neutral palettes and visual restraint, while Mediterranean brands were chosen due to more pronounced decorativeness, richer compositions, cultural references and more emotionally open communication. These characteristics were not assumed in advance as absolute characteristics of all brands from a certain region, but were used as a starting point for the selection of representative examples of dominant communication tendencies. It is important to emphasize that the goal of this sample was not the statistical representativeness of all Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands, but the formation of a theoretically relevant sample that enables a detailed comparative analysis of culturally specific patterns of fashion communication on Instagram. In this way, the purposeful

sampling method enables focusing on the cases that best suit the research objectives and provide the most analytical potential for the interpretation of visual and textual branding strategies.

Instagram was chosen as the primary data source because it represents one of the most important platforms of contemporary fashion communication, in which visual content plays a central role in building brand identity. The platform combines photography, video, text and design elements to construct coherent aesthetic narratives. Unlike traditional marketing channels, Instagram enables continuous and serial communication through posts that together form a visually recognizable feed. This makes Instagram particularly suitable for exploring the relationship between visual presentation, cultural codes and the textual tone of communication, since individual posts on Instagram do not function in isolation, but as a part of a wider narrative and aesthetic as a whole. In the context of the fashion industry, Instagram represents a space where aesthetic values, cultural codes and brand identity are articulated through images, which makes it a relevant environment for the application of semiotic and visual analysis. The unit of analysis in this research is an individual Instagram post published on the official profiles of the selected brands. Each post was viewed as a multimodal entity that includes visual content (photo or the first slide of the post carousel) and textual content (caption). In the case of carousel posts, the first visual frame was analyzed, as it represents the primary point of user perception in the feed and has the greatest communicative importance. The visual part was used for qualitative semiotic and cultural analysis, while the textual part was used for quantitative sentiment analysis.

Posts were collected from January 2023 to October 2025. This time span was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, it enables the analysis of modern communication strategies in the current digital environment, taking into account the stabilized practices of brand communication after the pandemic period. Secondly, the two-year interval provides a large enough sample of content to identify recurring aesthetic and narrative patterns. Twelve posts were selected for each brand, i.e., the first post from January, April, July and October of each observed year, resulting in 4 posts from each year, i.e., 12 posts in total, per brand. This selection method ensured an even temporal distribution of content and the influence of seasonal campaigns or short-term trends is reduced. During the selection, posts that contain analytically relevant content were chosen, such as photos of people, products, interiors, architecture or broader aesthetic presentation of the brand. Reposts, duplicate promotional material and posts whose content is not directly related to brand communication were not included in the sample. This approach enabled a balance between the systematicity of the sample and the relevance of the material to the research objectives.

Before conducting the sentiment analysis, the captions were manually cleaned and standardized, which means that the hashtags, user mentions, technical credits, numbers and other elements that do not carry a clear semantic meaning within the text have been removed. Emoticons were retained, since the VADER model recognizes them as potential carriers of sentiment, and in digital communication, they often have an important emotional or expressive function. Retaining emoticons contributed to preserving the authenticity of the Instagram discourse and a more precise recognition of the emotional tone. The total sample included **72 posts in total**, that is, **36 posts from each regional group**.

The data collection procedure defined in this way enabled a balanced and comparable body of material that is suitable for the integration of quantitative sentiment analysis and qualitative semiotic interpretation, thus providing a methodological basis for researching cultural differences between Nordic minimalist and Mediterranean expressive fashion communication on Instagram.

2.3. Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Although the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows a more comprehensive insight into digital fashion communication, the research has certain methodological limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Firstly, the sample size is relatively limited. The analysis includes a small number of brands and a selected number of Instagram posts, which means that the results cannot be generalized to the entire fashion industry or to all Nordic and Mediterranean brands. The goal of the research is therefore not statistical representativeness, but the identification of interpretive patterns and cultural tendencies in digital brand communication. Secondly, semiotic analysis implies a certain level of subjective interpretation. Although the analysis relies on clearly defined theoretical frameworks, such as Barthes' semiotics and the visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen, the meanings of visual elements may vary depending on the cultural and interpretive context of the researcher. In order to reduce subjectivity, analytical categories are defined in advance in the methodological framework, and interpretations are consistently linked to theoretical concepts and existing literature.

Furthermore, sentiment analysis based on the VADER model has its own limitations in an intercultural context. VADER was developed primarily for English and Western digital discourse (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014), which may affect the accuracy of emotional tone detection in cases where brands use culturally specific expressions, irony or implicit meanings. Also, algorithmic analysis measures linguistic sentiment, but cannot fully capture the complex cultural and symbolic dimensions of emotions, which is why the results of quantitative analysis are interpreted in combination with qualitative analysis. An additional limitation relates to the nature of the Instagram platform. Posts are carefully curated content that reflects strategic self-representation of brands, rather than spontaneous communication. Therefore, the analyzed material reflects the communication strategies of the brand, but not necessarily the reception of the audience or the actual interpretations of the users.

In an ethical sense, the research uses only publicly available data from official Instagram profiles of brands. No personal data of individual users, audience comments or private interactions are collected or analyzed, thus avoiding privacy and data protection issues. The analysis is focused on the institutional communication of brands as public actors in the digital space. Also, the research tries to avoid cultural essentialism or stereotyping. Cultural categories such as "Nordic minimalism" and "Mediterranean expressiveness" are used as analytical frameworks inspired by theories of intercultural communication (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001), but are not viewed as rigid or homogenizing characteristics of societies. The results are interpreted as tendencies within a specific communication context and not as universal traits of cultures.

Taking into account the mentioned limitations and ethical principles, the methodological approach enables a balance between analytical systematicity and interpretive reflexivity, which is in line with the research goals of digital and cultural communication of fashion brands.

3. Analysis Results

This chapter presents the results of textual and visual analysis of selected Nordic and Mediterranean brands' Instagram posts. All analyzed Instagram posts are available in [Appendix E](#) and [Appendix F](#). For the purpose of organization and easier reference through the analysis, each post was assigned a code consisting of the first two letters of the brand name followed by a numerical identifier indicating the order of the post (e.g., To1 refers to the first analyzed post published by the Toteme brand).

3.1. Sentiment Analysis Results

In order to examine the textual dimension of fashion brands' digital communication, a total of 72 Instagram captions were analyzed using the VADER sentiment analysis model. From 72 captions, 36 were part of Nordic brands' (Toteme, Filippa K, By Malene Birger) Instagram posts, while 36 belonged to Mediterranean brands (Dolce & Gabbana, Desigual, Zeus+Dione). The analysis included the classification of captions according to the dominant sentiment, as well as the percentage of positive, neutral and negative linguistic elements within each individual text.

It is important to emphasize that the VADER model does not measure only the final sentiment category, but also the internal distribution of the emotional tone in the text. The share of neutral sentiment indicates the presence of descriptive, informative and emotionally neutral language, while the share of positive sentiment indicates the presence of affirmative, promotional, warm or enthusiastic expressions. Negative sentiment might involve dramatic language, contrast words, irony or emotional intensity. Therefore, the analysis of these shares provides a more nuanced insight into the communications style than the final classification of the text as positive or neutral. The complete coding sheets for both Nordic and Mediterranean brands' captions are available in [Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#). All sentiment scores were rounded to two decimals.

The results show that both groups of brands predominantly used a neutral and positive tone of communication, which is expected in the context of the fashion industry, where product descriptions, campaigns and visual narratives are mostly promotional or informative. Negative classifications were limited and may reflect isolated lexical choices rather than genuinely

negative brand communication. Nordic brands recorded 16 positive captions (44.4%), 16 neutral (44.4%) and 4 negative captions (11.1%). This distribution indicates a balanced communication style in which positive promotional elements are combined with descriptive and emotionally restrained language. It is particularly significant that a large number of Nordic captions contain a very high proportion of neutral sentiment (often 0.90-1.00), with a low proportion of positive expressions. This suggests that captions often rely on short information, simple descriptions of products, materials, collections or visual atmosphere, without emphasized emotional rhetoric. When positive sentiment does appear, it is usually mild and unobtrusive, which is in line with communication based on restraint, clarity and minimalist aesthetic. For Mediterranean brands, 19 positive captions (52.8%), 15 neutral (41.7%) and 2 negative captions (5.6%) were registered. Compared to the Nordic brands, the Mediterranean group shows a more pronounced positive orientation and a smaller share of negatively classified posts. At the same time, a higher percentage of positive sentiment is observed in some captions (e.g., 0.25, 0.38, 0.42, 0.60), which indicates a more frequent use of affirmative and emotionally colored language. Such captions are more likely to contain words that evoke experience, mood, energy, beauty, celebration or enjoyment, making the text more engaging and promotionally expressive. The quantitative distribution of sentiment categories is available in Table 3, while the comparison of percentages obtained in sentiment categories are shown in Figure 3.

Region	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
Nordic	4 (11.1%)	16 (44.4%)	16 (44.4%)	36
Mediterranean	2 (5.6%)	15 (41.7%)	19 (52.8%)	36

Table 3: Distribution of sentiment categories

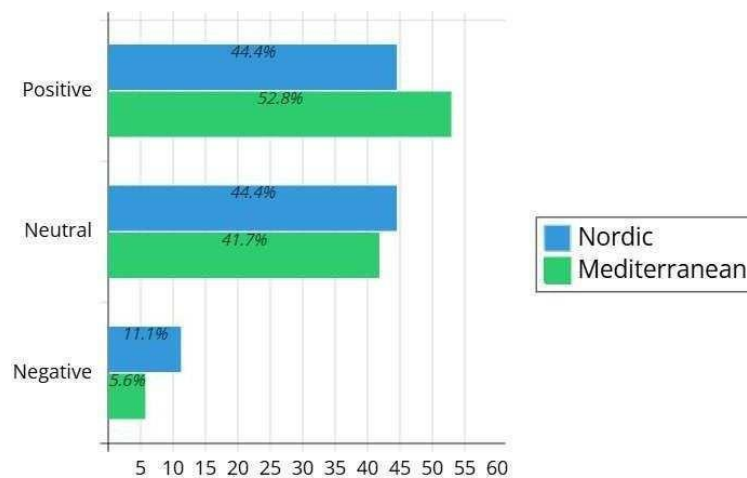


Figure 3: Sentiment percentage comparison

In addition to the classification of individual posts, the average VADER values for both regional groups were also calculated. Nordic brands showed an average of 1.9% negative, 92.3% neutral and 6.7% positive sentiment, with an average compound score of 0.24. In contrast, Mediterranean brands achieved an average of 1.3 % negative, 86.3% neutral and 12.4% positive sentiment, with an average compound score of 0.32. Average sentiment and compound scores of both regional groups are provided in Table 4.

Region	Avg. Negative	Avg. Neutral	Avg. Positive	Avg. Compound
Nordic	0.02	0.92	0.07	0.24
Mediterranean	0.01	0.86	0.12	0.32

Table 4: Average VADER scores

The results show that Nordic brands have an average neutral score of 0.92, indicating a dominantly informative, descriptive and emotionally restrained language. Their average positive score is 0.07, while the average compound score is 0.24, which suggests a slightly positive tone of communication. In contrast, Mediterranean brands have a lower average neutral score (0.86) and a higher average positive score (0.12), almost twice as high as the Nordic group. Their average compound score is 0.32, which indicates a more pronounced positive emotional tone. Examples of words used in Mediterranean captions include "joy", "freedom", "captivating", "beauty", "delight" and "to love out loud", which convey a feeling of satisfaction, enthusiasm and emotional openness. In addition, evaluative expressions such as "fashion-forward", "the trendiest", "mesmerizing" and "it feels good" often appear, which contribute to higher values of positive sentiment and compound score within the VADER analysis. Contrary to Mediterranean brands, Nordic captions more often use more subtle and aesthetically controlled forms of positive sentiment. Positivity is not expressed through intense emotionality or exclamatory language, but through concepts associated with sophistication, quality and atmosphere. Expressions such as "confidence", "timeless style", "refined", "rich minimalism", "sophisticated", "thoughtful" and "subtle" appear in the captions, which convey a feeling of calmness, elegance and aesthetic consistency. Even when positively colored expressions like "much-loved", "perfect moment" or "the joy of giving to others" are used, the emotional expression remains controlled and unobtrusive. Such vocabulary contributes to the dominantly neutral-positive tone of the Nordic posts within the VADER analysis. The charts in Figure 4 show a graphic comparison of average neutral, positive and compound scores from both corpora.

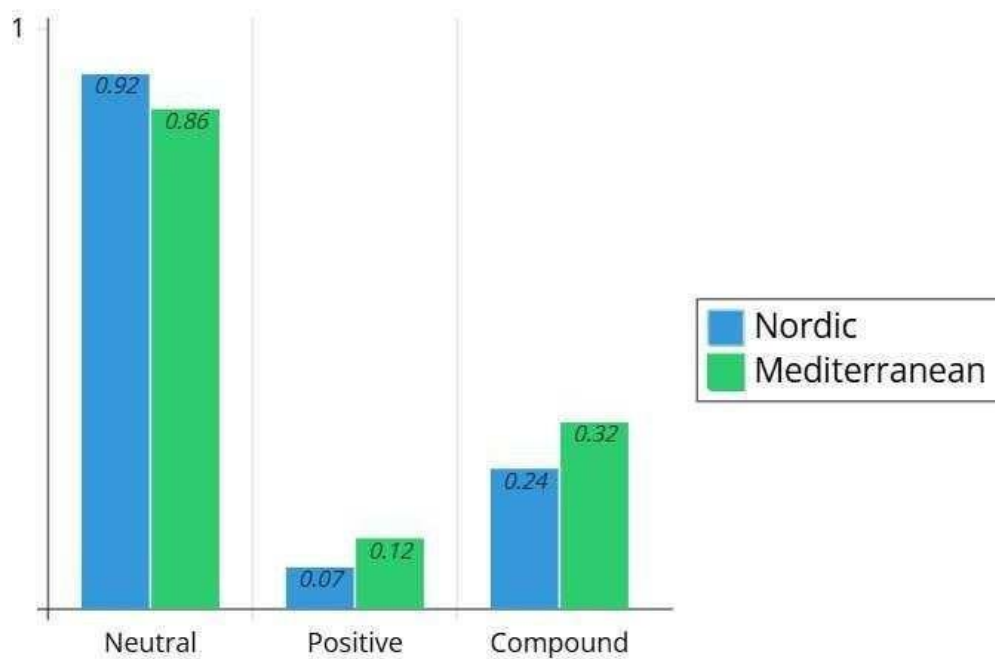


Figure 4: Average neutral, positive and compound scores

Such findings suggest that both groups use a dominantly neutral-positive tone, but that Mediterranean brands more often use affirmative and engaging language, while Nordic brands maintain a more neutral and restrained communication style. It is particularly important to point out that the difference between the two groups is not reflected in the presence of a “positive versus negative” tone, but above all in the degree of emotional expression.

In other words, with Nordic brands, neutral sentiment should not be interpreted as an absence of identity or emotionality, but as an indicator of discreet, controlled and aesthetically reduced communication, exemplified in Figure 5 and Figure 6. On the other hand, a higher share of positive sentiment in Mediterranean brands does not necessarily mean intense emotions, but a tendency towards a more open, warm and expressive brand language, as well as richer storytelling (see Figure 7 and Figure 8).

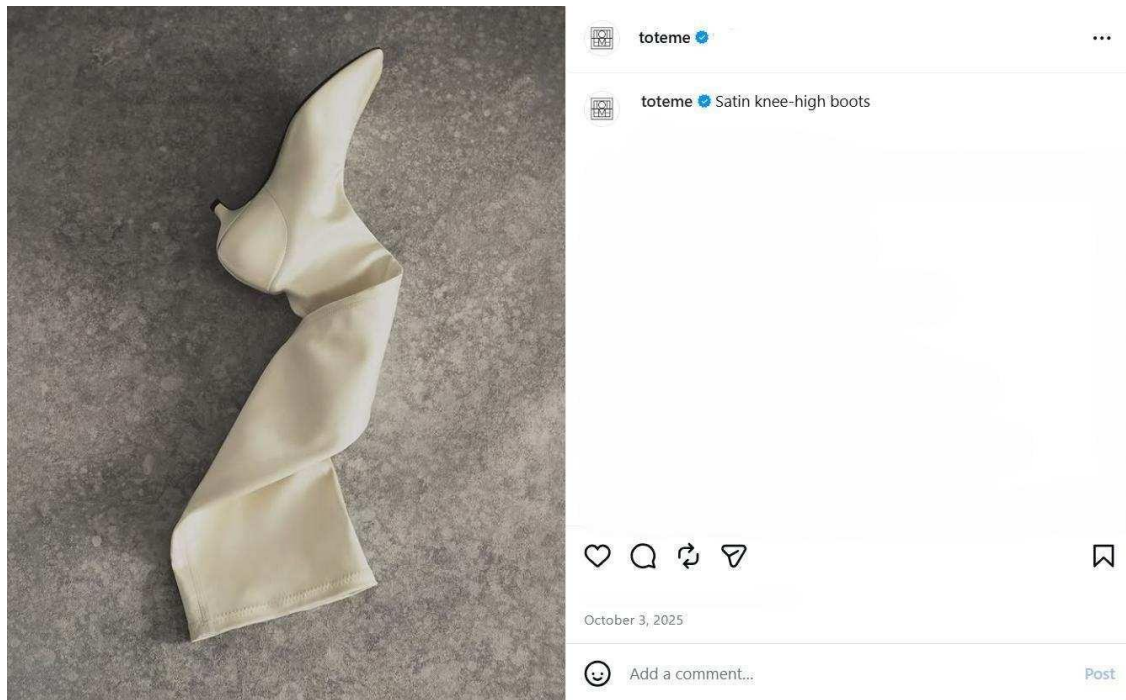


Figure 5: Example of controlled and aesthetically reduced communication in Toteme post (To12); Source: Instagram

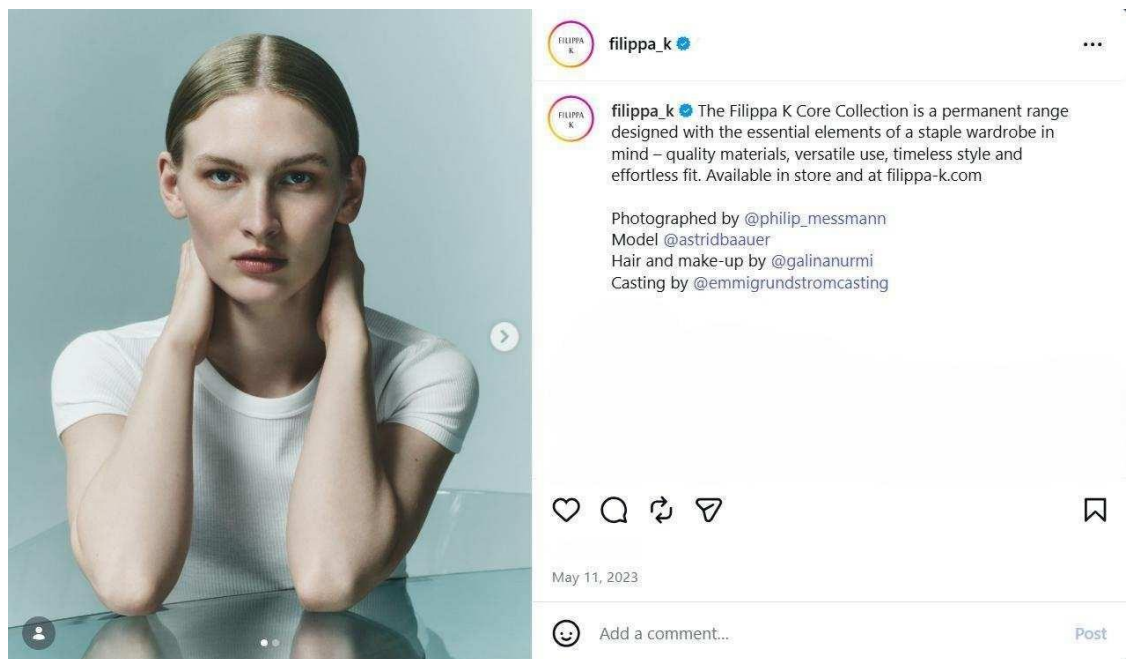


Figure 6: Example of controlled and aesthetically reduced communication in Filippa K post (Fi2); Source: Instagram

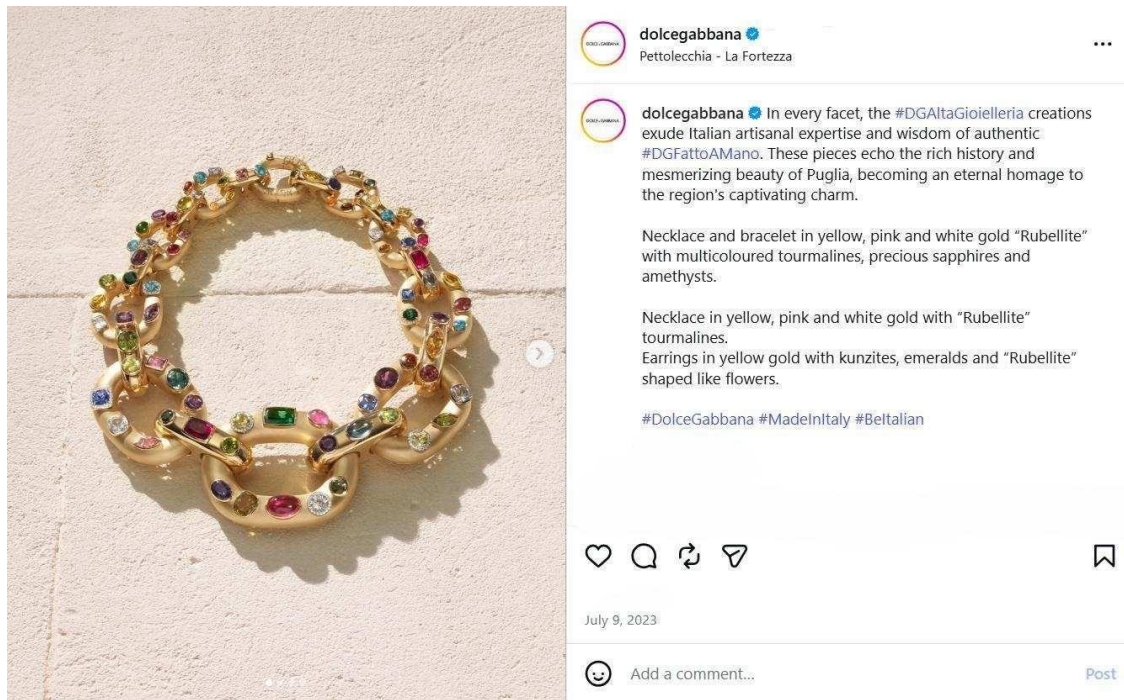


Figure 7: Example of expressive communication in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do3); Source: Instagram

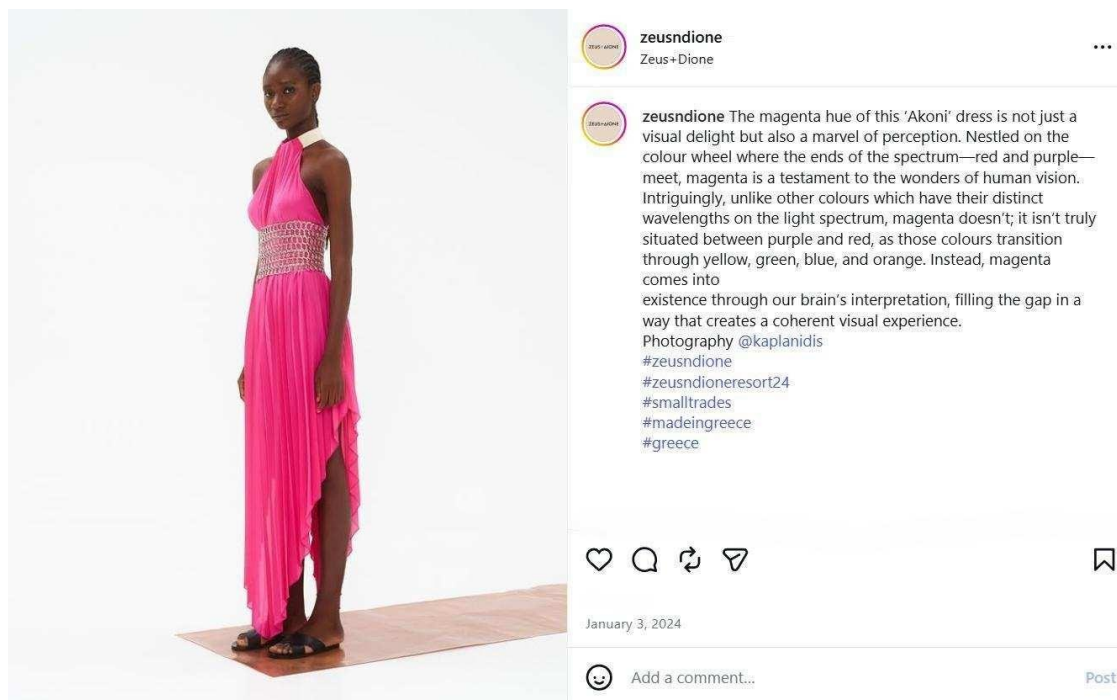


Figure 8: Example of expressive communication in Zeus+Dione post (Ze5); Source: Instagram

Taken as a whole, the results of the sentiment analysis support the assumption that the differences between Nordic minimalist and Mediterranean expressive communication do not only appear on the visual level, but also in the textual dimension of branding. While Nordic brands more often use a balanced and informative tone, Mediterranean brands show a slightly more pronounced tendency towards emotionally positive and engaging communication. These findings will be further discussed in combination with visual semiotic analysis in the next chapter.

3.2. Visual Semiotic Analysis Results

Qualitative semiotic analysis included a total of 72 Instagram posts (36 Nordic and 36 Mediterranean brand posts), coded according to predefined coding sheets based on Barthes' (1977) concepts of denotation and connotation, as well as Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) categories of visual grammar. Although the analysis is primarily interpretive, the frequency patterns allow the observation of dominant visual tendencies within each cultural context.

3.2.1. Denotative and Connotative Patterns

Within the framework of qualitative semiotic analysis, the denotative part of the analysis refers to the objective description of the elements present in the images, including clothes, accessories, colors, the model's pose, ambience, the presence of nature, architecture, objects and other visual elements. The connotative level of analysis includes potential cultural and symbolic meanings derived from the combination of visual elements detected on the denotative level, in accordance with Barthes' (1977) understanding of an image as a system of signs that transmit ideological and cultural meanings.

The denotative analysis shows the presence of recurring patterns in both cultural contexts. Nordic posts are characterized by a high degree of visual reduction with the dominance of neutral backgrounds, a limited number of elements in the frame, simple clothing and minimalistic interior. Models are often shown in isolation, without a clearly defined context, taking static and/or relaxed poses, with no conspicuous jewelry and with minimal

make-up, while the compositions are simple, with a focus on the form, texture and silhouette of the garments, which can be seen in the example posts below (Figure 9, Figure 10 and Figure 11). Neutral colors such as black, white, grey, beige and brown dominate in the large number of images, and these colors are often accompanied by simple, natural material and functional pieces of clothing, such as oversized coats (e.g., To4) or simple bags (e.g., Fi1, By3). Moreover, several posts contain fragmented composition and partial displays of bodies, such as a display of a model's profile (e.g., Fi7, By11), back or legs (e.g., To10, By3), which further reduced the emotional expressiveness of the image.

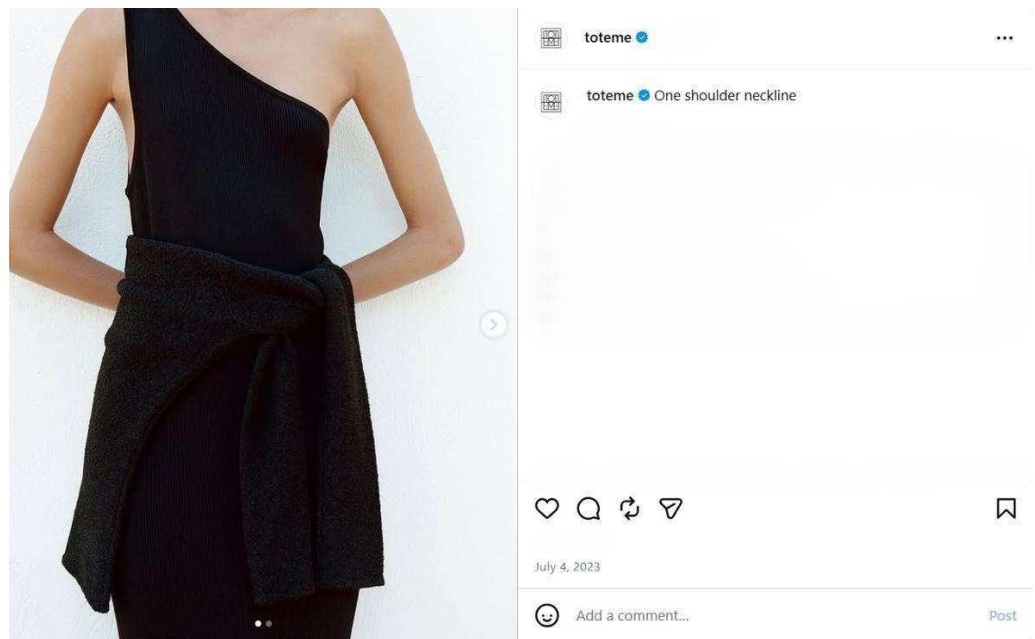


Figure 9: Example of minimalist aesthetic and visual restraint in Toteme post (To3); Source: Instagram

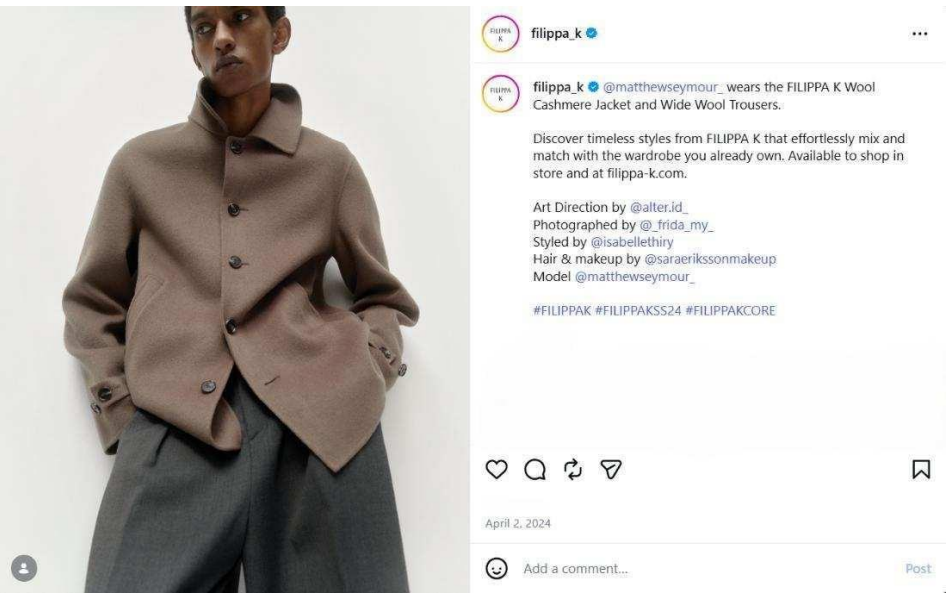


Figure 10: Example of minimalist aesthetic and visual restraint in Filippa K post (Fi6); Source: Instagram

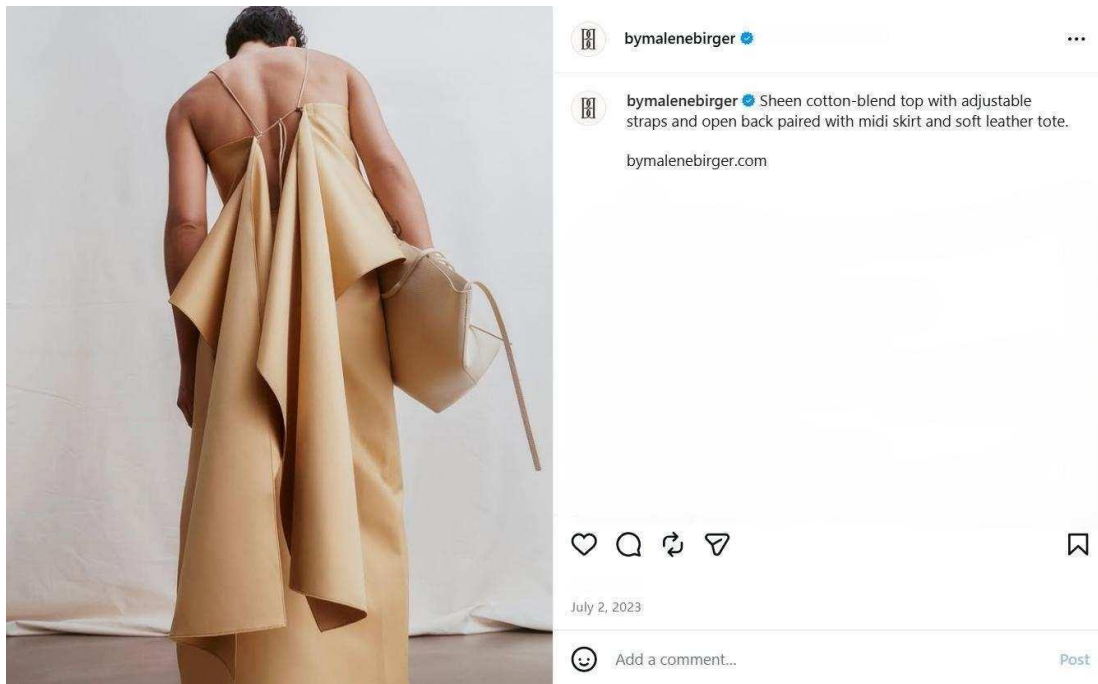


Figure 11: Example of minimalist aesthetic and visual restraint in By Malene Birger post (By3); Source: Instagram

In contrast, Mediterranean posts show significantly greater complexity at the denotative level, with significantly richer and more dynamic visual elements. Photographs often include various spatial and narrative elements, such as urban areas, streets, squares, seascapes, vegetation, stones and art (e.g., Do1, Do2, De4, Ze10, Ze12). There are more objects in the frame, as well as a more pronounced use of color, texture, and decorative elements. Models are more often shown in motion, walking, sitting or smiling, or interacting with the environment (e.g., Do1, Do9, De4), as in Figure 12. Clothes often include draped material (e.g., Ze1, Ze5), conspicuous jewelry (e.g., Do7, De7), and golden and floral details (e.g., Do4, Ze4).

Also, Mediterranean images often display unexpected combinations both in visual elements and the use of colors, through the mixture of fashion and technology (De5) or contemporary art and traditional design, which can be seen in the example post in Figure 13. In addition, the Mediterranean dataset contains numerous elements that refer to the local identity and cultural heritage, such as ancient motifs, religious symbols, traditional architecture, landscapes and craft references (e.g., Do6, Do8, Ze2, Ze11). The example image below (Figure 14) shows how Dolce & Gabbana uses landscape and religious references to form a recognizable brand identity.



Figure 12: Example of visual and narrative richness in Desigual post (De4); Source: Instagram



Figure 13: Example of contemporary art and traditional design mixture in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do7); Source: Instagram



Figure 14: Example of the use of landscape and religious symbolism in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do4); Source: Instagram

These differences at the denotative level are directly reflected in the connotative meanings. In Nordic brands, visual reduction, absence of context and limited expressiveness of models connote minimalism, functionality and controlled aesthetics. Neutral colors and the absence of heavy makeup and jewelry usually connote simplicity and restraint. Common displays of oversized clothes, simple silhouettes and relaxed poses could suggest comfort and practicality. The absence of striking elements contributes to the impression of restraint and distance, while the focus on simple forms and neutral tones suggests the so-called "quiet luxury" approach, in which the value of the product is communicated implicitly rather than through visual expressiveness. Additionally, frequent fragmentation of the body (e.g., absence of face or profile view) and neutral facial expressions contribute to connotations of emotional restraint and introspectiveness. Femininity in Nordic posts is commonly presented in the form of controlled and unobtrusive sensuality, through neutral poses and simple silhouettes. In this sense, the identity of the model is not represented through expression, but through form and stylization. Additionally, certain posts connected fashion to nature and authenticity, especially through the portrayals of leather, fur, sea or stone, such as the post shown in Figure 15.

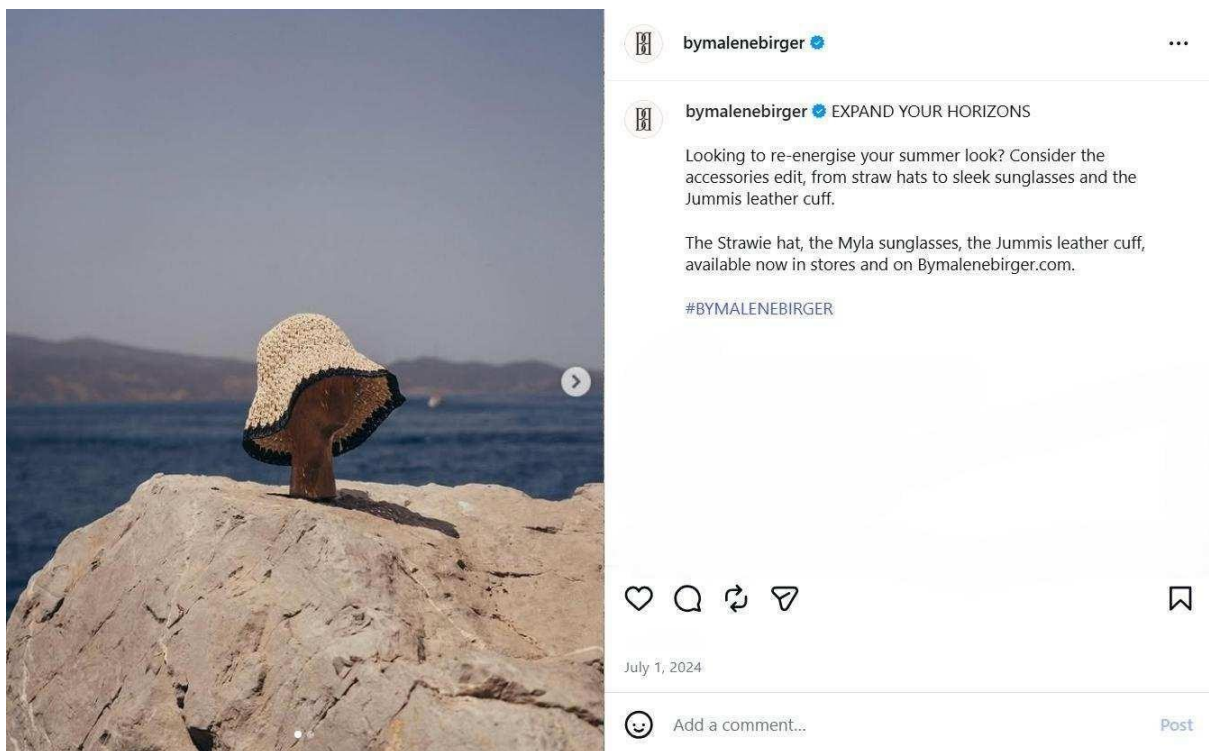


Figure 15: Example of combining fashion with nature in By Malene Birger post (By7); Source: Instagram

On the other hand, Mediterranean posts connote a more pronounced emotionality and visual richness. The use of vibrant and saturated colors, prominent jewelry, dynamic scenes and

rich visual elements is associated with energy, hedonism and enjoyment of everyday experiences. The presence of space, nature and social interactions contributes to the narrative of the image and creates the impression of an authentic lifestyle. The great number of posts connected fashion with everyday life, sociability and hedonism, particularly through settings such as cafes and streets. Models in Mediterranean posts more often show emotional expressiveness through movement, smile or interaction with the environment, which further reinforces the connotations of spontaneity, openness and sensuality. Unlike the Nordic approach, where identity is restrained and implicitly constructed, the Mediterranean visual language emphasizes the performativity and visibility of identity. Mediterranean brands present femininity through sensuality with more pronounced emotional expression and visual theatricality, as opposed to the Nordic posts, where sensuality is subtle. In the Mediterranean case, particularly significant is the presence of cultural and symbolic elements, such as religious motifs, historical references, craftsmanship, art and local tradition in Italian posts, while Greek posts contain references to ancient history, mythology and traditional architecture. Draped pieces of clothing, ancient symbols, Mediterranean landscapes and natural elements construct the narrative of connection to local identity and cultural heritage. The combination of these traditional and historical elements with contemporary pieces suggests an unconventional and bold approach to fashion, and it contributes to the expressive and artistic impression that Mediterranean brands often convey. Such an approach can be seen in the example post below (Figure 16), where the ancient iconographic motif of "sun in splendor" is applied to contemporary clothing.



Figure 16: Example of combining a historical element with a contemporary piece in Zeus+Dione post (Ze8); Source: Instagram

Overall, the analysis of denotation and connotation points to two different semiotic approaches: one based on reduction, restraint, and implicit meaning, and the other relying on expressiveness, narrativity and sensory communication of meaning.

3.2.2. Color Patterns

Within the color category, the analysis focuses on the subcategories color palette, color saturation and color temperature. According to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of visual grammar, colors play an important role in the construction of emotional and cultural meanings of the image. Through the choice of dominant tones, color intensity and their warmth or coldness, fashion posts convey different visual values and aesthetic strategies.

In the case of Nordic posts, the analysis shows that a neutral palette is the most dominant. As many as 34 of 36 posts in total display neutral color palettes, while 2 posts are considered to display a balanced palette. There were no images with vivid colors in the Nordic case. In contrast, a vivid palette and the use of bright colors dominate in Mediterranean brand posts, with 24 out of 36 posts in total displaying vivid colors. Neutral palette is detected in 9 Mediterranean posts and balanced colors in 3 of them.

The dominance of neutral tones in Nordic brands contributes to the impression of minimalist aesthetics, visual reduction and aesthetic control. Such palettes often include black, white, gray, beige and earth tones, focusing attention on form, material and composition instead of intense color expression. In contrast, the vivid palettes of Mediterranean brands create visually richer and more dynamic compositions. Intense colors like red, pink, yellow or blue often function as carriers of energy, sensuality and emotional expressiveness. Such color strategies contribute to the impression of warmth, hedonism and connection with the landscape, nature and local cultural identity. Figure 17 shows a comparable visual overview of the differences between the corpora and their different aesthetic logics, with Nordic posts on the left and Mediterranean posts on the right.

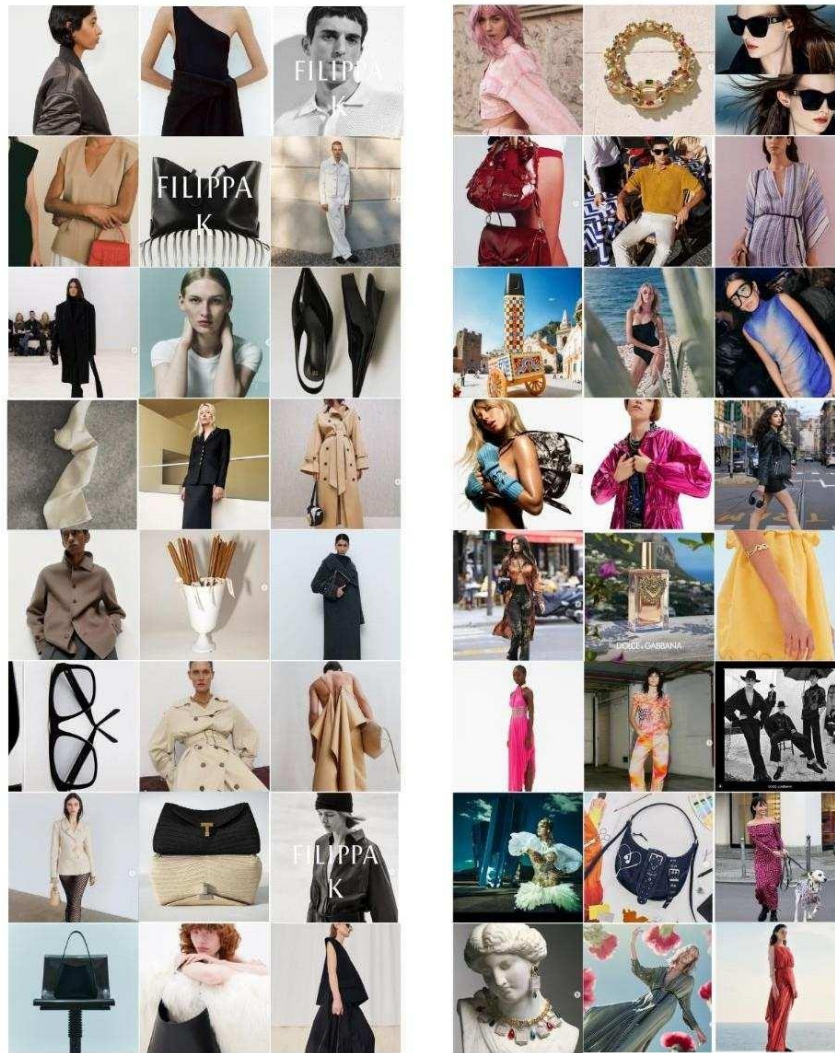


Figure 17: Comparative visual overview of Nordic and Mediterranean brands' color aesthetics on Instagram

The differences between Nordic and Mediterranean brands are particularly visible in the color saturation category. Medium saturation is dominant in Nordic posts, present in 34 out of a total of 36 posts, while only 2 posts are classified as low saturation, without a single post with high color saturation. In contrast, Mediterranean brands show a significantly more intense visual approach: 21 posts use high color saturation, 11 medium, while only 4 posts are characterized as low saturation. The dominance of medium saturation in Nordic brands contributes to a stable and harmonious visual atmosphere, in which colors do not assume a dominant role but remain part of a balanced composition. Such an approach corresponds to minimalist aesthetics of Scandinavian fashion brand communication. Conversely, high saturation in Mediterranean brands enhances the impression of sensory richness. Intense colors attract attention and create a more dynamic visual rhythm, which makes the images seem more

alive and emotional. This use of saturation is often associated with depictions of nature, fashion and everyday life.

When it comes to the color temperature category, balanced tones dominate in both cultural contexts, but certain differences in their distribution are noticeable. For Nordic brands, 18 posts use balanced color temperature, 13 posts use warm, while 5 posts are classified as cold. In contrast, the Mediterranean posts show much greater homogeneity – as many as 30 out of 36 announcements use a balanced color temperature, while 6 posts are characterized as warm-colored, without the presence of cool tones.

The dominance of balanced tones in both bodies indicates a desire for visual harmony, without extremely warm or cold color solutions. However, the presence of cold tones in Nordic posts can contribute to the impression of restraint, especially in combination with neutral palettes and medium saturation, as in the example post below (Figure 18). Mediterranean posts, although dominantly balanced, use more often warm elements through landscapes, sunlight and intense colors, which is why their compositions seem more open and sensory rich, as visible in Figure 19. The charts in Figure 20 show a graphic comparison of the results obtained in the analysis of color-related visual features.



Figure 18: Example of the use of cold tones in Filippa K post (Fi5); Source: Instagram



Figure 19: Example of the use of warm tones in Zeus+Dione post (Ze9); Source: Instagram

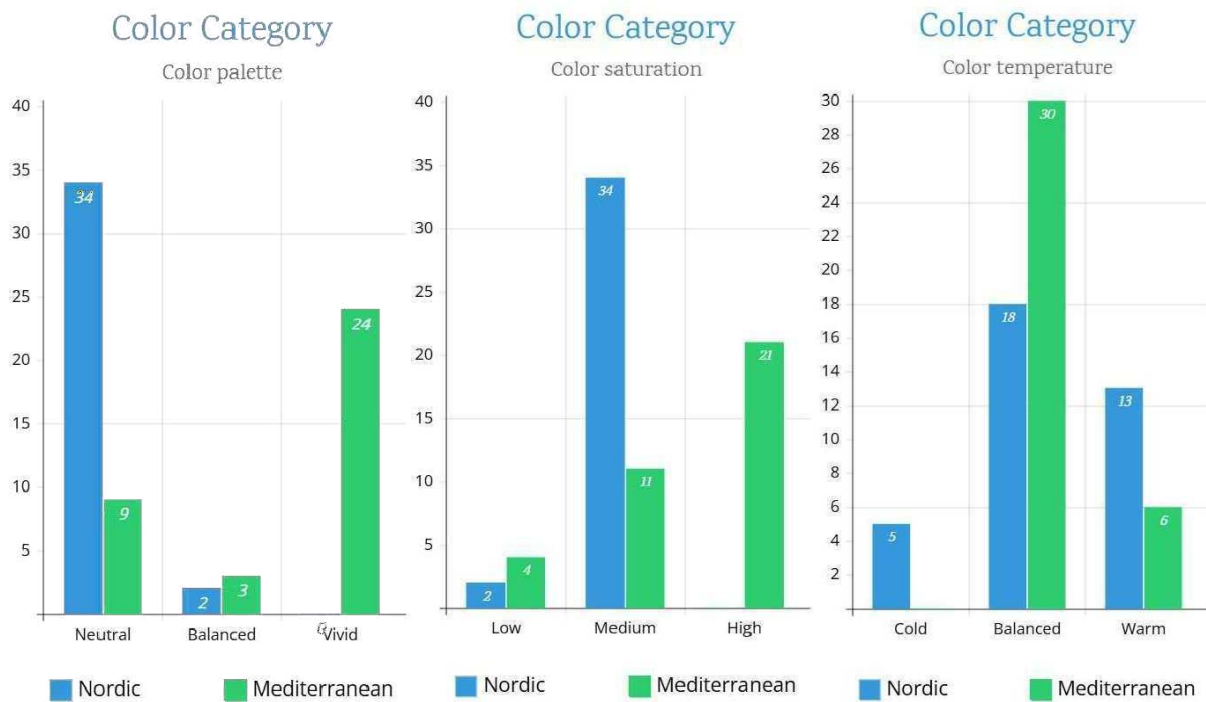


Figure 20: Comparison of color-related visual features of Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts

3.2.3. Perspective Patterns

Within the perspective category, the analysis focuses on three subcategories of visual grammar according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model: social distance, vertical angle and gaze. These categories refer to the interpersonal meaning of the image, that is, to the way in which the visual composition constructs the relationship between the depicted subjects and the viewer. Through the choice of the frame, the angle of photography and the view of the model, fashion posts convey different degrees of distance, involvement, power and emotional connection, thus contributing to the formation of specific cultural and aesthetic identities of brands.

Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts show differences in the representation and construction of social distance between the model and the observer. Nordic images tend to use a long shot frame (18 posts) predominantly, followed by a medium shot (14 posts). Close-ups are present in only 4 posts. Mediterranean brands most often use long shots (21 posts), but proportionally have a higher number of shots compared to medium shots (9) and close-ups (6). In Nordic posts, long-shot images are frequently paired with neutral backgrounds and minimalist compositions (e.g., To4, To5, Fi10, By5), as exemplified in Figure 21, which enhances the feeling of emotional restraint and visual control. Conversely, in the Mediterranean case, landscapes, urban areas and elements of everyday life are commonly used in long shots (Do2, De4, Ze1), which creates a more narrative and ambient impression of social distance, as exemplified in Figure 22. The fact that both datasets use a limited number of close-ups indicates that the focus is not predominantly on the psychological intimacy of the model, but rather on establishing a cohesive whole visually, aesthetically and atmospherically.

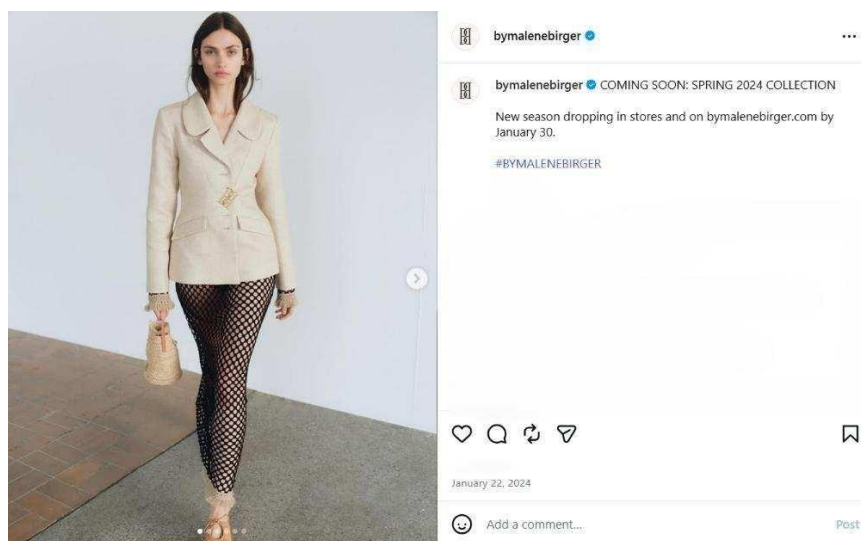


Figure 21: Example of a long shot paired with a minimalist background in By Malene Birger post (By5); Source: Instagram



Figure 22: Example of a long shot paired with rich ambient in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do2); Source: Instagram

The analysis of vertical angles shows a significant prevalence of the eye-level perspective in both cultural contexts. For Nordic brands, 30 out of 36 images use an eye-level perspective, while 6 images are photographed from a slightly lower angle. High angle is not detected in any of the images. Mediterranean posts show an even higher number of eye-level images, 33 of them in total, while only 1 high-angle and 2 low-angle images are present.

The prevalence of eye-level perspective within both cultural contexts indicates the tendency of fashion brands to portray models as accessible and immediate figures, rather than as authoritative subjects. However, the higher number of low-angle images in Nordic posts creates an overall impression of stability, control and self-confidence of the subjects, particularly when combined with reduced aesthetic and the neutral facial expression of the model, which is clearly visible in the example in Figure 23. In the Mediterranean case, fewer examples of extreme angles suggest that visual expressiveness is derived to a lesser degree through power relationships and more through color, movement and stylization. Such results indicate that both cultural contexts prefer visual balance and an unobtrusive relationship with the audience, but that this balance is achieved through different aesthetic strategies – in the Nordic case by combining eye-level images with minimalist composition and emotional restraint of the model (see Figure 24), and in the Mediterranean case by using more vivid imagery in combination with eye-level perspective (see Figure 25).



Figure 23: Example of the use of low-angle perspective in By Malene Birger post (By4); Source: Instagram



Figure 24: Example of eye-level perspective paired with minimalist aesthetic in Filippa K post (Fil); Source: Instagram

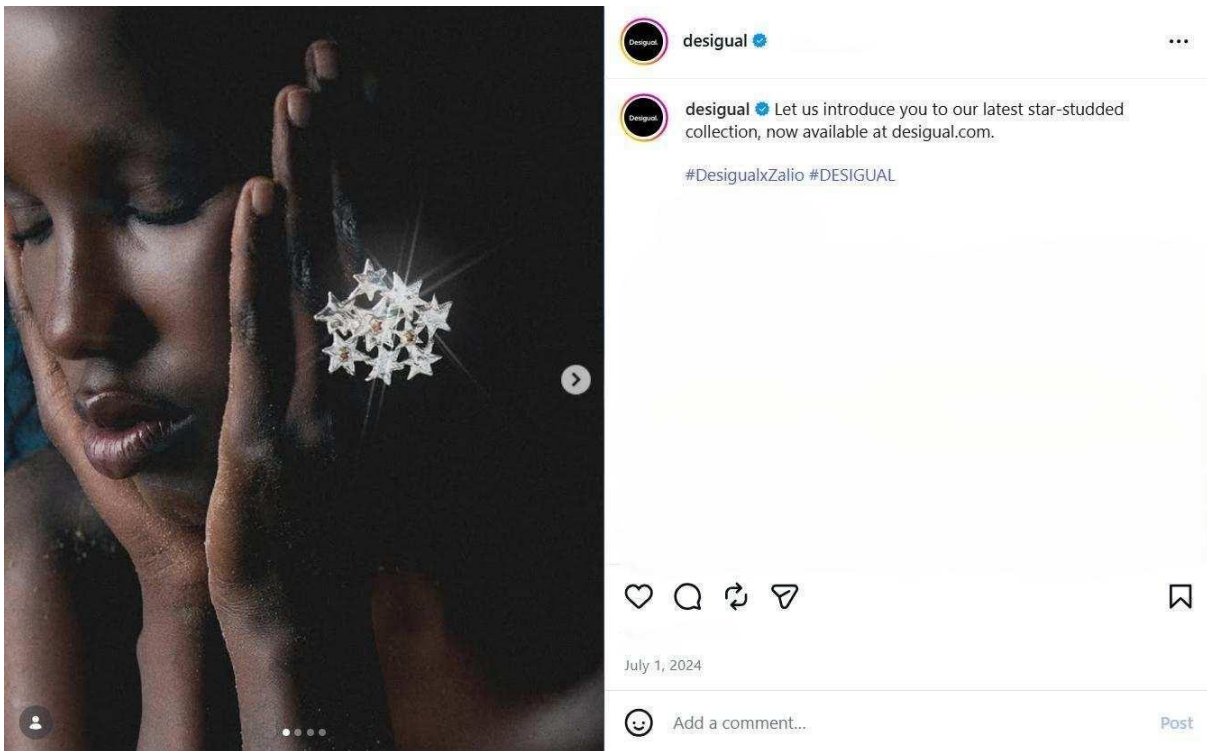


Figure 25: Example of eye-level perspective paired with vivid imagery in Desigual post (De7); Source: Instagram

There are also different approaches to developing an interpersonal relationship with the observer based on the type of gaze used in Instagram posts. The Nordic sample included 13 demand views, i.e., cases where the subject of the image makes eye contact with the observer, 8 offer views, i.e., cases where the subject does not make eye contact with the observer, and 15 posts where the type of gaze was not applicable, since only the product or specific parts of the body (face excluded) were shown in the image. The Mediterranean sample included 16 demand views, 9 offer views and 11 cases where gaze type was not applicable.

While both samples contain a high representation of demand views in relation to the number of posts, their functions differ. In Nordic posts, the direct gaze of the model tends to be emotionally neutral and restrained, followed by neutral facial expressions and minimalist stylization (e.g., To1, Fi9, By2), thus creating a sense of distance in the relationship with the observer. In the Mediterranean sample, the direct gaze of the model is usually part of a wider emotionally engaging aesthetic that combines a variety of elements, including movement, color and style (e.g., Do2, De2, Ze9); therefore, the relationship with the viewer appears more open and communicative. The number of images displaying offer gaze is similar in both datasets, but they employ this type of gaze in different ways. While models in Nordic posts might convey the meanings of emotional restraint and distance by looking away, models in Mediterranean

images often use an offer gaze to display naturalness, emotional expressiveness and the spur of the moment, as portrayed in Figure 26.



Figure 26: Example of offer gaze combined with emotional expressiveness in Dolce & Gabbana post; Source: Instagram

At the same time, the significant presence of the not applicable category in both corpora indicates the importance of the product, body and environment as independent bearers of meaning, whereby the brand identity is not constructed exclusively through the face and emotional expression of the model, but also through composition and visual atmosphere. Figure 27 shows a graphic comparison of the results obtained in the analysis of perspective-related features.

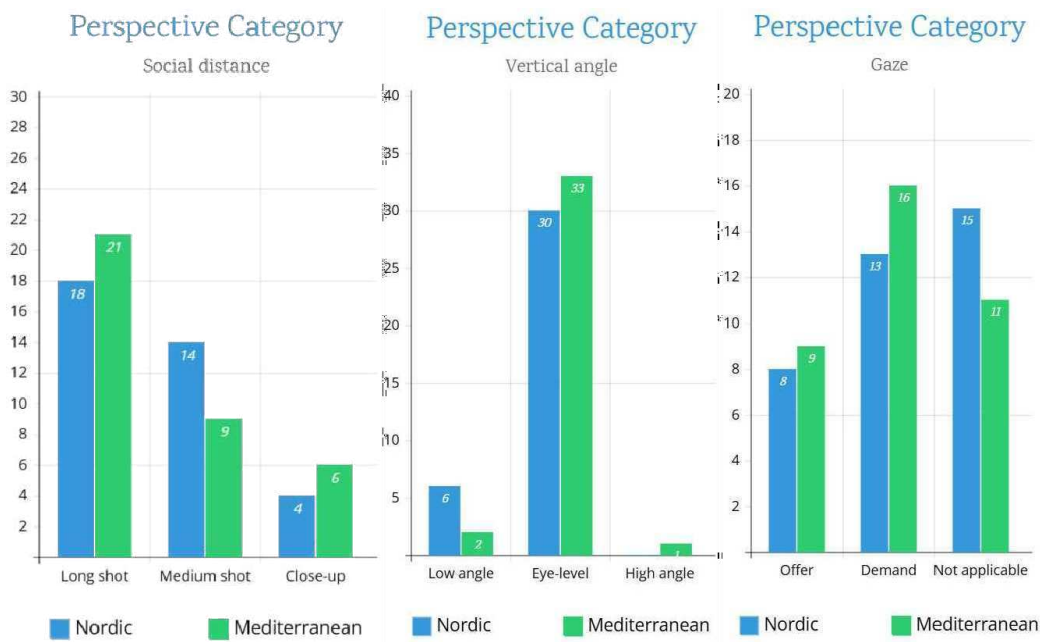


Figure 27: Comparison of perspective-related visual features of Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts

3.2.4. Composition Patterns

The analysis of composition elements includes the framing and visual salience subcategories, which, according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar, shape the way in which the image elements are interconnected and organized hierarchically. These subcategories allow the analysis of whether objects and subjects are presented as part of a unified whole or as separate elements, as well as which part of the image attracts the most attention from the viewer. In this way, the composition contributes to the construction of meaning, brand identity and the way the audience visually perceives fashion posts.

The results for the framing category show very similar patterns for Nordic and Mediterranean brands. It is noted that, in Nordic posts, the connection between elements dominates in a total of 30 posts, while only 6 posts are classified as having disconnected elements. Similar numbers are present with Mediterranean brands, where 31 posts use connection and 5 use disconnection in framing.

The dataset demonstrates that both Nordic and Mediterranean brands seek to create visually coherent narratives in which models, products and ambience belong to the same aesthetic and meaningful whole. Nordic brands seem to achieve connection through reduction of elements, neutral colors and spatial harmony, while Mediterranean brands do so by displaying richer settings, vibrant colors and decorative details. Although the disconnection of elements is relatively rare in both corpora, it appears more often in posts focused on products, as in Figure 28, or fragmented visual compositions, where elements are presented independently and with a lower degree of narrative connection, as presented in Figure 29.



Figure 28: Example of disconnection of elements in Desigual post (De11); Source: Instagram

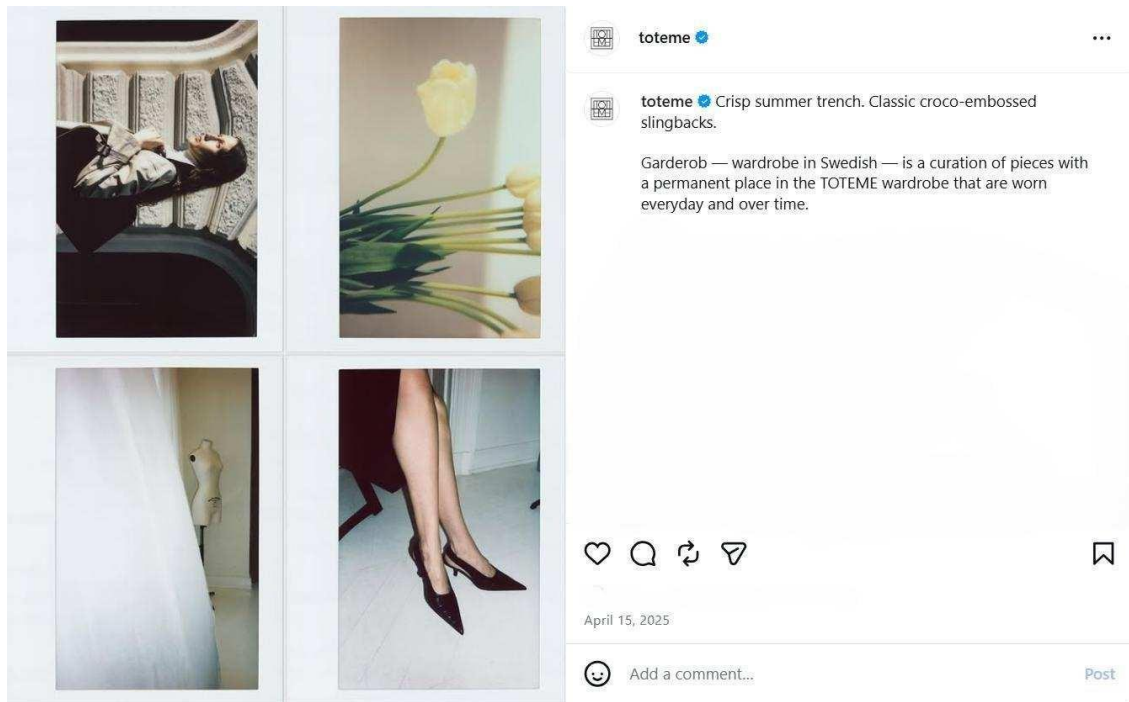


Figure 29: Example of fragmented visual composition in Toteme post (To10); Source: Instagram

The analysis of visual salience shows noticeable differences between Nordic and Mediterranean brands in the way visual attention is organized. In Nordic posts, the focus on the model (17 posts) and product (16 posts) is almost equally represented, while only 3 posts are classified as ambience-centered. In contrast, the Mediterranean corpus shows a clear dominance of model-centered compositions with 27 posts, while 9 posts are product-focused and none are classified as ambience-centered.

In the case of Nordic brand posts, the almost equal number of model-centered and product-centered posts in the Nordic corpus may suggest that these brands balance between presenting clothing as a functional product and presenting a certain lifestyle or aesthetic atmosphere. The presence of ambience-centered compositions in Nordic posts suggests that value is also placed on the use of space and atmosphere in constructing brand identity. In Figure 30, the ambience is not just a background element, but part of the image's meaning that conveys ideas of understated aesthetic and sensuality, as well as a slower, more contemplative storytelling style.

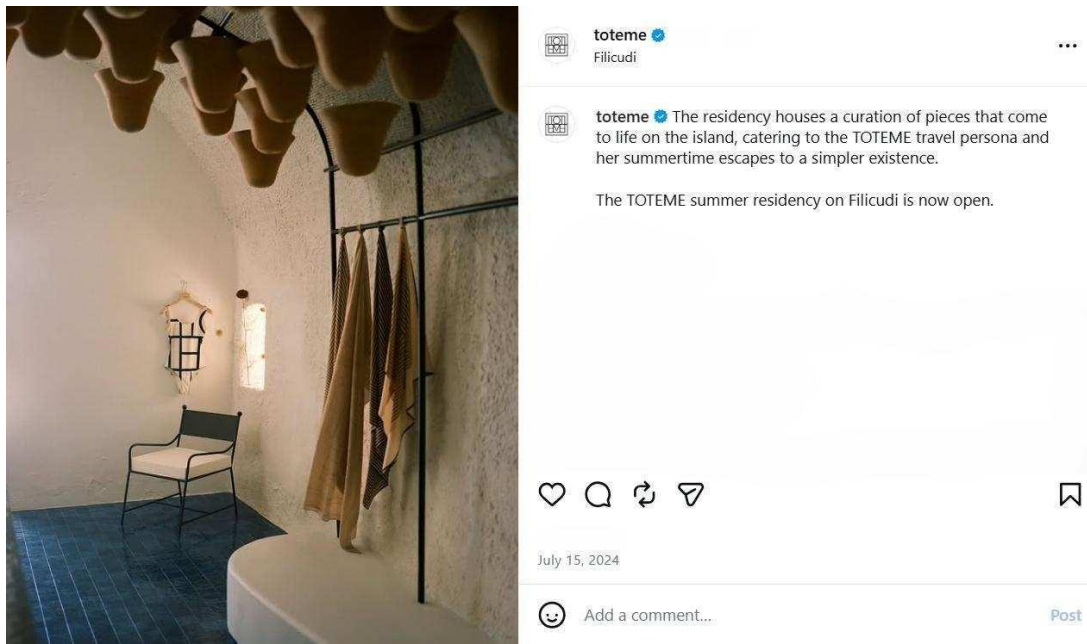


Figure 30: Example of an ambience-centered composition in Toteme post (To7); Source: Instagram

On the other hand, the model's body and styling are the main elements of focus in Mediterranean posts and main carriers of emotion and brand identity. The higher proportion of product-centered posts in the Mediterranean corpus suggests that Mediterranean brands more often emphasize accessories and decorative elements to convey meanings about the brand itself. Such patterns indicate that while Nordic brands nearly equally rely on models and products, and occasionally ambience, to establish their identity, Mediterranean brands focus on the body and stylized presence of the model (see Figure 31). Figure 32 shows a graphic comparison of the results obtained in the analysis of composition-related features.



Figure 31: Example of model-centered composition in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do5); Source: Instagram

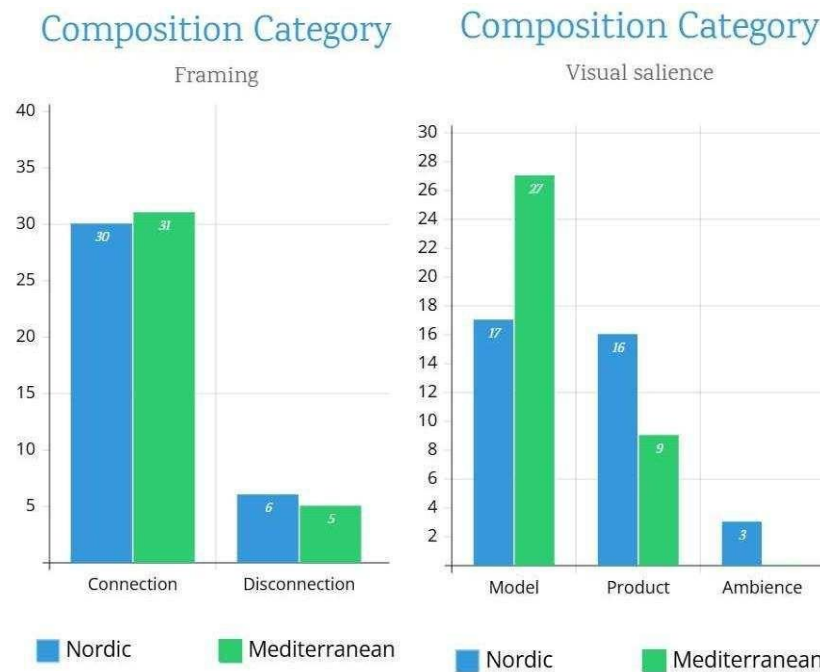


Figure 32: Comparison of composition-related visual features of Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts

3.2.5. Social Configuration and Brand Visibility

In addition to Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation and the categories taken from the visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen, two additional categories were included for a more comprehensive overview of how identity and brand are represented within selected brands' communication on Instagram: social configuration and brand visibility. The social configuration category refers to the presence of individuals, groups or the absence of human figures in posts, while brand visibility analyzes the presence of visible brand marks in the form of brand logos, inscriptions and other recognizable signs.

The analysis of Nordic posts demonstrated a heavy reliance on individual representations, with a total of 23 images of a single model, while group scenes appear in 3 posts. There were 10 posts categorized as not applicable, i.e., without human figures. Similarly, the Mediterranean corpus was also dominated by posts with an individual representation of the model, with 25 out of a total of 36 posts marked as 'individual'. Group scenes appear in 4 posts, while in 7 posts, the focus was exclusively on the product or object without the presence of human figures.

These results show that both cultural groups primarily present models individually, where the brand's visual identity is most often built through an individual figure or an isolated

product, rather than through a collective representation. Figure 33 shows a graphic comparison of the results obtained in the analysis of social configuration in Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts.

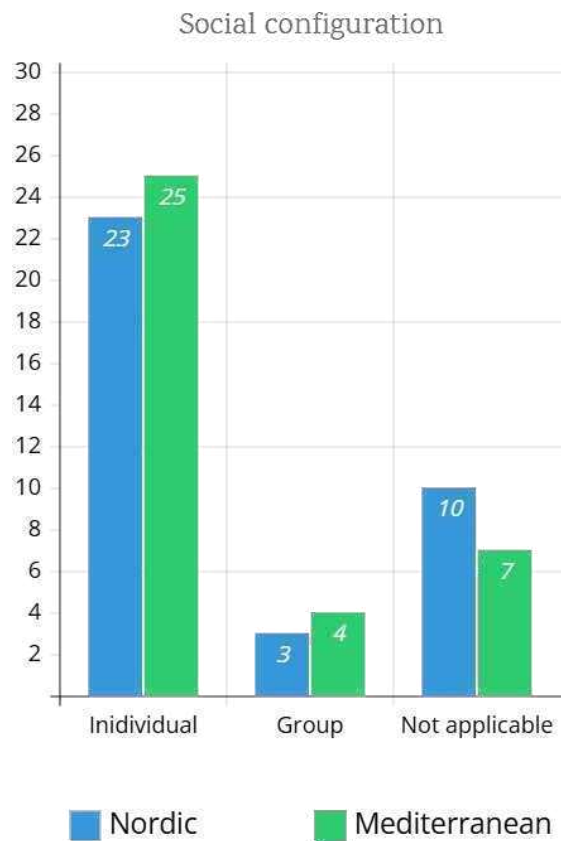


Figure 33: Comparison of results regarding social configuration in Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts

However, the way in which individuality is presented in the two datasets shows noticeable differences. In Mediterranean posts, individual models are depicted in a variety of day-to-day and social scenarios. Some examples include walking down the street, sitting in a cafe or interacting with the environment (e.g., Do2, Do5, De2, De9). Although there are fewer group scenes, they are often used to demonstrate social interaction and spontaneity (see Figure 34). On the contrary, Nordic group posts show models isolated from the wider social context (see Figure 35), often against neutral backgrounds or in minimalist interiors, thereby emphasizing the aesthetics of reduction and visual control. The greater number of product-centered posts without human figures in the Nordic corpus also indicates a stronger focus on the product itself, materiality and design.



Figure 34: Example of a group scene and sociability in Dolce & Gabbana post (Do1); Source: Instagram



Figure 35: Example of a group scene and reduction in By Malene Birger post (By10); Source: Instagram

When it comes to the brand visibility category, the absence of visible logos and explicit brand marks dominates in both cases. The Nordic corpus consists of 26 posts with absent brand visibility, i.e., without a clearly visible logo or brand name. There are 4 posts that include subtle brand visibility and 6 posts with clearly visible brand marks. Likewise, in the Mediterranean corpus, absent visibility appears in 24 posts, subtle brand marks in 3, while visible brand presence is recorded in 9 posts. Figure 36 shows a graphic comparison of the results obtained in the analysis of brand visibility in Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts.

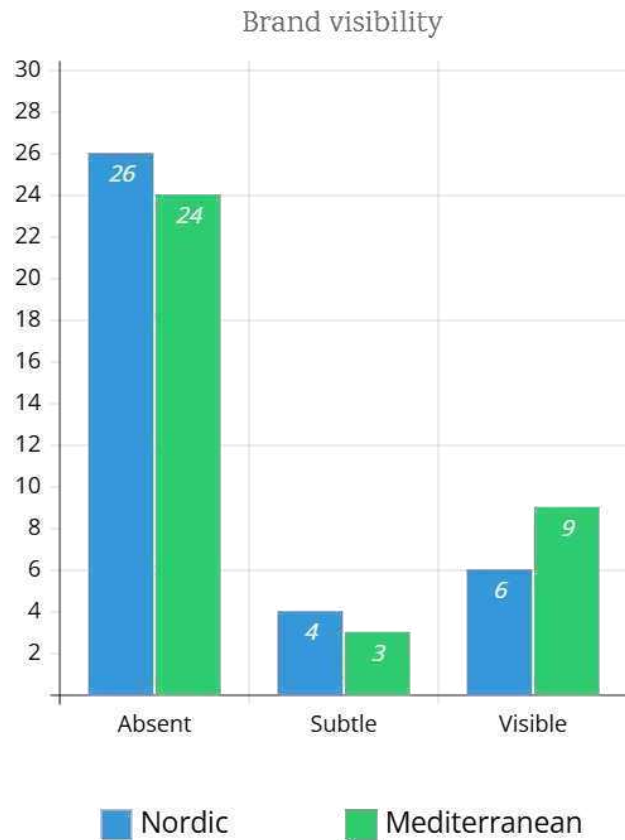


Figure 36: Comparison of results regarding brand visibility in Nordic and Mediterranean brand posts

Although these results are quite similar, they suggest that Nordic brands more often use strategies of subtle and implicit branding, relying on aesthetics, atmosphere and product design as the main carriers of brand identity. Such an approach can relate to the concept of quiet luxury. In contrast, the Mediterranean corpus shows a slightly greater presence of explicit branding through visible logos, inscriptions and decorative brand marks, especially in the Dolce & Gabbana dataset, where 6 out of 12 posts show explicit brand visibility (Do2, Do4, Do5, Do6, Do8, Do12).

However, even in Mediterranean publications, explicit branding is not dominant in most content, which indicates that these brands also build a significant part of their identity through atmosphere, cultural references and lifestyle, and not exclusively through direct logo promotion. This is confirmed by the Greek brand Zeus+Dione, which shows only one example where the use of a brand mark is present, and it is marked as subtle (see Figure 37).

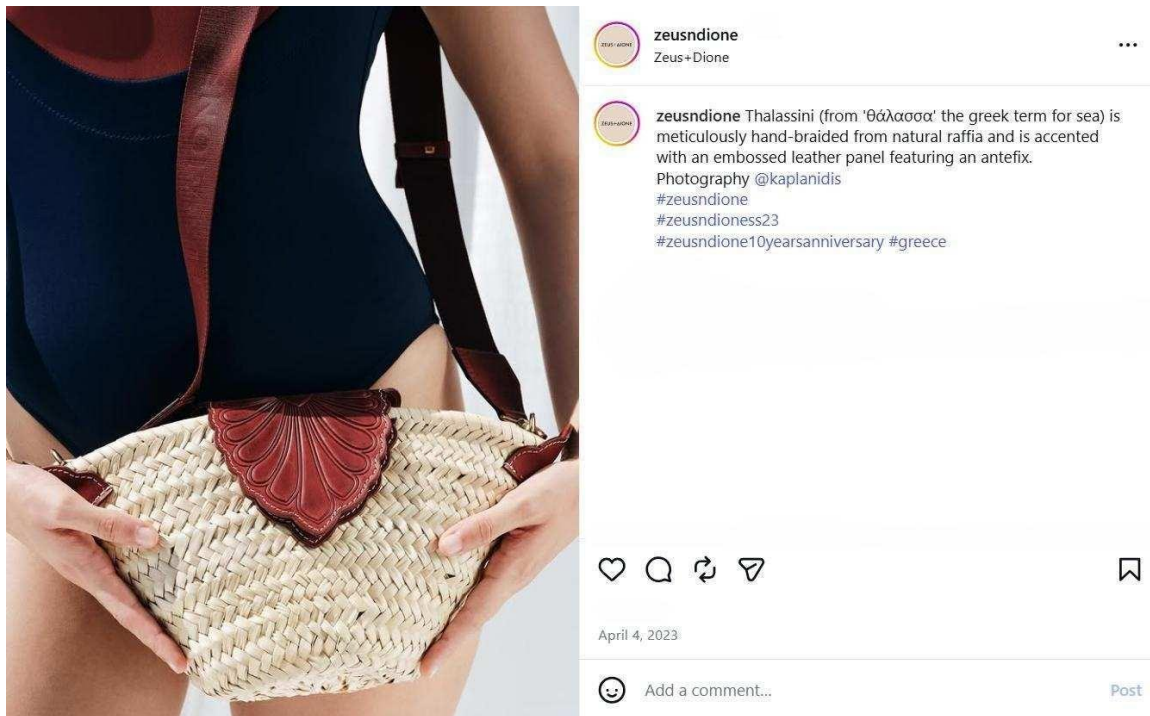


Figure 37: Example of subtle brand visibility in Zeus+Dione post (Ze2); Source: Instagram

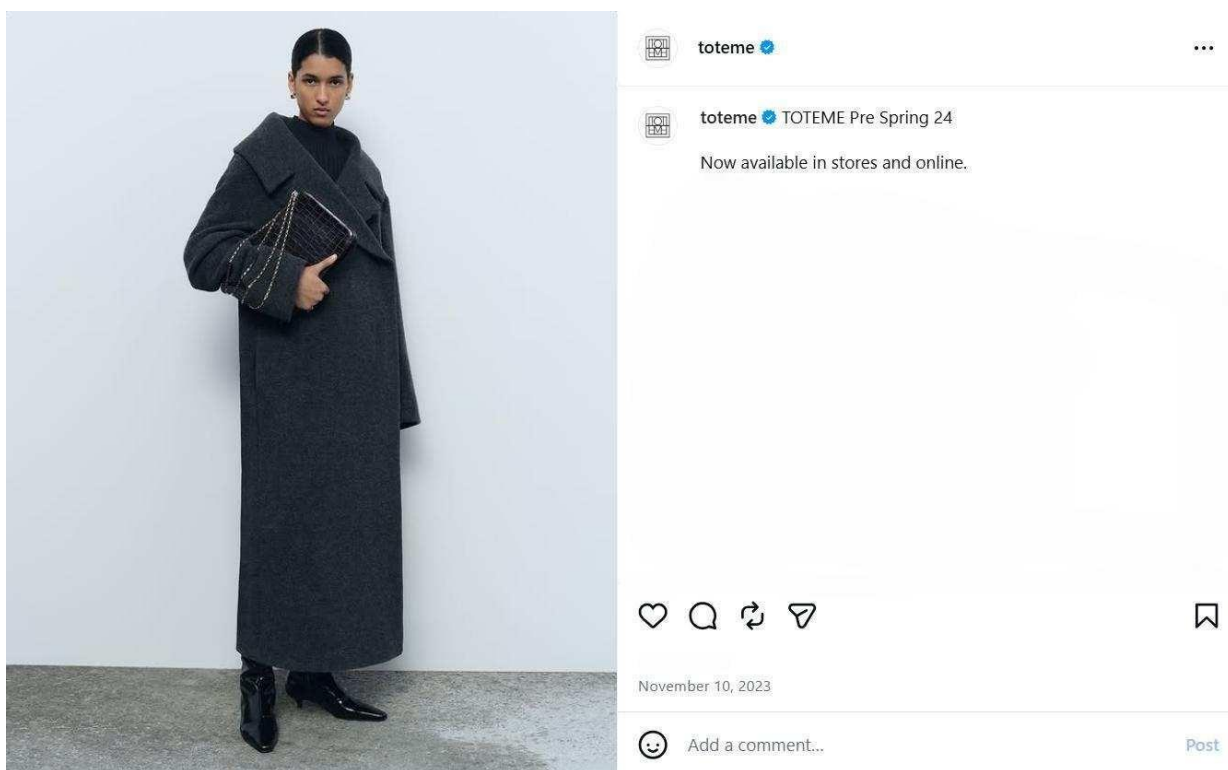
Overall, the results of the visual semiotic analysis indicate the existence of two different aesthetic and communicative logics in the presentation of fashion brands on Instagram. Nordic brands more often use a reduced visual aesthetic based on neutral colors, minimalist compositions, restrained emotionality and implicit branding, whereby the brand identity is built through the form, material, atmosphere and functionality of the product. In contrast, Mediterranean brands more often use visually rich and narrative compositions, intense colors, decorative elements and cultural references in order to construct a more emotionally open and expressive identity. While the Nordic approach favors aesthetic control, simplicity and subtlety, Mediterranean brands emphasize sensory fullness, theatricality and connection to local cultural heritage. The differences between these two visual models are not only related to aesthetic preferences, but also to different ways of representing identity, emotions and the relationship between fashion, space and culture. Such patterns will be further illustrated through a detailed analysis of selected posts in the next subchapter.

4. Case Studies of Selected Instagram Posts

In addition to the general qualitative interpretation of visual semiotics results, this part of the paper will present a more detailed analysis of individual representative posts from the Nordic and Mediterranean corpus. This subchapter aims to illustrate the way in which the identified visual tendencies manifest in concrete examples. This part will allow the results presented through tables and graphs to gain additional context and enable a clearer understanding of the relationship between visual elements, cultural meanings and brand identity.

Detailed analysis serves as representative examples of dominant patterns in both corpora and connects Barthes's denotative and connotative analysis to Kress and van Leeuwen's categories of visual grammar, i.e., color, perspective, and composition. Accordingly, the analyzed posts were not singled out as exceptions but as visually representative examples of broader aesthetic and cultural tendencies that were identified during the research.

Figure 38: Case study of a Nordic brand's post To4



Denotation and Connotation

Post To4 (Figure 38) depicts a model posing against a neutral background in a long, dark, grey oversized coat, paired with black pointy boots and a black leather purse, as well as minimal make-up and discreet earrings. The image composition is simple and reduced, featuring no additional decorations or complex scenography, allowing the viewer to focus primarily on the silhouette, the texture of the material and the shape of the clothes and accessories.

On a connotative level, the use of neutral colors, minimalist scenography and the absence of eye-catching makeup can be related to Scandinavian minimalist aesthetics and the concept of quiet luxury. The dark oversized coat suggests functionality, comfort and contemporary urban style, while a black leather bag and pointed boots connote quality and durability. Visual reduction and the absence of decorative details contribute to the impression of aesthetic restraint and unobtrusive elegance, which is characteristic of the Nordic visual identity.

Color, Perspective and Composition

The post uses a neutral color palette, medium saturation and cold color temperature, which contributes to the impression of calmness and emotional control. Moreover, cold tones emphasize sophistication and distance, and medium saturation prevents visual aggressiveness and maintains a balance between aesthetics and functionality.

When it comes to the perspective category, the photo uses a wide shot and an eye-level angle. The wider frame makes the complete outfit and silhouette of the model visible, thus emphasizing the form of the clothing. The eye-level angle creates a sense of equality between the model and the viewer. The gaze category is marked as demand because the model looks directly towards the camera, thus establishing contact with the viewer. However, due to the reduced emotional expressiveness and controlled visual environment, that contact remains emotionally restrained, rather than intimate or emotional.

Within the composition category, the elements are connected because the model, clothes and accessories are organized as a single visual entity. Visual salience is model-centered, since the model is the central and dominant element of the composition, while the background and ambience are kept to a minimum. This directs attention to the silhouette, materials and design of the product, which is characteristic of the Nordic approach to fashion communication.

Figure 39: Case study of a Mediterranean brand's post Do11



Denotation and Connotation

Post Do11 (Figure 39) features a marble bust sculpture of a woman adorned with massive pieces of jewelry, including large earrings and a striking necklace. The jewelry is made with a combination of marble, gold and multi-colored gems, while Latin inscriptions and ornamental symbols appear on some parts. The visual composition combines elements of sculpture, historical aesthetics and luxury fashion product, creating a layered and highly decorative image.

On a connotative level, the combination of sculpture and jewelry can be associated with artistic expression and mixing of different art forms, i.e., fashion, sculpture and historical symbolism. Marble sculpture and Latin inscriptions evoke Italian cultural heritage, classical art and historical tradition, as well as Italian artistry and handiwork, while gold and multicolored jewels connote luxury and authenticity. Ornaments and decorative details contribute to the impression of visual richness and aesthetics of maximalism, which is characteristic of the visual identity of the Dolce & Gabbana brand.

Color, Perspective and Composition

The post uses a vivid color palette, high saturation, and balanced color temperature. The combination of neutral marble with golden and vibrant, multicolored details creates a visual balance between elegance and decorativeness. High saturation contributes to the impression of intensity, while the absence of extremely cold tones enables a warmer and emotionally richer visual impression.

When it comes to the perspective, the photo uses a medium shot and an eye-level angle. The medium shot enables a sufficiently close display of jewelry details, but at the same time maintains the visibility of the entire sculptural form. Eye-level angle creates a sense of visual equality between the object and the viewer, without emphasized dominance or inferiority. The gaze category is marked as not applicable because the human model is not present, and the focus is completely shifted to the product and the art object.

Within the composition category, the elements are connected, since sculpture and jewelry are presented as a unique aesthetic unit. Visual salience is product-centered because jewelry is the central and dominant element of the composition. The sculpture functions as a symbolic and cultural framework that emphasizes the luxury and artistic value of the product. In this way, apart from promoting a fashion item, the post also conveys a wider narrative about Italian history, art and cultural identity.

4.1. Summary of Findings

Taken as a whole, the results of the analysis indicate the existence of two different communication and aesthetic logics in the presentation of fashion brands on Instagram. Although both Nordic and Mediterranean brands use modern visual and promotional strategies characteristic of digital fashion communication, the way in which they construct identity, emotions and attitude towards the audience shows clear differences.

Sentiment analysis showed that both groups predominantly use a neutral-positive tone of communication, but that Mediterranean brands more often use emotionally open and affirmative language, while Nordic brands favor a more informative, controlled and discreet style of expression. These differences were further confirmed through visual semiotic analysis.

Nordic brands more often use neutral color palettes, reduced compositions, restrained emotionality and implicit branding, whereby the brand identity is built through the atmosphere, materiality and form of the product. In contrast, Mediterranean brands more often use narrative and visually rich compositions, more intense colors, decorative elements and cultural references in order to construct a more emotionally open and sensory-expressed identity.

The results also show that the differences between the observed cultural contexts are not only present at the level of aesthetics, but also in the way individuality, femininity, space, the body and everyday life are presented. While Nordic visual models strive for aesthetic controlled and emotionally distanced presentation of individuality and femininity, the Mediterranean approach more often combines atmosphere, sociability and performativity to display these values. Detailed case studies further confirmed that the dominant patterns identified through quantification and coding consistently appeared in individual posts, with visual elements functioning as carriers of broader cultural and symbolic meanings.

Based on all the above, it can be concluded that Instagram communication of fashion brands is not only a promotional tool, but also a space of cultural representation in which specific models of identity and values are shaped through text, aesthetics and visual strategies. In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed in more detail in relation to the theoretical framework of the work and the wider cultural patterns of Nordic minimalist and Mediterranean expressive aesthetics.

5. Discussion

The research results show that there are consistent differences between Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands in the way they construct identity and cultural meanings through digital communication on Instagram. Although both groups of brands use modern strategies of fashion promotion characteristic of social networks, the analysis shows that differences do not appear only at the level of aesthetics, but also in the way of organizing visual meaning, emotional expression and relationship with the audience. The obtained findings confirm that Instagram communication of fashion brands functions as a space of cultural representation in which wider patterns of cultural and social values, as well as communication styles, are reproduced through images and text.

In this sense, the results can be interpreted through Hall's (1976) concepts of low-context and high-context communication styles, as well as through Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, especially uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity and power distance. At the same time, the findings confirm the relevance of Barthes' (1977) concepts of denotation and connotation, as well as Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model of visual grammar, because they show that visual elements on Instagram function as both aesthetic choices and carriers of cultural meanings.

5.1. Nordic Minimalism and Mediterranean Expressiveness as Cultural Communication Styles

The first research question refers to how the cultural aesthetics of Nordic minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness are manifested in the visual communication of fashion brands on Instagram. The results clearly show that different aesthetic and communication logics exist.

Nordic brands more often use reduced compositions, neutral palettes, a limited number of elements in the frame, minimalist interiors and emotionally restrained facial expressions. Therefore, the visual communication of these brands is based on the aesthetics of silence, control and subtlety. Meaning is not constructed through spectacle or narrative exaggeration,

but through atmosphere, texture of materials, proportions and form of the product. In this sense, the Nordic visual style can be linked to Hall's concept of low-context communication, in which meaning is conveyed through clarity, reduction and controlled expression (Hall, 1976).

Although Hall primarily associates low-context communication with verbal directness, the results of this research show that a similar logic can be transferred to the visual level as well. Nordic brands do not use a lot of cultural references or complex narratives to convey meaning. Rather, meaning emerges from the carefully controlled aesthetics and minimalist organization of space. Visual identity works through the absence of excess. Such communication does not aggressively try to attract attention, but builds an identity through restrained sophistication and implicit branding, which corresponds to the concept of quiet luxury that is often associated with Scandinavian fashion identity.

In contrast, Mediterranean brands use much richer and more narrative visual compositions, as their posts are dominated by intense colors, landscapes, urban atmosphere, decorative details, religious symbols, references to local history and cultural heritage, as well as a more pronounced emotionality of the models. The meaning is not only transmitted through the product, but through the entire cultural environment that surrounds the product.

Such findings can be linked to Hall's concept of relatively high-context communication, in which meaning emerges from context, symbolism and cultural references (Hall, 1976). Mediterranean posts often require the interpretation of the wider cultural environment in order to fully understand their connotations, which confirms Barthes' idea that, alongside denotative information, images also communicate culturally coded connotations (Barthes, 1977). For example, the use of ancient motifs and religious symbols functions both as a decoration and as a cultural sign that evokes ideas of tradition, history, authenticity and local identity. In this way, the fashion product becomes part of a wider narrative about lifestyle and culture.

However, the results also confirm the arguments of Kittler et al. (2011) that Hall's division between low-context and high-context communication styles should not be seen as a strict binary opposition. Mediterranean brands in this research do not represent typical high-context cultures in the full sense, but rather offer a higher level of contextuality compared to Nordic brands. Their communication remains part of the global fashion industry and modern digital platforms, which is why it still contains a certain level of visual clarity and international aesthetics. The differences between the two groups of brands should therefore be understood as differences in the degree of expressiveness and symbolic density, rather than as absolute cultural opposites.

5.2. Interpersonal and Compositional Meanings: Emotional Distance versus Emotional Involvement

The second research question focuses on interpersonal and compositional meanings according to Kress and van Leeuwen's model, that is, on the way in which the visual organization of the image shapes the relationship between the brand, the model and the audience. The results show that the differences between Nordic and Mediterranean brands are also reflected in the way of establishing interpersonal closeness and sense of presence.

Nordic brands are dominated by long shots, static poses and visually "refined" compositions in which the models often seem emotionally distant. Although a direct gaze towards the camera is dominant, the relationship with the audience remains restrained due to the neutral facial expressions and the large amount of empty space in the frame. Such visual composition creates an impression of control and introspection, where attention is directed to form, texture and atmosphere rather than emotional interaction.

In contrast, Mediterranean brands are more likely to use movement, spontaneous poses and scenes of everyday life to create a sense of immediacy and emotional involvement. Models walk down the street, sit in cafes, smile, turn their bodies in motion or interact with the environment, which makes communication seem more open and sensory. Interpersonal meaning here is not built through distance, but through the atmosphere of presence and experience. The audience does not have the impression that they are only looking at a fashion product, but at a certain lifestyle and cultural environment.

Differences are also visible in the way the composition is organized and in visual salience. In Nordic posts, salience is generally achieved through a reduction of elements and a clear hierarchy of focus on the model or product that stands out through a simple background, carefully controlled lighting, and the absence of visual "noise". In contrast, Mediterranean posts tend to use richer frames where attention is drawn to colors and more decorative details. The attention is not concentrated only on the product, but is distributed over the whole scene and atmosphere of the picture. Moreover, the differences between the two brand groups also appear in the framing and connection of elements. Even though both cultural groups mostly rely on connected elements to reach visual harmony, the way in which they do it is different. Nordic brands connect visual elements usually through neutral colors and minimalist composition with a limited number of elements, Mediterranean brands more often connect models, objects and environment through rich colors, narratives and cultural references into a single visual whole.

Such results confirm that interpersonal and compositional meanings have an important role in the reproduction of cultural patterns of communication. While Nordic brands build their relationship with the audience through distance, clarity and aesthetic discipline, Mediterranean brands more often insist on a sense of closeness, spontaneity and immersion in the cultural context. The differences, then, appear not only in what is shown, but also in the way the visual structure organizes the viewer's experience.

5.3. Emotional Tone of Textual Communication

The third research question is focused on whether the differences in visual communication are reflected in the emotional tone of the textual descriptions of the posts. The results of the sentiment analysis confirm this assumption.

Both Nordic and Mediterranean brands dominantly use a neutral-positive tone of communication, which is expected in the context of the fashion industry and promotional communication on Instagram. However, Mediterranean brands show a higher average compound score and a higher average score of positive sentiment compared to Nordic brands. Their descriptions more often use emotionally colored terms associated with energy, beauty, experience and enjoyment. Although both brand groups generally avoid negative sentiment and rely on positive brand presentation, they achieve this in different ways.

In contrast, Nordic captions more often contain a high percentage of neutral sentiment and rely on short, informative and descriptive wording. Emotionality and positive wording are present, but they are controlled and subtle, often referring to refinement, quality and sophistication. Such findings confirm the H3 hypothesis and additionally strengthen the interpretation through Hall's theory of communication styles. While Mediterranean brands more often use emotionally open language that tries to create an atmosphere of experience and sensation through various symbols and references, which is typical for a high-context communication style, Nordic brands prefer a more direct, economical and reduced discourse, corresponding to Hall's idea of a low-context communication.

It is important to emphasize, however, that the difference between the two groups is not the difference between "emotional" and "non-emotional" communication. Rather, it is a

difference in the degree and manner of emotional expression. Nordic communication conveys emotion through an atmosphere of silence, sophistication and aesthetic control, while Mediterranean communication conveys emotion through warmth, movement, color and narrative openness.

5.4. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Fashion Communication

The research findings can be further interpreted through Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which provide a broader framework for understanding the cultural values present in the digital communication of fashion brands.

5.4.1. Uncertainty Avoidance

The uncertainty avoidance dimension is particularly interesting in the context of the analyzed Mediterranean brands, because the results show a certain ambivalence between reliance on stable cultural codes and, at the same time, openness to experimentation and aesthetic risk. According to Hofstede (2001), countries like Italy, Spain and Greece show a higher level of uncertainty avoidance, which implies a greater need for familiar patterns, symbolic stability and cultural predictability. In the analyzed posts, this tendency is clearly visible through the strong presence of culturally recognizable elements.

Mediterranean brands often build a narrative through the motifs of traditional architecture, religious symbols, ancient history, craftsmanship, natural landscapes and daily rituals typical for the local culture. Fashion is not presented as completely separate from cultural heritage, but as its contemporary continuation. In this sense, visual communication confirms Hofstede's assumption that cultures with higher uncertainty avoidance more often use familiar cultural patterns to produce a sense of security, continuity and recognition (Hofstede, 2001).

However, the results also show that Mediterranean brands do not remain closed within traditional aesthetic frameworks. In the connotative analysis, the elements of unconventionality and boldness in fashion often appear, which indicates a pronounced willingness to take creative risks and push aesthetic boundaries. Unusual forms of jewelry, combining fashion and

technology, theatrical corsets, intense color contrasts and the fusion of contemporary art with historical motifs create the impression of a constant balance between tradition and innovation. Especially with brands like Dolce & Gabbana and Desigual, fashion functions as a space of performativity and visual experimentation, where cultural symbols are reinterpreted in unexpected ways.

In contrast, Nordic brands are less likely to use elements of visual risk or sharp aesthetic contrasts. Their communication seems more stable and consistent, with smaller oscillations in style codes. Although such an aesthetic may act as an expression of a greater need for control and predictability, it may be associated with cultural values of functionality and clarity rather than fear of uncertainty in Hofstede's sense. Unlike Mediterranean brands, where identity is often created through the collision of different visual registers, Nordic brands build their identity through continuity and aesthetic coherence.

The results, therefore, show that uncertainty avoidance in contemporary fashion communication should not be viewed exclusively through the presence or absence of experimentation. Mediterranean brands simultaneously use both stable cultural references and aesthetic courage, indicating that global digital fashion allows cultures to negotiate between tradition and innovation rather than choosing only one of the two extremes.

5.4.2. Individualism vs. Collectivism

The dimension of individualism and collectivism is emphasized in the way brands represent the relationship between the individual and the social environment. Hofstede (2001) describes the Nordic countries as highly individualistic cultures, in which identity is primarily seen as a personal and autonomous category, while the Mediterranean countries are closer to the middle between individualism and collectivism, with a greater importance of interpersonal relations, community and social connection. The results of the research largely confirm these tendencies, especially through the social configuration category and through the wider narratives integrated in the posts.

In Nordic posts, the individual is most often presented as an independent figure separated from the wider social context. Models often appear alone, with no pronounced interaction with other people or the environment, which creates an impression of introspection and personal autonomy. Identity is constructed through individual presence, not through community or social relationships. Even when an urban or everyday environment is present, it

mostly functions as an aesthetic background rather than a space of social dynamics. Such a representation corresponds to Hofstede's idea of individualistic cultures, in which independence, privacy and personal choice are emphasized.

In contrast, Mediterranean posts much more often include elements of sociability, shared experience, and connection with the environment. Cafes, streets, markets, landscapes and scenes of everyday life create the impression that fashion exists within the wider social and cultural context, and it is not isolated from it. Even when a model is shown in isolation, it rarely seems completely detached from the space and people around them. Visual communication often suggests the presence of community and collective experience, thus presenting identity as something that arises through a relationship with the environment and social life.

Such findings are particularly interesting in the context of Instagram as a global platform that encourages personalized branding and individual self-presentation. Despite this, Mediterranean brands manage to maintain a strong sense of collective and cultural connection, relying on motifs of local life, shared spaces and daily rituals. In this way, the communication of fashion also becomes the communication of social values, where clothes function as part of a wider cultural narrative about belonging, social closeness and shared experience.

5.4.3. Masculinity vs. Femininity

Dimension masculinity vs. femininity proved to be one of the most noticeable cultural differences in the communication of the analyzed brands. Hofstede (2001) describes the Nordic countries as distinctly "feminine" cultures, in which modesty, balance, quality of life and social harmony are valued, while the Mediterranean countries are positioned closer to the "masculine" gender, characterized by a greater focus on status, success, visibility and performativity. The obtained results largely confirm this classification, especially in the way luxury, body, emotions and aesthetic identity are constructed.

The visual communication of Nordic brands is based on the aesthetics of restraint and controlled elegance. Instead of spectacle, identity is built through simplicity of form, an atmosphere of calm and unobtrusive sophistication. The models seem distant and introspective, and fashion is presented as a part of everyday lifestyle, not as a means of demonstrating prestige. Such an approach corresponds to Hofstede's concept of feminine culture. Even when luxury elements are present, they remain implicit and subordinate to the overall aesthetic of harmony and functionality. Additionally, Nordic posts rarely insist on overt sexualization or

dramatization of the body. Femininity is mainly represented through naturalness and controlled sensuality, while emotions remain subtle and unobtrusive. The brand's visual identity does not try to impress with intensity, but with consistency and a sense of aesthetic discipline. In this way, luxury functions as a matter of quality and sophisticated taste, not visual spectacle.

In contrast, Mediterranean brands much more often use the aesthetics of expressiveness. The analysis shows a greater presence of dramatized poses, rich textures, intense colors and decorative elements that attract attention and produce a stronger emotional effect. In some posts, especially by Dolce & Gabbana, luxury takes on an almost ceremonial character through gold, religious motifs, monumental fashion accessories and theatrical organization of the frame. Such elements correspond to Hofstede's description of masculine culture, in which success, status and symbolic visibility are more pronounced.

However, the results also show a certain degree of hybridity. A particularly interesting case is the Greek brand Zeus+Dione, which combines Mediterranean cultural references with calm aesthetics, fluid silhouettes and unobtrusive luxury. Such examples indicate that contemporary fashion brands do not reproduce cultural patterns mechanically, but adapt them to global aesthetic trends and contemporary ideas of luxury. Despite this, the dominant patterns of research still confirm Hofstede's assumption.

5.4.4. Power Distance

The dimension of power distance can be interpreted through the ways in which brands construct authority, prestige and the hierarchical relationship between the model and the audience. Both groups of brands are dominated by eye-level shots, which, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), suggests a relatively equal and egalitarian relationship between the viewer and the model. Such a result is especially expected in the Nordic context, bearing in mind that Hofstede (2001) describes the Nordic countries as societies with a very low power distance, in which equality and the absence of demonstrative authority are valued.

However, it is interesting that the Nordic brands show a slightly higher number of low-angle shots compared to the Mediterranean ones. At first glance, such a result may seem contradictory to Hofstede's theory, since the low-angle perspective in Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model may suggest the power and superiority of the model over the observer. However, in the Nordic context, these shots are mostly integrated into emotionally controlled and visually reduced compositions, without dramatized scenography or emphasized status symbols.

Therefore, the low angle does not function as an open demonstration of dominance, but rather as an aesthetic tool that emphasizes the form and silhouette of the model.

In contrast, Mediterranean brands more often create the impression of symbolic authority through the richness of the composition and visual fullness of the image. Although eye-level shots are dominant, the central positioning of the model, dramatized lighting, luxurious details and more pronounced decorativeness produce a stronger sense of prestige. In this way, power relations in Mediterranean communication are not primarily established through the camera angle, but through the overall atmosphere of luxury and symbolic grandiosity.

A similar ambivalence can be observed in the display of brand marks. Mediterranean brands somewhat more often use explicitly visible logos and brand marks, which can be linked to a greater openness to status symbols and the visual demonstration of luxury. However, the differences between the two groups turned out to be surprisingly small, since in the vast majority of the posts, brand marks were absent for both Nordic and Mediterranean brands. Such results indicate that contemporary fashion communication, regardless of the cultural context, increasingly favors the aesthetics of implicit branding, in which brand identity is built through atmosphere, style and visual identity, and not exclusively through the direct visibility of the logo.

5.5. Confirmation of Hypotheses and Integration of Results

The research results mostly confirm the set hypotheses. H1 is confirmed, since Nordic brands indeed use neutral palettes, simple compositions, greater social distance and minimalist presentation strategies more often. H2 is also confirmed, as Mediterranean brands show greater visual expressiveness through movement, color, narrative and emotional openness.

H3 was confirmed by the results of the sentiment analysis, which show a higher level of positive sentiment and compound score values for Mediterranean brands. Finally, H4 is largely confirmed, as there is consistency between visual expressiveness and textual emotional tone. Visually richer and more narrative posts of Mediterranean brands are accompanied by

more emotionally open captions, while minimalistic and controlled visual strategies of Nordic brands are matched with a more neutral and informative textual style.

The findings related to Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's communication styles indicate that fashion brand communication on Instagram functions both as a marketing tool and as a space for symbolically reproducing broader cultural patterns of emotional expression, identity construction and social relations. At the same time, the results show that these cultural patterns are not reproduced mechanically; rather, they are continuously adapted to the global aesthetics and communicative conventions of digital fashion culture.

6. Conclusion

This research aimed to examine how the culturally specific aesthetics of Nordic minimalism and Mediterranean expressiveness shape the digital communication of fashion brands on Instagram. Starting from the assumption that fashion on social networks functions not only as promotional content, but also as a space of cultural representation, the research analyzed the textual and visual strategies of selected Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands through a combination of sentiment and semiotic analysis, as well as an interpretation within the framework of intercultural communication. Using Hall's (1976) theory of communication styles, Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, Barthes' (1977) semiotics and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model of visual grammar, this thesis sought to show how broader cultural patterns of identity, emotionality and social relations are reproduced through digital fashion branding communication.

The results of the research show that there are consistent differences between Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands in the way of organizing visual meaning, emotional expression and constructing relations with the audience. These differences appear beyond the level of aesthetics; they are also manifested in the way brands use space, color, composition, perspective, models, textual descriptions and cultural references to shape a certain identity and atmosphere of communication. Nordic brands use more often reduced compositions, neutral color palettes, minimalist interiors, a limited number of elements in the frame and emotionally restrained models. Their communication is based on an aesthetic of simplicity, control and unobtrusive sophistication. Visual identity is not built through spectacle or narrative dramatization, but through atmosphere, proportions, textures and carefully controlled organization of space. Such communication leaves an impression of functionality, rationality and aesthetic discipline, which corresponds to the idea of Nordic minimalism and the modern concept of "quiet luxury". In contrast, Mediterranean brands more often use richer and more visually dynamic compositions, intense colors, decorative details, cultural symbols and narrative scenes related to everyday life, local identity and emotional experience. In their posts, fashion is not presented in isolation, but as part of a wider cultural atmosphere and lifestyle. The visual communication of Mediterranean brands includes more often motifs of architecture, history, religion, urban life and social interaction, which gives the products additional symbolic and cultural meanings.

The analysis of the textual descriptions of the posts further confirmed the existence of differences in emotional communication between the two cultural groups. Although both

Nordic and Mediterranean brands dominantly use a neutral-positive tone of communication, Mediterranean brands show a higher score of positive sentiment and higher compound score values in the VADER analysis. Their captions often contain emotionally colored terms associated with experience, energy, sensuality, beauty and enjoyment. In contrast, Nordic brands use more subtle and controlled positive expressions that emphasize quality, sophistication, timelessness and understated elegance. Such results show that the difference between the two groups of brands is not a difference between "emotional" and "non-emotional" communication, but a difference in the degree and manner of emotional expression. Mediterranean communication conveys emotions through openness, atmosphere and narrative, while Nordic emotionality functions through subtlety, peace and aesthetic discipline.

These results also confirm the relevance of Hall's theory of high-context and low-context communication in the analysis of contemporary digital communication of fashion brands. Nordic brands have shown a tendency towards communication that is visually reduced, clear and controlled, which corresponds to the low-context logic in which the meaning comes from the explicitness and simplicity of the form. Mediterranean brands, on the other hand, more often build meaning through context, symbolism, atmosphere and cultural references, which brings them closer to a relatively high-context communication style. However, research has also shown that Hall's division cannot be viewed as an absolute binary opposition. Mediterranean brands do not represent typical high-context cultures in the full sense, nor are Nordic brands completely devoid of symbolism and emotionality. The differences between the two groups of brands seem to be, in fact, differences in the degree of expressiveness, symbolic density and way of organizing meaning rather than complete opposites. Such findings confirm the arguments of authors such as Kittler et al. (2011), who point out the limitations of a rigid understanding of Hall's model.

A particularly important contribution of the research relates to the analysis of interpersonal and compositional meanings according to the model of Kress and van Leeuwen. The results show that cultural differences are manifested not only through what is shown, but also through the way the image is organized and how it establishes a relationship with the audience. Nordic posts use long shots in combination with static poses and compositions with a larger amount of empty space, giving a real impression of distance, introspection and emotional control. Although the direct gaze of the model is present in a large number of posts, the relationship with the audience remains restrained due to neutral facial expressions and a minimalist environment. Mediterranean posts, in contrast, create more often a sense of presence and emotional involvement through movement, spontaneous poses, scenes of everyday life and

the connection between the model and the environment. The audience is positioned as observers of a certain way of life and cultural atmosphere, and not only as observers of the product. Differences are also visible in the way of achieving visual salience. While Nordic brands attract attention through the reduction of elements and a clearly defined focus, Mediterranean brands more often use richness of color, decorativeness and narrative complexity to organize visual meaning.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions additionally enable a wider interpretation of the obtained results. The dimension of individualism and collectivism proves to be particularly relevant in the analysis of social relations and the representation of space. Nordic brands more often present models as autonomous figures separated from the wider social context, while Mediterranean brands more often include scenes of sociability, shared experience and connection with the environment. Such findings confirm Hofstede's assumption that individualistic cultures emphasize autonomy and personal identity, while cultures closer to collectivism more often construct identity through relationships and social connectedness. The dimension of masculinity vs. femininity is also clearly visible in the visual strategies of the analyzed brands. Nordic communication reflects the values associated with Hofstede's concept of "feminine" cultures – harmony, modesty, balance and quality of life. Mediterranean brands, in contrast, more often use the aesthetics of spectacle, luxury, decorativeness and symbolic visibility, which corresponds to the characteristics of cultures closer to "masculine" orientation.

When it comes to power distance, the results show a certain ambivalence. Both groups are dominated by eye-level shots, which suggests a relatively egalitarian relationship between the model and the audience. However, the Nordic brands show a slightly higher number of low-angle shots than the Mediterranean ones, which at first glance may seem contrary to Hofstede's assumptions about low power distance in Nordic societies. Nevertheless, the analysis showed that those shots do not function as a demonstration of dominance, but primarily as an aesthetic tool for emphasizing form, silhouette and composition. Mediterranean brands, on the other hand, more often build a sense of prestige and symbolic power through decorativeness, the central position of the model, luxurious details and the monumentality of the scene. The uncertainty avoidance dimension turned out to be particularly complex. Mediterranean brands simultaneously use stable cultural codes and elements of aesthetic experimentation, which indicates that contemporary digital fashion enables a negotiation between tradition and innovation. Nordic brands show greater visual consistency and less tendency towards sharp aesthetic contrasts, but such aesthetics can also be associated with the values of functionality and clarity, not exclusively with the avoidance of uncertainty.

One of the important contributions of this work is the methodological approach that combines quantitative sentiment analysis and qualitative semiotic analysis. Using Barthes' concept of denotation and connotation together with Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar enabled a detailed study of how visual elements produce cultural meanings. At the same time, VADER sentiment analysis provided an additional dimension to the research of the emotional tone of communication and enabled the comparison of textual patterns between two cultural groups. The research also shows that contemporary fashion branding communication functions as a space of cultural hybridization. Although the differences between Nordic and Mediterranean brands are clearly visible, both groups of brands simultaneously remain part of the global digital and fashion culture. Instagram as a platform imposes certain aesthetic and promotional conventions that affect all brands regardless of cultural context. Therefore, cultural differences do not appear as absolute opposites, but as dominant tendencies within the wider global visual language of fashion.

This research also has certain limitations. The analysis was focused exclusively on Instagram communication and a limited number of fashion brands, which is why it is not possible to generalize the results to the entire fashion industry or all cultural contexts. Also, the interpretation of visual meanings in semiotic analysis to a certain extent always includes a subjective element, despite a systematic methodological approach. In addition, culture itself is not a homogeneous or static category, which is why neither the Nordic nor the Mediterranean identity can be viewed as unique and unchanging models. Future research could include a larger number of brands, other social networks like TikTok, as well as comparisons with other cultural regions. It would also be useful to analyze audience reactions and the way users interpret the cultural codes present in fashion branding communication. Additional research could also focus on the role of influencers, video content or the algorithmic logic of social networks in shaping the cultural representation of fashion.

Taken as a whole, the research confirms that the digital communication of fashion brands represents much more than the aesthetic promotion of products. Instagram posts function as complex cultural texts through which social values, communication styles and ideas about identity, emotions and luxury are reproduced. Through the analysis of Nordic and Mediterranean fashion brands, it was shown that culture remains an important factor in shaping modern digital communication, even within globalized platforms and the international fashion industry.

References

- Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building Strong Brands*. New York: The Free Press.
- Adair, W. L. (2003). Integrative Sequences and Negotiation Outcome in Same- and Mixed-culture Negotiations. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 14 (3-4), 273-296.
- Ahmed, S. (2014). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
- Annous, R. M. (2023). *The Effects of Instagram as a Stimuli on the Purchasing Behavior of Generation Z and Millenials in Western Europe Fashion Industry*. Universidade NOVA De Lisboa (Portugal).
- Bárbara Castillo-Abdul, B., Pérez-Escoda, A., & Núñez-Barriopedro, E. (2022). Promoting Social Media Engagement Via Branded Content: A Fashion Brands Study on Instagram. *Media and Communication*, 185-197.
- Barinaga, E. (1999). Swedishness through lagom: Can words tell us anything about culture?
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Elements of Semiology*. New York: HILL and WANG.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image Music Text*. London: Fontana Press.
- Basak, R. (2021). Janteloven: Scandinavian Social Conformity, IKEA, Minimalism, and The Socialism of Design. *Arts Artuklu Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 159-185.
- Carpio-Jiménez, L., Suing, A., & Ordóñez, K. (2024). Visual Design in Brand Communication on Instagram. *Visual Review*, 1-14.
- Chowdhury, R. H. (2024). Sentiment analysis and social media analytics in brand management: Techniques, trends, and implications. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews* , 287-296.
- De Mooij, M. (2010). *Global Marketing and Advertising: Understanding Cultural Paradoxes* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- De Mooij, M. (2010). *Global Marketing and Advertising: Understanding Cultural Paradoxes, Third Edition*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- De Mooij, M. (2019). *Global Marketing and Advertising: Understanding Cultural Paradoxes*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Dibda, A., & Ahmad, H. A. (2025). The Role of Visual Imagery in Building Brand Image and Consumer Purchase Intention in the Era of Social Media: A Literature Review. *JURNAL EKONOMI KREATIF DAN MANAJEMEN BISNIS DIGITAL* 4, 70-81.
- Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behavior* 68, 1-7.
- Djursaa, M. (1994). North European business cultures: Britain vs. Denmark and Germany. *European Management Journal*, 12, 138-146.
- Dozier, J. B., Husted, B. W., & McMahon, J. T. (1998). Need for Approval in Low-Context and High-Context Cultures: A Communications Approach to Cross-Cultural Ethics. *Teaching Business Ethics*, 2, 111-125.
- Entwistle, J. (2015). *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. Polity Pr.
- Ergaver, A. (2015). *MEDITERRANEAN VALUES: The Honour and the Shame of Hospitality*. Ljubljana: Hrčak.
- Fletcher, K. (2014). *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys*. Routledge.
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Press/Double day.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations across Nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2, 8-16.
- Holt, D. B. (2004). *HOW BRANDS BECOME ICONS: The Principles of Cultural Branding*. New York: Harvard Business School Press.
- Hutto, C. J., & Gilbert, E. (2014). VADER: A Parsimonious Rule-based Model for Sentiment Analysis of Social Media Text. *Proceedings of the Eight International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* (pp. 216-225). Michigan: University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Jensen, R. H., Strengers, Y., Raptis, D., Nicholls, L., Kjeldskov, J., & Skov, M. B. (2018). Exploring Hygge as a Desirable Design Vision for the Sustainable Smart Home.

- Proceedings of the 2018 Designing Interactive Systems Conference (DIS '18)* (pp. 355-360). New York: Association for Computing Machinery.
- Jeong, H. J., Chung, D. S., & Kim, J. (2022). Brands Are Human on Social Media: The Effectiveness of Human Tone-of-Voice on Consumer Engagement and Purchase Intentions Through Social Presence. *International Journal of Communication* 16, 4231-4253.
- Kapferer, J.-N., & Bastien, V. (2012). *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*. Kogan Page.
- Kittler, M. G., Rygl, D., & Mackinnon, A. (2011). Special Review Article: Beyond culture or beyond control? Reviewing the use of Hall's high-/low-context concept. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 11(1), 63-82.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Liu, B. (2012). *Sentiment Analysis and Opinion Mining. Synthesis Lectures on Human Language Technologies*. . Morgan & Claypool Publishers.
- Maïos, T. (2017, September 21). *KEΦI: a Greek word that can't be translated*. Retrieved from Neos Kosmos: The Hellenic Perspective since 1957: <https://neoskosmos.com/en/2017/09/21/features/Kefi-a-greek-word-that-cant-be-translated/>
- Manovich, L. (2017). *Instagram and Contemporary Image*.
- Mendes, A. (2015). Living la dolce vita: the impact of Italian culture on ideals of beauty. *MA Journal of Aesthetic Nursing*, 344-345.
- Mohammad, S. M. (2021). Sentiment analysis: Automatically Detecting Valence, Emotions, and Other Affectual States from Text. In *Emotion Measurement* (pp. 323-379).
- Murray, S. (2000). Dull tomes replaced by designer message. *Financial Times*, 5.
- Norman, D. A. (2004). *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things*. Basic Books.
- Okazaki, S., & Taylor, C. (2013). Social media and international advertising: Theoretical challenges and future directions. *International Marketing Review*. 30., 56-71.

- Pang, B., & Lee, L. (2008). Opinion Mining and Sentiment Analysis. Foundations and Trends in Information Retrieval . *NOW* , 1-135.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Sage Publications.
- Peña-Acuña, B. (2025). New Visual Narratives and Storytelling on X and Instagram: A Systematic Review. *VISUAL Review*, 17 (4), 215-228.
- Poon, S. T. (2023). Logomania in Counterfeit Luxury Brands Consumption: The Social Adjustive Function in Shifting Consumer Perceptions and Behaviours. In C. F. Silva, *Origin and Branding in International Market Entry Processes*.
- Rondon, A. (2025, September 1). *Elegant Woman in Red Sequin Evening Dress*. Retrieved from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/elegant-woman-in-red-sequin-evening-dress-33722922/>
- Rosdiana, A., & Indrawati, I. (2025). The Impact of Social Media Marketing Elements on Consumer Brand Engagement, Brand Awareness, and Brand Image. *JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING GENERAL FINANCE AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ISSUES* 4(1), 199-209.
- Rosenbloom, B., & Larsen, T. (2003). Communication in international business-to-business marketing channels: Does culture matter? *Industrial Marketing Management*, Volume 32, Issue 4, 309-315.
- Rousi, R. (2023). The Scandinavian Style: Nordic values in HCI. *arXiv.org*.
- Schroeder, J. (1998). Consuming Representation: A Visual Approach to Consumer Research. In B. Stern, *Representing Consumers: Voices, Views and Visions* (pp. 193-230). New York: Routledge.
- Schroeder, J. (2002). *Visual Consumption*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Schroeder, J. (2008). Visual Analysis in Brand Culture. *Go Figure: New Direction in Advertising Rhetoric*, 277-296.
- Segre Reinach, S. (2011). *Un Mondo Di Mode*. LATERZA & FIGLI S.P.A.
- Segre Reinach, S. (2015). The meaning of ‘Made in Italy’ in fashion. *Craft+Design Enquiry*, Issue 7, 135-150.
- Shao, A. T., & Hill, J. S. (1994). Global Television Advertising Restrictions: The Case of Socially Sensitive Products. *International Journal of Advertising*, 13, 347-366.

- Sijbers, W. R., & Ershov, M. (2025). *Cold, Calm, and Cashmere: Exploring Motivations For Quiet Luxury Fashion Consumption In Scandinavia*. Jönköping: Jönköping University.
- Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V. (2016). New Nordic and Scandinavian Retro: Reassessment of values and aesthetics in contemporary Nordic design. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 8 (1).
- Tamara, D., Heriyati, L., Hanifa, T., & Carmen, M. (2021). The effect of Instagram influencers on purchase intentions mediated by brand image on cosmetic products (study on Gen Z women). *Open Access Indonesia Journal of Social Sciences*, 570-580.
- Tenca, E. (2022). Creating Brand Personality and Engaging Users in Instagram for Marketing Purposes: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis. *Iperstoria*, 422-450.
- Trocchianesi, R. (2019). Visual Grammar of the Mediterranean Landscape: Chromatic, Iconic and Object Identities. *PAD*, 133-159.
- Usunier, J.-C., & Lee, J. A. (2013). *Marketing Across Cultures*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Valenzuela, P. (2026). The joy of living: emotion, meaning, and agency. *Reuniones Filosóficas 2026: "De la filosofía trascendental a la rehabilitación de la filosofía práctica. Las sendas de la filosofía según Alejandro Llano"*.
- Yoo, J., & Lee, Y. (2019). National Culture and Tax Avoidance of Multinational Corporations. *Sustainability*, 1-28.
- Zanola, E., Stachel, C., & Greco, S. (2025). Leveraging Heritage Argumentation Strategies in Luxury Fashion Brands' Storytelling. In P. Von Wachenfeldt, L. Cantoni, N. Sabatini, & T. Sádaba, *Fashion Communication in the Digital Age* (pp. 64-78). Springer.
- Żemojtel-Piotrowska, M., & Piotrowski, J. (2023). *Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory*.
- Zhang, X., Ji, X., Cao, P., & Xiao, Q. (2026). Storytelling through images: understanding the persuasive effectiveness of social media influencers' visual narratives. *Journal of Business Research* 207.

Appendices

Appendix A – Sentiment Analysis Coding Sheet for Nordic Brands

Appendix A1 – Sentiment analysis of Toteme posts (To1-To12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Date	Caption (cleaned)	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Compound	Sentiment
To1	Toteme	Sweden	18.1.2023	Introducing TOTEME, the loyalty service housed in the TOTEME app. As a member you can access exclusive features and a portfolio of off-menu services. Get the app-link in bio.	0.00	0.83	0.17	0.61	Positive
To2	Toteme	Sweden	12.4.2023	The Aviators: light frames in tortoise acetate and gold-tone metal with tinted brown lenses.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
To3	Toteme	Sweden	4.7.2023	One shoulder neckline	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
To4	Toteme	Sweden	10.11.2023	TOTEME Pre Spring 24 Now available in stores and online.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
To5	Toteme	Sweden	24.1.2024	TOTEME Fall Winter, unveiled at Salle des Tirages, Paris, on January. Defined by line, cut and shape, Fall Winter builds on the house's established codes, with an emphasis on trans-seasonal pieces that complement, rather than reinvent, the wardrobe. The collection instills confidence, communicating a self-assured femininity filled with purpose and power.	0.04	0.89	0.06	0.29	Positive
To6	Toteme	Sweden	3.4.2024	The Navigators	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
To7	Toteme	Sweden	15.7.2024	The residency houses a curation of pieces that come to life on the island, catering to the TOTEME travel persona and her summertime escapes to a simpler existence. The TOTEME summer residency on Filicudi is now open.	0.00	0.96	0.04	0.13	Positive
To8	Toteme	Sweden	11.10.2024	Wedge-Heel Slingbacks	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
To9	Toteme	Sweden	16.1.2025	Garderob - wardrobe in Swedish - is a curation of pieces with a permanent place in the TOTEME wardrobe that are worn everyday and over time. Now available in stores and at toteme.com.	0.07	0.93	0.00	-0.29	Negative
To10	Toteme	Sweden	15.4.2025	Crisp summer trench. Classic croco-embossed slingbacks. Garderob - wardrobe in Swedish - is a curation of pieces with a permanent place in the TOTEME wardrobe that are worn everyday and over time.	0.08	0.93	0.00	-0.29	Negative
To11	Toteme	Sweden	7.7.2025	Mini T-Lock Clutch	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
To12	Toteme	Sweden	3.10.2025	Satin knee-high boots	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral

Appendix A2 – Sentiment analysis of Filippa K posts (Fi1-Fi12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Date	Caption (cleaned)	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Compound	Sentiment
Fi1	Filippa K	Sweden	3.1.2023	The ultimate accessory for the new year Discover the Large Shoulder Bag on filippa-k.com	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Fi2	Filippa K	Sweden	11.5.2023	The Filippa K Core Collection is a permanent range designed with the essential elements of a staple wardrobe in mind - quality materials, versatile use, timeless style and effortless fit. Available in store and at filippa-k.com	0.00	0.93	0.08	0.36	Positive
Fi3	Filippa K	Sweden	11.7.2023	Explore the Filippa K x Swedish Hasbeens unisex clogs	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Fi4	Filippa K	Sweden	3.10.2023	Discover the Small Shoulder Bag from Filippa K, designed with the essential elements of a staple wardrobe in mind. Available in store and at filippa-k.com.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Fi5	Filippa K	Sweden	8.1.2024	THE FILIPPA K Core Collection is a permanent range designed with the essential elements of a staple wardrobe in mind - quality materials, versatile use, timeless style and effortless fit. Available in store and at filippa-k.com	0.00	0.93	0.08	0.36	Positive
Fi6	Filippa K	Sweden	2.4.2024	wears the FILIPPA K Wool Cashmere Jacket and Wide Wool Trousers. Discover Timeless styles from FILIPPA K that effortlessly mix and match with the wardrobe you already own. Available to shop in store and at filippa-k.com.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Fi7	Filippa K	Sweden	9.7.2024	Fresh outerwear silhouettes from Spring/Summer: the cropped bomber, A-line jacket, and relaxed trench	0.00	0.68	0.33	0.67	Positive
Fi8	Filippa K	Sweden	1.10.2024	Essentials from our AW collection: poplin shirting tucked into tailoring, and a ribbed scarf over a double-faced wool peacoat.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Fi9	Filippa K	Sweden	2.1.2025	Get ready to go back to work with knitwear, soft suede and refined tailoring from FILIPPA K. Available to shop in store and at filippa-k.com.	0.00	0.91	0.09	0.36	Positive
Fi10	Filippa K	Sweden	3.4.2025	Spring has finally arrived. Discover the SS collection in store and at filippa-k.com.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Fi11	Filippa K	Sweden	10.7.2025	Summer vibes with. Here, he wears the Mesh Polo and the Loose Cotton Oxford Shirt. Available to shop in store and at filippa-k.com.	0.10	0.91	0.00	-0.31	Negative
Fi12	Filippa K	Sweden	6.10.2025	The Leather Cut Out Tote Bag from our Autumn/Winter Pre Collection. Available to shop in store and at filippa-k.com.	0.10	0.90	0.00	-0.27	Negative

Appendix A3 – Sentiment analysis of By Malene Birger posts (By1-By12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Date	Caption (cleaned)	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Compound	Sentiment
By1	By Malene Birger	Denmark	19.1.2023	Pre-spring	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
By2	By Malene Birger	Denmark	5.4.2023	Spring Malgosia Bela as seen by Suzanne Koller.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
By3	By Malene Birger	Denmark	2.7.2023	Sheen cotton-blend top with adjustable straps and open back paired with midi skirt and soft leather tote. bymalenebirger.com	0.00	0.90	0.10	0.20	Positive
By4	By Malene Birger	Denmark	7.11.2023	LOOK Venture down a quiet cul-de-sac in Paris's leafy arrondissement and you'll come across a building that changed architecture forever. Maison La Roche is an unconventional dwelling - half art gallery, half family home - but this 1925 exemplar of Purist design, with its spare interiors and open floor plan, helped to establish the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier as the Master of Modernism. This season, Maison La Roche plays host to our Pre-Spring collection. The crisp confines of the building are the perfect foil to the collection's rich minimalism, captured by. As for the key looks? Allow to present the Adrienna jacket and Isolda skirt, a ladylike pairing in sophisticated black twill. Available now in stores and on bymalenebirger.com . With thanks to	0.00	0.82	0.18	0.98	Positive
By5	By Malene Birger	Denmark	22.1.2024	COMING SOON: SPRING COLLECTION New season dropping in stores and on bymalenebirger.com by January 30.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
By6	By Malene Birger	Denmark	2.4.2024	POSTCARDS FROM HYDRA Missed the ferry to Hydra? As part of a series of collaborations with local talents and producers to celebrate the Greek island that plays host to our SS campaign, we've created a unique edit of made-in-Hydra products available to purchase in our stores. Today we highlight Four Corners, the much-loved local supermarket occupying a lofty spot in between Hydra Port and Kamini, whose signature beeswax candles are in our stores this spring. Handmade by Maria, pairs of candles have been tied with our signature ribbons. Visit our stores to purchase the limited-edition candles.	0.02	0.85	0.13	0.87	Positive
By7	By Malene Birger	Denmark	1.7.2024	EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS Looking to re-energise your summer look? Consider the accessories edit, from straw hats to sleek sunglasses and the Jummis leather cuff. The Strawie hat, the Myla sunglasses, the Jummis leather cuff, available now in stores and on bymalenebirger.com .	0.00	0.93	0.07	0.46	Positive
By8	By Malene Birger	Denmark	1.10.2024	SPRING SUMMER COLLECTION PREVIEW IN COLLABORATION WITH CONIE VALLESE On September we previewed and celebrated our Spring Summer collection with an intimate aperitivo, cohosted by artist Alongside Vallese, Creative Director welcomed guests to our Parisian on Place des Vosges. Our showroom was decorated with vintage finds, expressive artworks by Vallese made in bronze, as well as six Murano glass vases inspired by the seasonal collection palette, designed exclusively for BY MALENE BIRGER by the artist. As a brand muse and frequent collaborator, Vallese was photographed for the Spring Summer campaign, on location in the historic villa Torre di Bellosguardo; a magical property minutes outside of Florence, Italy. The idea of the artist's villa serves as inspiration for the new collection and was reflected in every thoughtful detail for the aperitivo; from the setting to the interiors, and the food, curated by friend of the house, inspired by Valleses artistic world and the seasonal collection. Thank you to all for joining us this very special evening and an extra special thank you to our friends	0.00	0.80	0.21	0.99	Positive
By9	By Malene Birger	Denmark	2.1.2025	THE AFTERMATH As the holiday season draws to a close, it becomes the perfect moment to, sit back, kick off your shoes and shift focus: from the joy of giving to others, to the art of selfcare. Discover perfect post-holiday gifts in stores and on bymalenebirger.com	0.00	0.71	0.29	0.95	Positive
By10	By Malene Birger	Denmark	9.4.2025	THE SEASON BLOOMS Drawing inspiration from the poised, meticulously manicured, and formal lines of classical French and English gardens, the Pre-Fall collection unfolds at first, with bold symmetrical lines - softened by the bounce of more airy materials. Pops of reddened dotted throughout the collection mimics the brightness of the first buds of spring, gently peaking out after a long winter season. Discover the first look of Pre-Fall on bymalenebirger.com	0.00	0.82	0.18	0.91	Positive
By11	By Malene Birger	Denmark	1.7.2025	POLISHED EASE Warm-weather dressing calls for light, breathable fabrics that keep their ease from morning to evening. Relaxed tailoring and thoughtful layers strike the right balance between polish and comfort. Subtle structure, sleeveless silhouettes and airy separates make practicality feel effortless. Available in stores and on bymalenebirger.com	0.27	0.73	0.25	0.91	Positive
By12	By Malene Birger	Denmark	1.10.2025	HER SIGNATURE - EDITION Starting her career in fashion at just went on to launch her own label before turning her creative energy towards ceramics. Now, she is preparing to unveil her next project. Discover Anouk's journey into ceramics and what creative production means to her. Read the full dialogue on bymalenebirger.com	0.00	0.86	0.14	0.78	Positive

Appendix B – Sentiment Analysis Coding Sheet for Mediterranean Brands

Appendix B1 – Sentiment analysis of Dolce & Gabbana posts (Do1-Do12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Date	Caption (cleaned)	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Compound	Sentiment
Do1	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	1.1.2023	The essence of sartorial Italian tradition. Captured by in front of typical Italian cafés and portraying a refined aesthetic vision of classic and modern together. Discover the Men's Collection at the link in bio.	0.00	0.94	0.06	0.25	Positive
Do2	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	2.4.2023	Optimism, joy and freedom. is the face of the new campaign. Discover the new floral fragrance at the link in bio and on.	0.00	0.64	0.37	0.91	Positive
Do3	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	9.7.2023	In every facet, the creations exude Italian artisanal expertise and wisdom of authentic. These pieces echo the rich history and mesmerizing beauty of Puglia, becoming an eternal homage to the region's captivating charm. Necklace and bracelet in yellow, pink and white gold Rubellite with multicoloured tourmalines, precious sapphires and amethysts. Necklace in yellow, pink and white gold with Rubellite tourmalines. Earrings in yellow gold with kunzites, emeralds and Rubellite shaped like flowers.	0.00	0.75	0.26	0.97	Positive
Do4	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	2.10.2023	DEVOTION Uncover the tantalizing delectable notes of the new bright gourmand fragrance by. Discover more at the link in bio.	0.00	0.62	0.38	0.89	Positive
Do5	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	1.1.2024	presents the new Women's Collection, starring, shot by.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Do6	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	1.4.2024	The new Collection, shot by.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Do7	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	9.7.2024	The new collection captured by amidst the ancient ruins of the archeological park of Nora and through Nora Mirage, an installation by renowned artist. wears a poplin shirt with linen collar and cuffs, delicately embroidered and adorned with crochet details, finished with sparkling filigree buttons. The organza skirt is embellished with intricate double organza feathers, tied with a corset intricately designed in filigree and shimmering crystals. A pleated chiffon corset dress embellished with jewelled cups in filigree with crystals, accompanied by a chiffon veil. An organza dress with pleated details, adorned with appliqué double organza and cotton batiste trimming featuring cutwork embroidery.	0.03	0.88	0.09	0.54	Positive
Do8	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	1.10.2024	At the intersection of art and function lies. and turn the act of highlighting into a gesture of quiet creativity. Wrapped in 4 iconic patterns, and, the exclusive limited-edition box set of reimagines the ordinary. Officially available online at dolcegabbana.com and select retailers from October.	0.06	0.85	0.09	0.08	Positive
Do9	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	1.1.2025	for shot by	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Do10	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	2.4.2025	vision has always aimed towards blending fashion and cinema, with this new ambassadorship begins a highly anticipated creative path.	0.00	0.76	0.25	0.63	Positive
Do11	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	14.7.2025	The Alta Gioielleria creations pay tribute to the Eternal City. Two parures become treasure chests of gold and precious gems, guarding pendants that portray symbols of antiquity as miniature masterpieces. In the first, finely painted details and micro mosaics, hallmarks of, shine alongside ancient coins. In the second, classical figures, heroes, and deities are sculpted by hand from marble powder, evoking carved stone through a refined artisanal technique. These exceptional creations are evidence of poetry, history, and sublime beauty. Discover the Creations at the link in bio.	0.01	0.72	0.26	0.98	Positive
Do12	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	3.10.2025	The new Campaign shot by	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral

Appendix B2 – Sentiment analysis of Desigual posts (De1-De12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Date	Caption (cleaned)	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Compound	Sentiment
De1	Desigual	Spain	2.1.2023	Metallic texture & neon colours. Kicking off with a bang.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
De2	Desigual	Spain	3.4.2023	in a baby pink total look by, a snow wash-effect denim combo made from sustainable fibres, a non-negotiable for both the designer and Desigual.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
De3	Desigual	Spain	4.7.2023	& style the trendiest pieces. Bold & electric styles, only for the fashion-forward.	0.00	0.79	0.21	0.38	Positive
De4	Desigual	Spain	2.10.2023	wore our New FW Collection - EXTRAORDINARY during Paris Fashion Week last weekend. Check out the complete collection at desigual.com and in stores worldwide.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
De5	Desigual	Spain	10.1.2024	Have you checked your mail? Our newest collection 'Back to routine' is coming out tomorrow. Can't wait to see you around the office	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
De6	Desigual	Spain	1.4.2024	I never thought I'd wear Desigual, but it sure feels good to do it. Find our newest collection now at desigual.com.	0.00	0.73	0.27	0.78	Positive
De7	Desigual	Spain	1.7.2024	Let us introduce you to our latest star-studded collection, now available at desigual.com.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
De8	Desigual	Spain	2.10.2024	DESIGUAL <3's PARIS. We had the chance to celebrate our latest collab with Alphonse Maitrepierre during PFW along the Parisian Desigual community, and here's how it went! Only a few weeks till the official drop, which piece are you most excited for?	0.04	0.77	0.18	0.76	Positive
De9	Desigual	Spain	7.1.2025	In our family, we love fun prints.	0.00	0.40	0.60	0.82	Positive
De10	Desigual	Spain	2.4.2025	It's all in the details and how you wear them 🍷	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
De11	Desigual	Spain	2.7.2025	Take a peek inside our creative team's bags and minds 🍷 Today Mar Sánchez Sierra - product designer.	0.00	0.83	0.17	0.44	Positive
De12	Desigual	Spain	2.10.2025	Introducing and The Joy Bag. To wear joy is to love out loud. To carry joy is to resist conformity. A bag is a statement. This one, literally.	0.00	0.59	0.42	0.95	Positive

Appendix B3 – Sentiment analysis of Zeus+Dione posts (Ze1-Ze12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Date	Caption (cleaned)	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Compound	Sentiment
Ze1	Zeus+Dione	Greece	3.1.2023	Harpe dress has beautifully draped detailing and gives it the illusion of a slightly-loose top with a flattering square neckline worn with a tonal skirt. It is made from the signature 'spathoto' textured silk in a fiery scarlet red shade, that elegantly drapes across your frame. Its split, asymmetric hem reveals the perfect amount of leg.	0.07	0.70	0.23	0.87	Positive
Ze2	Zeus+Dione	Greece	4.4.2023	Thalassini (from the greek term for sea) is meticulously hand-braided from natural raffia and is accented with an embossed leather panel featuring an antefix.	0.00	0.90	0.10	0.36	Positive
Ze3	Zeus+Dione	Greece	1.7.2023	Step into the pulsating realm of ZEUS+DIONE's Collections, where past and present intertwine and the soul-stirring legacy of Greek artisans, merge with the zeitgeist of the modern world. Small Trades, ZEUS+DIONE Resort	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Ze4	Zeus+Dione	Greece	1.10.2024	For the Fall Winter season of, Zeus+Dione retraces the riveting persona of Maria Callas, in an ultra-modern vein.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Ze5	Zeus+Dione	Greece	3.1.2024	The magenta hue of this 'Akoni' dress is not just a visual delight but also a marvel of perception. Nestled on the colour wheel where the ends of the spectrum—red and purple—meet, magenta is a testament to the wonders of human vision. Intriguingly unlike other colours which have their distinct wavelengths on the light spectrum, magenta doesn't; it isn't truly situated between purple and red, as those colours transition through yellow, green, blue, and orange. Instead, magenta comes into existence through our brain's interpretation, filling the gap in a way that creates a coherent visual experience.	0.02	0.86	0.12	0.85	Positive
Ze6	Zeus+Dione	Greece	2.4.2024	Whether used in sharp tailoring or woven in silky spathoto, the spectrum of blue shades remains a key colour in every ZEUS+DIONE collection, season after season.	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Ze7	Zeus+Dione	Greece	11.7.2024	In mythology, anemones sprang from where Aphrodite wept over Adonis, who lay dying from a boar wound. In Shakespeare's poem, Venus, heartbroken, cursed love to be entwined with sorrow and deceit: That all love's pleasure shall not match [its] woe. Adonis' body "melted like a vapour," leaving blood-red flowers. Variations of the myth say anemones turned red from his blood.	0.18	0.65	0.17	-0.24	Negative
Ze8	Zeus+Dione	Greece	1.10.2024	Each material, every thread, and each element in the A/W collection weaves a narrative that transcends moments and memories. 'Chronos' Autumn Winter Collection	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Ze9	Zeus+Dione	Greece	9.1.2025	The 'Maria' dress flows with the subtle linear texture of Tempo spathoto silk. Its sage green hue fades from darker to lighter tones, a refined degrade effect that reflects the delicate movement of light. 'Acanthus Mollis' Resort Collection by	0.07	0.90	0.03	-0.40	Negative
Ze10	Zeus+Dione	Greece	1.4.2025	Golden glints beneath the sun. A gold 'spathoto' motif traces the one-shoulder strap of this 'Attis' one-piece in black, adding a touch of finesse. 'Acanthus Mollis' Resort Collection by	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	Neutral
Ze11	Zeus+Dione	Greece	1.7.2025	Two dolphins meet mid-leap, frozen in gold, circling the wrist like a memory of the sea.	0.00	0.85	0.15	0.36	Positive
Ze12	Zeus+Dione	Greece	4.10.2025	Blue runs as a constant thread in Zeus+Dione, recurring in signature pieces across every collection. Born of sea and sky, it evokes vastness and serenity, mythologically recalling Poseidon's depths and Zeus's celestial calm. 'Chimera' Autumn/Winter collection by Zeus+Dione	0.00	0.94	0.06	0.32	Positive

Appendix C – Semiotic Analysis Coding Sheet for Nordic Brands

Appendix C1 – Semiotic analysis of Toteme posts (To1-To6)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Salance
To1	Toteme	Sweden	The image shows a model's face photographed against a neutral background. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Balanced colors and the absence of heavy makeup can be connoted to simplicity and quiet luxury. The model's face suggests intimacy.	Individual	Absent	Balanced	Medium	Warm	Close-up	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
To2	Toteme	Sweden	The image shows a model wearing sunglasses. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Balanced colors and the absence of heavy makeup can be connoted to simplicity and quiet luxury. The model's face suggests confidence, suggests exclusivity and urban fashion style.	Individual	Absent	Balanced	Medium	Warm	Close-up	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
To3	Toteme	Sweden	The image shows a model's body from the shoulders to the thighs, with her arms behind her back and leaning against a wall, wearing a black dress, photographed against a white background. The model shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Neutral colors and a monochrome outfit might connote visual restraint and quiet luxury. The model's relaxed pose suggests comfort, spontaneity and confidence. The absence of heavy makeup suggests emotional restraint and detachment. The color black might imply power and elegance, while the one-shoulder design suggests controlled sensuality.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
To4	Toteme	Sweden	A model wearing a long, dark ovenized grey coat, black pointed boots and a black leather purse is photographed on a white background. The model wears little or no makeup and a pair of earrings.	Neutral colors of the outfit and the absence of heavy makeup might connote a minimalist aesthetic, functionality and quiet luxury. The coat suggests comfort and urban style, while black leather purse and boots suggest power, elegance and quality.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Cold	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
To5	Toteme	Sweden	A model walks the runway wearing an all-black outfit (a black hurlenck, a black coat, black pointed boots, black gloves and a black purse), surrounded by a white crowd of other people in the background. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	The black, monochrome outfit could connote simplicity, quiet luxury and aesthetic reduction. The model's walk suggests confidence and spontaneity, while the color black might signify power, authority and elegance.	Group	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered

Appendix C2 – Semiotic analysis of Toteme posts (To7-To12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Saliency
To7	Toteme	Sweden	The image shows a Mediterranean-style room with white walls, blue-tiled floor and a small window, containing a chair, a black-and-white bathing suit hung on the wall and neutrally colored scarves tied to a black rod object with hanging tassels and a bathing suit displays the brand's signature pattern, functioning as discreet brand mark.	Neutral colors and a limited number of objects in the room connote minimalism and simplicity. The room suggests warmth, intimacy and Mediterranean cultural identity, evoking associations of vacation and displaying a narrative of connection between the brand and its lifestyle. The discreet brand mark on the bathing suit suggests quiet luxury.	Not applicable	Subtle	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Disconnection	Ambience-centered
To8	Toteme	Sweden	The image shows black pointed shoes photographed on a white background. The product shows a discreet brand mark.	Black shoes on a white background and a discreet brand mark might connote quiet luxury and visual restraint. The color black and pointy design of the shoes could suggest power.	Not applicable	Subtle	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Disconnection	Product-centered
To9	Toteme	Sweden	The post consists of four independent Polaroid images - one showing a modern, neutral-colored hallway, the second showing a model's back from shoulders to ankles, dressed in a white leather skirt, the third image depicting a winter landscape, and the fourth showing a tailoring mannequin against a black background.	Fragmented visual storytelling combines neutral colors and a vintage aesthetic to convey minimalism and contrast between fashion and environment. The winter landscape evokes the Scandinavian nature. The absence of the model's face suggests emotional restraint and detachment.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Medium shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Disconnection	Ambience-centered
To10	Toteme	Sweden	The post consists of four independent Polaroid images - the first one showing a model looking at a distance, the second one containing an image of flowers, the third showing a white cloth and a tailoring mannequin in the distance and the last one showing a posed female leg in black, pointed shoes.	Fragmented visual storytelling combines neutral colors and a vintage aesthetic to convey minimalism and connect fashion and nature elements. The model's look at a distance might suggest spontaneity and emotional restraint. Black pointy shoes might connote power, authority and elegance.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Medium shot	Eye-level	Offer	Disconnection	Ambience-centered
To11	Toteme	Sweden	The image shows two beige, one in black with a golden T-shaped buckle as a brand mark, and another in metal buckles. Both are in beige with a silver T-shaped buckle, photographed against a white background.	Neutral colors and simple design may connote a minimalist aesthetic, while metal buckles and brand logos could convey meanings of luxury, exclusivity and quality.	Not applicable	Visible	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
To12	Toteme	Sweden	A long, white satin boot is photographed against a grey, concrete background.	The simple design and neutral colors connote minimalism and functionality. Satin is associated with elegance and sophistication.	Not applicable	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered

Appendix C3 – Semiotic analysis of Filippa K posts (Fi1-Fi6)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Saliency
Fi1	Filippa K	Sweden	A model leans on a piece of white fur furniture holding a bag, black leather shoes are placed against a white background. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	The absence of heavy jewelry, alongside neutral colors, might connote comfort, quiet luxury and simplicity. The model, by revealing her arms and hand, suggests sensuality and femininity. Materials like fur and leather are associated with quality and longevity.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Fi2	Filippa K	Sweden	A model wearing a white T-shirt sits at a glass table, with her legs crossed around her neck, photographed against a neutral background. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Neutral colors, a plain white T-shirt and the absence of heavy makeup connote comfort and simplicity. The model, by revealing her arms and torso, suggests sensuality and femininity. The model's bare shoulders and the way she looks to the side with a neutral facial expression, photographed against a sea-like background, might imply calmness and a reference to nature. The model's relaxed pose and sideways gaze suggests emotional restraint and spontaneity.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Cold	Medium shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Fi3	Filippa K	Sweden	A model shows her bare shoulders and looks to the side with a neutral facial expression, photographed against a sea-like background. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	The model's bare shoulders suggest sensuality and femininity. The sea-like background might imply calmness and a reference to nature. The model's relaxed pose and sideways gaze suggests emotional restraint and spontaneity.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Close-up	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered
Fi4	Filippa K	Sweden	A black bag is photographed against a neutral background, placed on a black swivel chair.	The simple design of the bag emphasized a minimalist aesthetic and visual reduction. The use of a swivel chair suggests functionality and contemporary.	Not applicable	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Cold	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
Fi5	Filippa K	Sweden	A model dressed in an all-black outfit, with snakeskin shoes sits on a chair, taking a relaxed pose with one leg raised on the chair and his elbow resting on his knee. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Neutral colors, a monochrome outfit and the absence of heavy makeup and conspicuous jewelry connote simplicity, quiet luxury and femininity. The model's relaxed pose suggests comfort, confidence and spontaneity. The color black suggests power, and the snakeskin shoes might be associated with nature and luxury.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Cold	Medium shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Fi6	Filippa K	Sweden	A model in gray pants and a slightly oversized brown jacket, with hands in pockets, is photographed against a white background while sitting on a chair. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Neutral colors emphasize simplicity and aesthetic reduction. The relaxed pose and slightly oversized outfit suggest comfort and functionality. The model's sideways gaze suggests emotional restraint and spontaneity.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Medium shot	Low	Offer	Connection	Product-centered

Appendix C4 – Semiotic analysis of Filippa K posts (Fi7-Fi12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Salience
Fi7	Filippa K	Sweden	The model's profile is photographed against a neutral background, as she wears a brown bomber jacket, with her hands in her pockets. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Neutral colors, the absence of heavy makeup and conspicuous jewelry connotes minimalism, simplicity and functionality. The bomber jacket suggests comfort and the brown color focuses on the model's profile, suggesting emotional restraint and detachment.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Product-centered
Fi8	Filippa K	Sweden	The model is shown in a black-and-white image wearing a light-colored oversized shirt, a bowtie, and pants with a large belt, walking with her gaze downward, displayed against a blurry background. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry. The brand's logo in white letters is placed at the centre of the image.	The black-and-white image suggests timelessness, cinematic storytelling and aesthetic reduction. Oversized outfit and the model's relaxed posture suggest comfort and spontaneity. The beanie and the bag may be associated with urban style. The model's downward look might imply emotional restraint and spontaneity. The brand's logo in the image could be associated with strong brand identity and brand recognizability.	Individual	Visible	Neutral	Low	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered
Fi9	Filippa K	Sweden	A model dressed in a dark jumper and blue jeans is in a relaxed pose with one leg raised and his elbow resting on his knee, photographed against a beige background. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	The simple styling and the absence of conspicuous jewelry connote simplicity, quiet luxury and functionality. The model's relaxed pose suggests comfort and spontaneity.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Medium shot	Low	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Fi10	Filippa K	Sweden	The model is photographed in a street setting, leaning against a beige building, dressed in an all-white denim outfit. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	The monochrome outfit and neutral colors might connote minimalist aesthetic and visual restraint. The model's relaxed pose suggests comfort and confidence. The street setting and denim outfit could be associated with urban style.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Fi11	Filippa K	Sweden	The model is shown in a black-and-white image wearing a light polo T-shirt, photographed against a neutral background. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry. The brand's logo in white letters is placed at the centre of the image.	The black-and-white image emphasizes timelessness, cinematic storytelling and aesthetic reduction. The brand's logo in the image could be associated with strong brand identity and brand recognizability.	Individual	Visible	Neutral	Low	Balanced	Close-up	Low	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Fi12	Filippa K	Sweden	A black leather bag is photographed against a neutral background, placed on a metal surface. The brand's logo in white letters is placed at the centre of the image.	Neutral colors and the design of the bag connote a minimalist aesthetic and quiet luxury. Leather is associated with quality and longevity. The use of a metal surface suggests a contemporary brand identity and strong brand recognizability.	Not applicable	Visible	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered

Appendix C5 – Semiotic analysis of By Malene Birger posts (By1-By6)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Salience
By1	By Malene Birger	Denmark	A model wears a beige trench coat, puffy black leather shoes and a black bag with a massive golden metal detail of unclear shape. The model is photographed from the waist up, against a white background. The model wears a discreet pearl necklace.	The neutral color of the coat suggests simplicity and a minimalist aesthetic. The absence of the model's face suggests a sense of emotional restraint and detachment. Puffy black shoes on legs apart might imply quality, confidence and authority. The model's pose with legs apart against a neutral background could be associated with nature. The pearl necklace suggests femininity and understated elegance.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Low	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
By2	By Malene Birger	Denmark	A model sits leaning back on a beige trench coat with a huge belt and a discreet golden necklace. The model is photographed against a white background. The model wears little or no makeup.	Neutral colors and the absence of her makeup connote minimalism, simplicity and quiet luxury. The model's relaxed pose suggests comfort. The model's pose with a huge belt and a discreet golden necklace suggests confidence, while the golden necklace on her neck suggests luxury and understated elegance. The huge belt might be associated with functionality and urban style.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
By3	By Malene Birger	Denmark	The image shows a model's back, photographed against a white background. The model wears a flowy beige top with thin straps and a long, matching skirt, along with a large white bag. The model's arms and back are revealed. The model shows no conspicuous jewelry.	The neutral colors of the outfit and the bag connote visual reduction and understated elegance. The absence of the model's face suggests emotional restraint and detachment. The flowy design and revealed arms and back suggest femininity and elegance. The large white bag could be associated with functionality and urban style.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
By4	By Malene Birger	Denmark	A model wears a black suit jacket and a long, black skirt, photographed in a building-like setting against a white-and-black background. The model wears little or no makeup and a massive golden ring.	The monochrome outfit connotes minimalism, simplicity and quiet luxury. The black jacket and skirt suggest elegance, femininity and dominance. The golden ring suggests luxury, while the building-like setting could be associated with contemporaneity and urban style.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Medium shot	Low	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
By5	By Malene Birger	Denmark	A model wearing a beige jacket with a black belt, a black skirt and a black woven bag is photographed against a neutral background, walking on a concrete surface. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	Neutral colors and the absence of her makeup connote minimalism and simplicity. The discreet black belt and the brand logo buckle suggest quiet luxury and a strong brand identity. The model's pose emphasizes controlled elegance and unconventionality in fashion, while the concrete background suggests a minimalist aesthetic and understated walking could imply spontaneity.	Individual	Subtle	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
By6	By Malene Birger	Denmark	A dozen brown, wax candles in a white vase are photographed against a white background. A piece of white ribbon with the brand name is tied around each candle.	Neutral colors and discreet brand marks connote visual reduction and simplicity. White ribbons suggest a minimalist aesthetic, and unobtrusive brand name is tied around each candle.	Not applicable	Visible	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered

Appendix C6 – Semiotic analysis of By Malene Birger posts (By7-By12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Salience
By7	By Malene Birger	Denmark	A beige woman hat is photographed on a rock and blurry seascapes in the background.	The design of the hat is reminiscent of a seascapes might be associated with calmness and location, and the rock and the sea could function as a reference to nature.	Not applicable	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
By8	By Malene Birger	Denmark	The image shows three women dressed casually taking a relaxed pose, photographed against a blurred background. A gold frame like setting. On the wall and marble sculpture could be associated with Italian cultural heritage, while the food and plates on the table work for a social interaction and hospitality.	Casual, airy outfits, relaxed poses and a home setting imply comfort and familiarity. A gold frame could be associated with Italian cultural heritage, while the food and plates on the table work for a social interaction and hospitality.	Group	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
By9	By Malene Birger	Denmark	The image shows several pairs of shoes scattered on a wooden floor. Some pairs display a discreet brand logo. Shoes are either made of leather or suede.	Tossed shoes suggest spontaneity and informality, while materials such as leather and fur could be associated with nature. Subtle brand logos convey meanings of quiet luxury.	Not applicable	Subtle	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Disconnection	Product-centered
By10	By Malene Birger	Denmark	The image shows two models, one from the shoulder to the thighs and only the arm of the other model. The first model is dressed in neutral colors and poses with crossed arms, with a small bright red bag with a black strap. The other model is dressed in black. The models show no conspicuous jewelry.	The absence of the models' faces and the crossed arms of one model suggest restraint and detachment. The brand logo on the bag suggests strong brand identity and brand loyalty. The bright red could be linked to energy.	Group	Visible	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Medium shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
By11	By Malene Birger	Denmark	The image shows a model's profile while walking, photographed against a blurred background. The model is dressed in an all-black casual, airy outfit, wearing black walking impulses leather bag. The model is carrying a large black leather bag. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	The monochrome outfit, neutral colors and the model's profile suggest a minimalist and sophisticated aesthetic. The casual outfit and conspicuous jewelry might connote simplicity and functionality. The casual, airy outfit and walking impulses leather bag suggest spontaneity, while the large black leather bag also suggests practicality, as well as quality and longevity. The sunglasses can be associated with urban style.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Low	Offer	Connection	Product-centered
By12	By Malene Birger	Denmark	The image shows a woman dressed in a casual outfit of neutral colors, holding and looking at a ceramic object, photographed in a workshop. The woman wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry. The ceramic object is positioned with white letters in the centre of the image.	The casual outfit can be associated with comfort and functionality, while the woman's attention to the ceramic object suggests spontaneity and informality. The workshop setting could symbolize craftsmanship, slow aesthetic and authenticity.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered

Appendix D – Semiotic Analysis Coding Sheet for Mediterranean Brands

Appendix D1 – Semiotic analysis of Dolce & Gabbana posts (Do1-Do6)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Saliency
Do1	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	A model in a yellow polo shirt and light-colored pants with glasses sits relaxed in what appears to be a cafe and is served a cup of coffee by a waiter. In the background, people sit at other blue-and-white tables in the cafe. The model shows no conspicuous jewelry.	The yellow and blue connote expressive aesthetic, energy and sensory richness. The cafe setting and the model's casual sitting suggest spontaneity, everyday elegance and an authentic Mediterranean leisure culture, with an emphasis on social interaction and hedonism. The absence of conspicuous jewelry suggests an effortless elegance, while the absence of clear brand marks could be understood as a focus on lifestyle over product and a narrative over branding.	Group	Absent	Vivid	High	Balanced	Long shot	High	Not applicable	Connection	Model-centered
Do2	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	A model's profile is photographed while crossing the street. The model wears a black leather jacket, a short black skirt and black leather boots with headphones in her hand. The model wears noticeable makeup and a prominent choker necklace. The brand name in white letters is at the bottom of the image.	The combination of the urban street scene, black leather outfit and accented accessories and makeup connotes an edgy and expressive aesthetic. The visible brand logo implies strong brand presence and explicit branding. The elements such as city atmosphere and headphones suggest a contemporary lifestyle.	Individual	Visible	Vivid	High	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Do3	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	The image shows a piece of gold jewelry with multicolor gemstones, photographed on a beige, stone-like surface.	Colorful details suggest visual richness and vibrant aesthetic. Gold and multicolor gemstones are associated with luxury and authenticity, reminiscent of Italian handicraft, artistry and the vivid Italian landscape. The stone surface can also be linked to nature and the Italian landscape.	Not applicable	Absent	Vivid	High	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
Do4	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	The image shows a perfume bottle filled with bright rose liquid featuring a massive gold heart-shaped detail displaying the brand logo. The bottle is on a stone-like surface and in the background, there is the Italian landscape. Green leaves with purple flowers are visible in the corners of the image, and the brand name in white letters is at the bottom of the image.	Vivid colors symbolize vibrant atmosphere and sensory richness, resembling the Italian landscape. The Italian nature in the background could be associated with the brand's connection to the local identity. The stone surface, leaves and flowers refer to nature and warm weather. The gold detail with a brand logo suggests luxury and exclusivity, and its shape resembles the motif of the Sacred Heart and could be understood as a religious reference to Christianity.	Not applicable	Visible	Vivid	High	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
Do5	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	The image shows a model's profile in black and white, photographed on a neutral background as the model walks in a short dress and pointed black heels. The model carries a small purse with the brand logo buckle. The model has discreet makeup. The brand name is written on the left side of the image.	The black-and-white image might suggest artistic expression and cinematic storytelling. The model's walking conveys confidence and spontaneity, and her outfit and discreet makeup could be associated with femininity and elegance. The brand logo buckle on the purse can be linked to emphasized exclusivity and brand recognizability.	Individual	Visible	Neutral	Low	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered
Do6	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	The black-and-white image shows four models either sitting in a relaxed way, standing neutrally or leaning on objects around them, dressed in dark suits wearing dark hats and dark shoes. Some pieces of clothing have floral details. In the right end of the picture, a woman is knitting in dark clothes and a dark scarf around her head as she is sitting on the steps of a building. The brand name is written in white letters at the bottom of the image.	The black-and-white image might suggest cinematic storytelling, conveying a nostalgic tone. The models' relaxed poses and black suits convey spontaneity and nonchalant elegance. Floral details on clothing could be associated with nature. The woman knitting might be understood as a reference to Italian craftsmanship and artistry, as well as the connection to the local identity and cultural heritage.	Group	Visible	Neutral	Low	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Disconnection	Model-centered

Appendix D2 – Semiotic analysis of Dolce & Gabbana posts (Do7-Do12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Salience
Do7	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	A model poses in front of a contemporary artistic outdoor site with large, mirror-like objects. The model wears white chiffon skirt and a leather jacket, adorned with embellished with golden button-like details. The model wears massive gold jewelry and a gold headpiece. The model has emphasized makeup.	The combination of artistic ambience and a richly decorated outfit with ornate accessories involves luxury and visual expressiveness and extravagance. The image emphasizes theatrically and culturally coded expressiveness. The contrast of contemporary fashion and classical motifs could convey the narrative of timelessness.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	High	Warm	Medium shot	Eye-level	Offer	Disconnection	Model-centered
Do8	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	The image shows a multicolored highlighter placed on a square in an Italian town. The highlighter has the brand name written on it.	The colorful design of the highlighter might connote expressive aesthetic and visual richness, resembling the Italian town. The highlighter might signify art and creativity, while the Italian town and the cart could be understood as a connection to local identity and history.	Not applicable	Visible	Vivid	High	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
Do9	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	The black-and-white image shows a model laughing in a street setting, leaning against a building. The model is wearing a sheer black dress with a V-shaped neckline and floral details, and black pony shoes. Next to the model is the rear of a motorcycle.	The black-and-white image suggests styled realism and cinematic storytelling. The model's relaxed pose and the street setting could convey spontaneity and emotional expressiveness, and the image might convey meanings of nonchalant elegance, femininity and expressive sensuality. The street setting and the motorcycle could be understood as a way of representing modern femininity in the urban environment.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Low	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Offer	Disconnection	Model-centered
Do10	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	The black-and-white image shows a man's face leaning on his hands. The man has a cross-shaped ring on his finger.	The black-and-white image might connote styled realism and artistic expression. The focus on the man's face suggests intimacy, while the man's relaxed pose suggests comfort and sensuality. The cross-shaped ring can be understood as a symbol of Christianity.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Low	Balanced	Close-up	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Do11	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	The image shows a marble sculpture of a woman's head and neck, decorated with earrings and a massive necklace. The jewelry is a statement of marble, gold and gemstones, decorated with Latin inscriptions and undear symbols.	The combination of a sculpture and jewelry connotes artistic expression and a mixture of different arts. The inscriptions could be understood as a connection to human cultural heritage and history, while the marble, gold and gemstones could refer to luxury, authenticity, Italian craftsmanship and artistry.	Not applicable	Absent	Vivid	High	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
Do12	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	The post consists of two similar images of a woman wearing black sunglasses with the brand logo and gold earrings. The brand logo, alongside the bright red lipstick, the brand name in white letters is visible at the bottom of the post.	The black sunglasses could suggest exclusivity, urban style and emotional restraint, while the brand logo on sunglasses and earrings might connote luxury and brand presence. The bright red lipstick could be associated with femininity and sensuality.	Individual	Visible	Balanced	Medium	Balanced	Close-up	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Model-centered

Appendix D3 – Semiotic analysis of Desigual posts (De1-De6)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand viability	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Salience
De1	Desigual	Spain	A model wearing a metallic pink jacket, with her hands on the collar of the jacket, is photographed against a white background. Underneath the jacket, the model wears a multicolored piece of clothing with the brand name. The model wears little or no makeup.	The colorful outfit might connote vibrant aesthetic, energy and visual richness. The color and the design of the jacket suggest contemporality and urban style, while the brand name on the clothing suggests emphasized brand identity. The absence of heavy makeup and the first background draw attention to the products.	Individual	Subtle	Vivid	High	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
De2	Desigual	Spain	A model is photographed while walking and wearing a light pink denim outfit. In the background, there is a stone-like building. The model wears little or no makeup.	The model's walking and the absence of heavy makeup could suggest spontaneity and everyday style, while the denim outfit suggests urban style and comfort. The light pink might connote femininity and sensuality, evoking associations of spring.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	Medium	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
De3	Desigual	Spain	A model is photographed in a garage-like setting with her hands in her pockets, wearing a casual, colorful outfit.	Vivid colors connote a vibrant and expressive aesthetic. The model's pose suggests spontaneity, comfort and confidence, while the garage setting could convey contemporality and urban style.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	High	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
De4	Desigual	Spain	A model is photographed crossing the street wearing a black-and-orange outfit and a black bag. The model wears a necklace of unusual shape.	Vivid colors connote visual richness and energy. The model crossing the street suggests spontaneity and everyday lifestyle, while the street setting connotes contemporality and urban style. The unusual shape of the necklace suggests unconventionality and boldness in fashion.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	High	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered
De5	Desigual	Spain	The image shows a silver bracelet with a flower-shaped detail, a computer mouse and a photograph against a neutral background.	The flower detail evokes associations of spring and Mediterranean landscape, alongside sensuality. The computer mouse suggests contemporality, while the combination of a fashion product and a technological gadget signals innovation, unconventionality and modernity.	Not applicable	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
De6	Desigual	Spain	The image shows a model reading a newspaper with the brand name on the street. The model wears an oversized black suit.	The street setting suggests contemporality and urban style, while the model reading the newspaper in an oversized outfit connotes comfort, spontaneity and everyday lifestyle.	Individual	Visible	Balanced	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered

Appendix D4 – Semiotic analysis of Desigual posts (De7-De12)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Salience
De7	Desigual	Spain	The image shows a model touching her face with eyes closed, wearing a massive, shiny, silver star-shaped ring.	The model's pose suggests sensuality and calmness, while the massive shiny ring connotes exclusivity and glamour. The combination of the model's closed eyes and the star motif suggests a dreamy and celestial look.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	Medium	Balanced	Close-up	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered
De8	Desigual	Spain	The image shows a model wearing a large, black bag and blue, wearing large, black glasses. In the background, there are other people. The model wears several silver rings and silver earrings. The model wears little or no makeup.	Vivid colors connote expressive aesthetic, energy and visual richness. The jewelry and the glasses suggest contemporality, boldness and urban style.	Group	Absent	Vivid	High	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
De9	Desigual	Spain	A model is photographed walking a dog in a street setting, wearing a pink and purple dress and black boots. The model is smiling. The dog is smiling.	The colors pink and purple might connote voracious aesthetic, energy and femininity. The dog's smile could suggest emotional expressiveness and positive emotions, while her walking the dog connotes everyday lifestyle and spontaneity.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered
De10	Desigual	Spain	The image shows female legs and feet, carrying two dark red purses. One of the purses has flower-shaped details and the brand logo, while the other has a bow.	The color red in combination with female legs might be associated with passion, femininity and desire. The bow and flower-shaped details suggest sensuality and associations of the Mediterranean landscape.	Individual	Visible	Vivid	High	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
De11	Desigual	Spain	The image shows multiple things tossed on a white surface. In the centre, there is a denim purse with a discreet logo.	Vivid colors connote expressive aesthetic, energy and sensory richness. The tossed objects suggest spontaneity and everyday lifestyle, while the denim bag suggests urban style.	Not applicable	Visible	Vivid	High	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Not applicable	Disconnection	Product-centered
De12	Desigual	Spain	A model is photographed against a white background, wearing knitted blue gloves, a silver heart-shaped bracelet and a black and white outfit with a large belt. The model is carrying a black-and-white denim purse with a subtle brand name and she shows a bare arm and bare stomach. The model wears little or no makeup.	Vivid colors connote expressive aesthetic, energy and sensory richness. The model's outfit suggests contemporality and urban style, while the revealed arms and stomach emphasize sensuality and confidence.	Individual	Subtle	Vivid	High	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered

Appendix D5 – Semiotic analysis of Zeus+Dione posts (Ze1-Ze6)

Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Balance
Ze1	Zeus+Dione	Greece	A model is photographed standing on a white surface, with the sky and the sea in the background. The model is wearing a draped, airy, bright red outfit, combined with black slippers and subtle jewelry. The model wears little or no makeup.	Bright red might connote passion and energy. The sky and the sea could be associated with calmness and the Greek landscape. The model's flowing outfit might suggest femininity, comfort and controlled sensuality, while the draped design of the clothing resembles the ancient Greek garment and could be associated with a reference to ancient Greek history and cultural heritage.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Offer	Connection	Model-centered
Ze2	Zeus+Dione	Greece	The image shows the middle part of the female body in a black-and-white color. The model's hands, the purse has a leather buckle shaped like an artefact and a subtle brand name on the strap.	The bathing suit and the woven design of the purse evoke associations of femininity and sensuality, while the black-and-white color scheme emphasizes craftsmanship and handwork. The artefact detail could be understood as a reference to classical Greek architecture and cultural heritage.	Not applicable	Subtle	Balanced	High	Balanced	Close-up	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
Ze3	Zeus+Dione	Greece	The image shows a model wearing a beige jacket and a black-and-white collar underneath, displayed on a blurry background. The model wears little or no makeup and subtle jewelry.	The suit jacket suggests elegance and sophistication, while the black-and-white color scheme could be associated with subtle boldness and unconventional. The absence of makeup and subtle jewelry emphasizes naturalness.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	High	Warm	Close-up	Low	Offer	Connection	Model-centered
Ze4	Zeus+Dione	Greece	A model wears a black leather jacket, black boots, standing on a marble object. The model wears a prominent necklace with a massive earring and heavy makeup. The model is photographed against a neutral background, and she is in the center of the image. The area around her is darkened.	The combination of dramatic use of light, heavy makeup and prominent jewelry suggests theatricality, power and visual dominance, while the model on the elevated marble object conveys authority and spectacle. The model's outfit might be associated with elegance, femininity and power.	Individual	Absent	Neutral	High	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Ze5	Zeus+Dione	Greece	A model is photographed against a white background, wearing a draped bright pink dress with a golden waist belt and a golden collar. The model wears little or no makeup and subtle, conspicuous jewelry.	Bright pink color connotes energy and visual richness. The design of the dress suggests femininity and controlled sensuality and resembles the ancient Greek garment, which could be understood as a reference to ancient Greek history and cultural heritage. The combination of bright pink and the traditional design gives the model an edgy, unconventional and boldness in fashion. The absence of makeup and conspicuous jewelry emphasizes naturalness.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	High	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Ze6	Zeus+Dione	Greece	A model is photographed walking the runway in a royal blue dress. The model wears little or no makeup and shows no conspicuous jewelry.	The royal blue color and silky material of the suit suggest luxury, elegance and femininity. The color blue is reminiscent of traditional Greek architecture.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	High	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered

Appendix D6 – Semiotic analysis of Zeus+Dione posts (Ze7-Ze12)

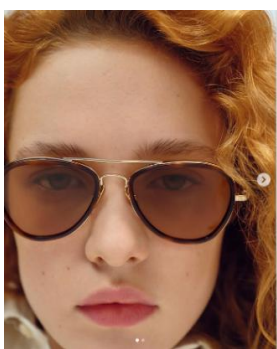
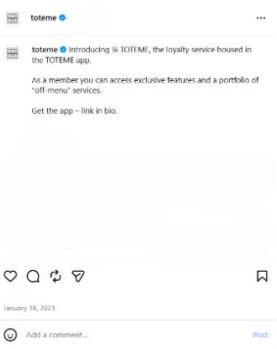
Post ID	Brand	Country	Denotation	Connotation	Social configuration	Brand visibility	Color palette	Color saturation	Color temperature	Social distance	Vertical angle	Gaze	Framing	Visual Saliency
Za7	Zeus+Dione	Greece	The image shows a model photographed against a pale pink background, dressed in a light, flowing piece of clothing, possibly a robe or dress, with a white collar, carrying a woven purse. The model wears little or no jewelry, contributing to the impression of naturalness and understated elegance.	Vivid, warm colors and a light, flowing piece of clothing connotes a Mediterranean or ancient Greek aesthetic. The white collar and woven purse suggest a relaxed, pastoral lifestyle, while the absence of heavy jewelry contributes to the impression of naturalness and understated elegance.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	Medium	Balanced	Medium shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Za8	Zeus+Dione	Greece	The image shows two models, one standing and one sitting, against a dark background. The standing model is wearing a blue, flowing outfit, and the sitting model is wearing a dark, possibly black, outfit. The models are positioned in a way that suggests a narrative or a scene from a story.	The image shows two models, one standing and one sitting, against a dark background. The standing model is wearing a blue, flowing outfit, and the sitting model is wearing a dark, possibly black, outfit. The models are positioned in a way that suggests a narrative or a scene from a story.	Group	Absent	Neutral	High	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Disconnection	Model-centered
Za9	Zeus+Dione	Greece	The image shows a model in a green dress and a pink top, standing in a field of pink flowers. The model is wearing a green dress with a pink top, and the background is a field of pink flowers. The model is standing in a way that suggests a sense of tranquility and natural beauty.	The model's pose and the flowy design of the dress suggest understated elegance and a connection to nature. The pink flowers and the model's attire contribute to a sense of tranquility, nature, and sophistication.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	Medium	Warm	Long shot	Low	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Za10	Zeus+Dione	Greece	A model is shown in a black, flowing dress, standing in a field of pink flowers. The model is wearing a black, flowing dress, and the background is a field of pink flowers. The model is standing in a way that suggests a sense of tranquility and natural beauty.	The model's pose and the flowy design of the dress suggest understated elegance and a connection to nature. The pink flowers and the model's attire contribute to a sense of tranquility, nature, and sophistication.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	Medium	Balanced	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered
Za11	Zeus+Dione	Greece	The image shows the middle part of a female body, with focus on the model's arm. The model is wearing a black, flowing dress, and the background is a field of pink flowers. The model is standing in a way that suggests a sense of tranquility and natural beauty.	The image shows the middle part of a female body, with focus on the model's arm. The model is wearing a black, flowing dress, and the background is a field of pink flowers. The model is standing in a way that suggests a sense of tranquility and natural beauty.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	Medium	Balanced	Close-up	Eye-level	Not applicable	Connection	Product-centered
Za12	Zeus+Dione	Greece	The model is photographed sitting on a stone fence, with the background being a field of pink flowers. The model is wearing a blue, flowing outfit, and the background is a field of pink flowers. The model is sitting in a way that suggests a sense of tranquility and natural beauty.	The seascape and the blue sky suggest a sense of tranquility and natural beauty. The model's pose and the background contribute to a sense of tranquility, nature, and sophistication.	Individual	Absent	Vivid	High	Warm	Long shot	Eye-level	Demand	Connection	Model-centered

Appendix E – Instagram Posts from Nordic Brands’ Official Accounts

Appendix E1 – Toteme Instagram posts (To1-To12)



To1



To2



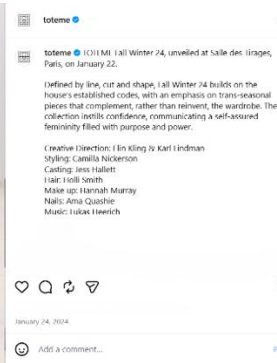
To3



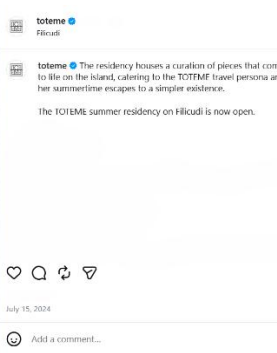
To4



To5

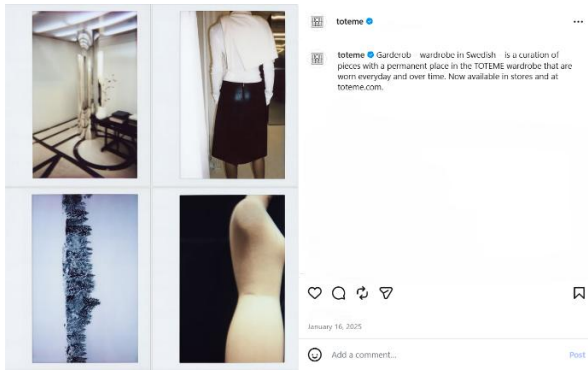


To7

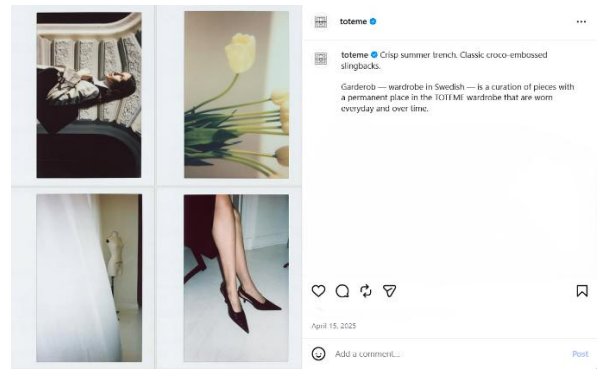


To8

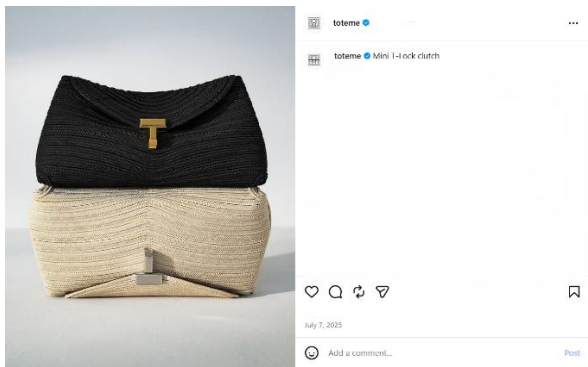




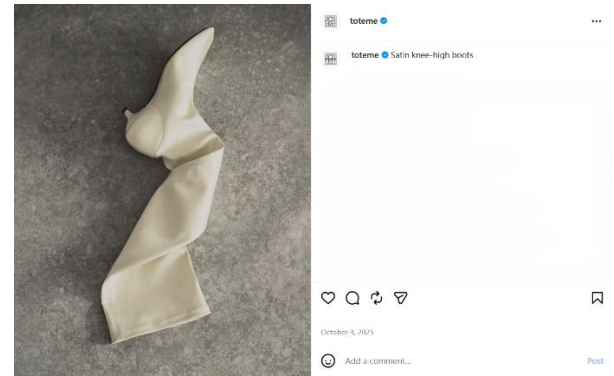
To9



To10



To11

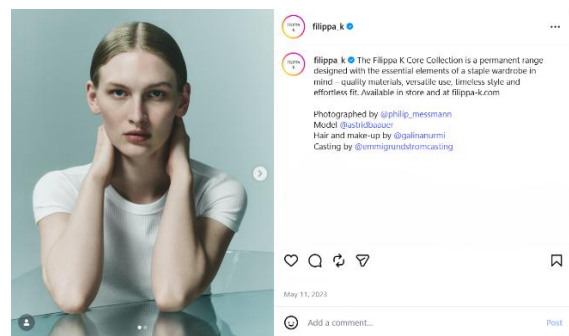


To12

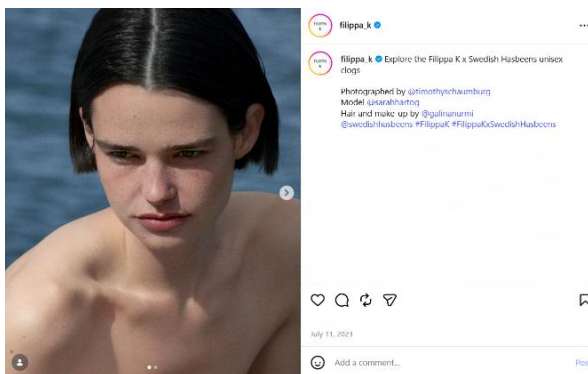
Appendix E2 – Filippa K Instagram posts (Fi1-Fi12)



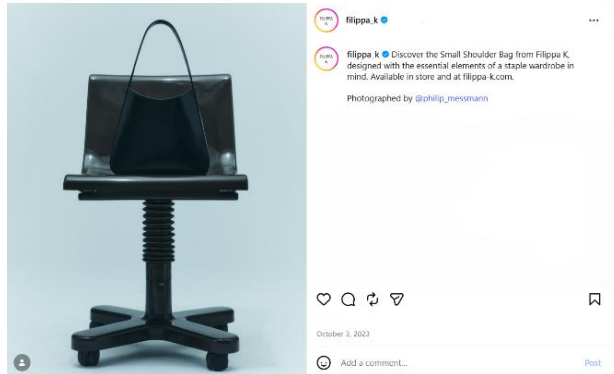
Fi1



Fi2



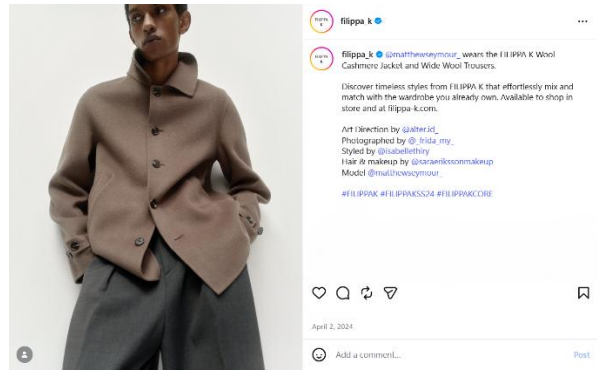
Fi3



Fi4



Fi5



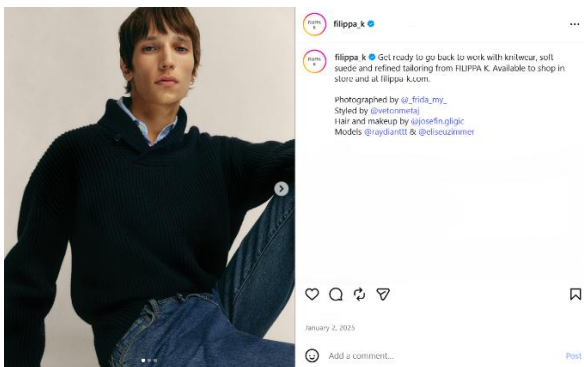
Fi6



Fi7



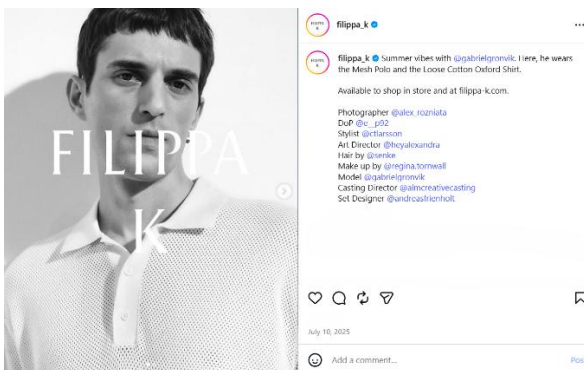
Fi8



Fi9



Fi10



Fi11



Fi12

Appendix E3 – By Malene Birger Instagram posts (By1-By12)



By1



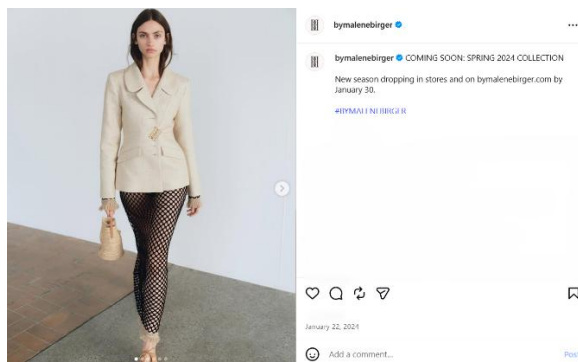
By2



By3



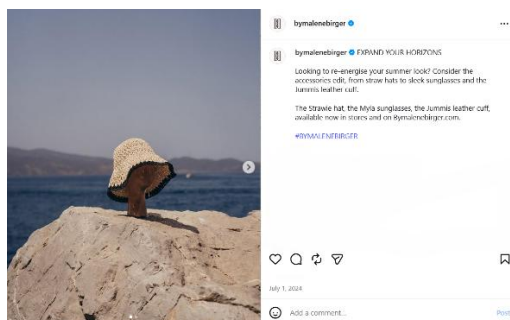
By4



By5



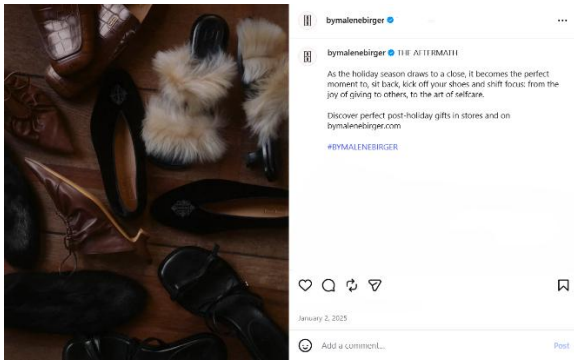
By6



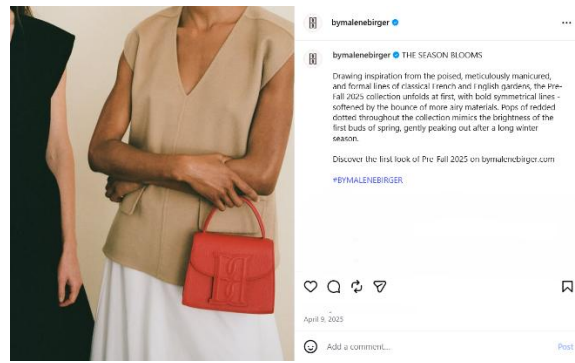
By7



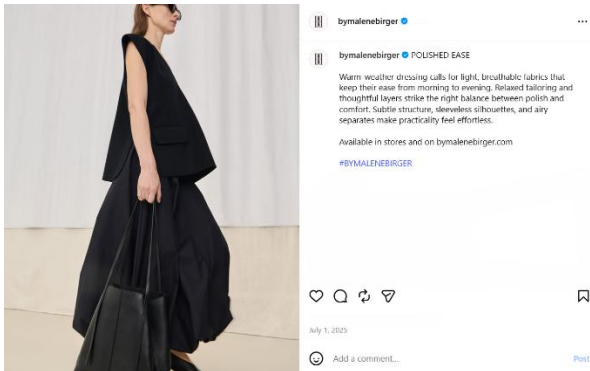
By8



By9



By10



By11



By12

Appendix F – Instagram Posts from Mediterranean Brands’ Official Accounts

Appendix F1 – Dolce & Gabbana Instagram posts (Do1-Do12)



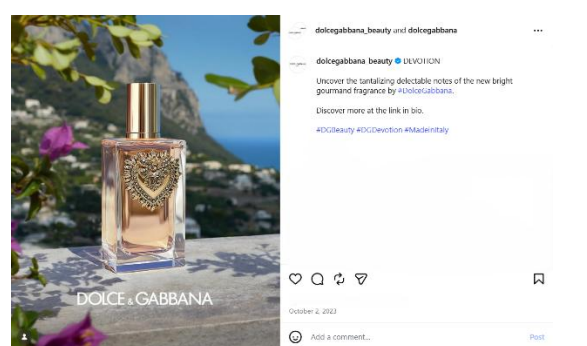
Do1



Do2



Do3



Do4



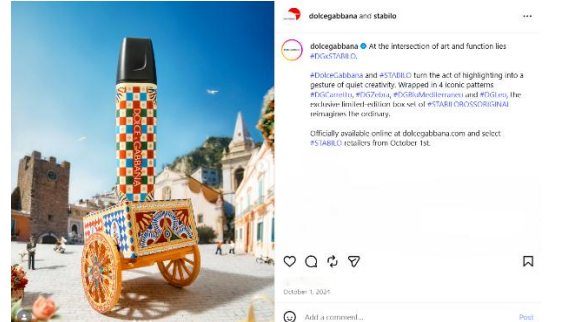
Do5



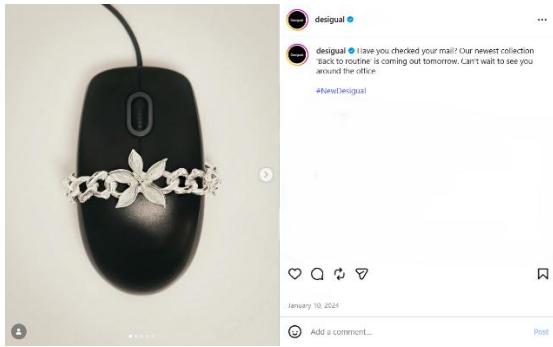
Do6



Do7



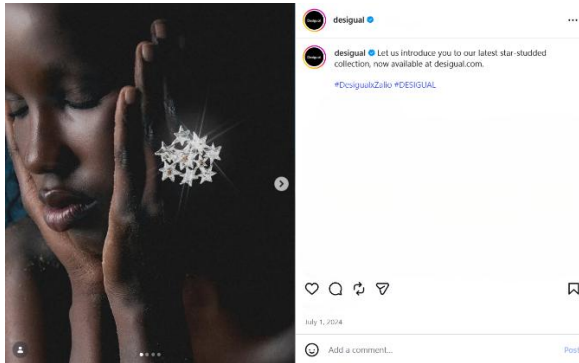
Do8



De5



De6



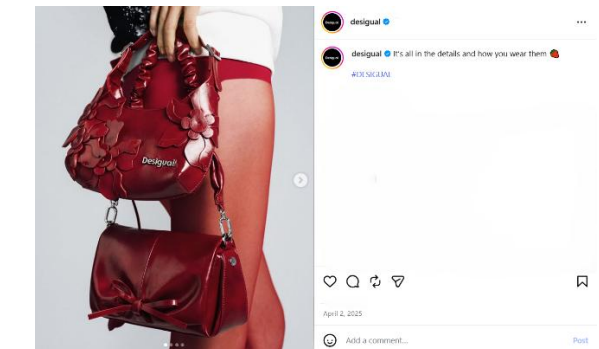
De7



De8



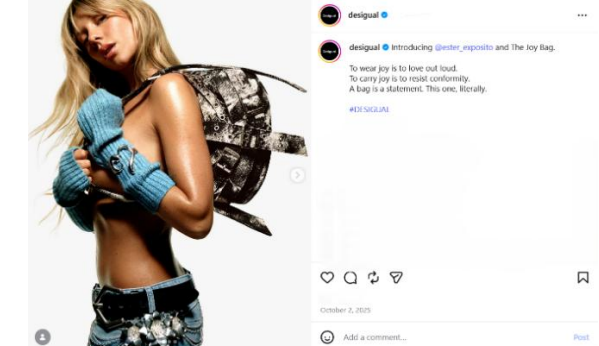
De9



De10

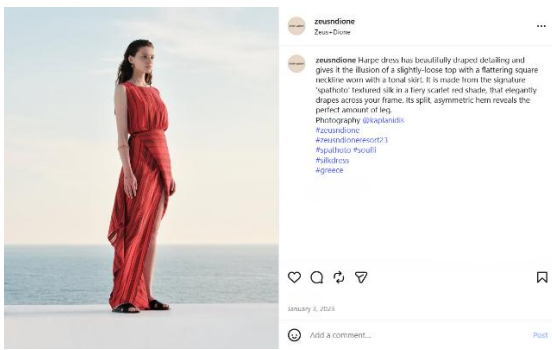


De11

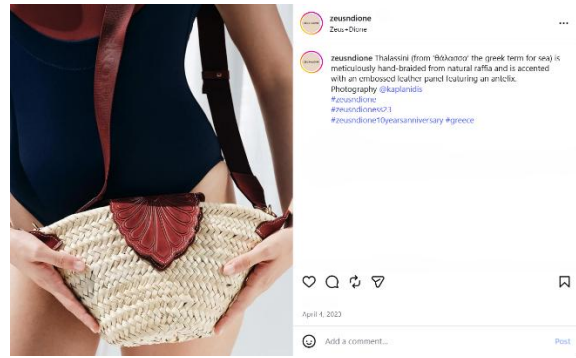


De12

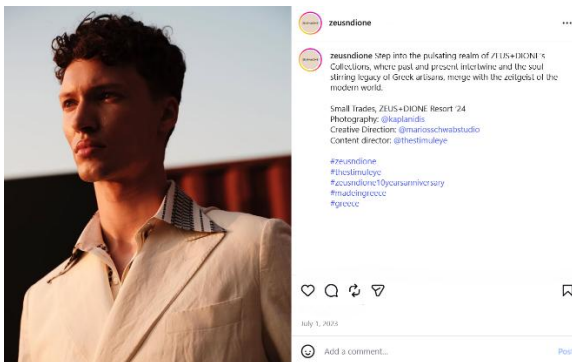
Appendix F3 – Zeus+Dione Instagram posts (Ze1-Ze2)



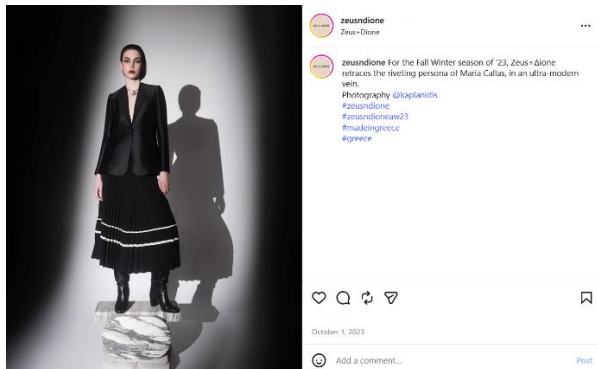
Ze1



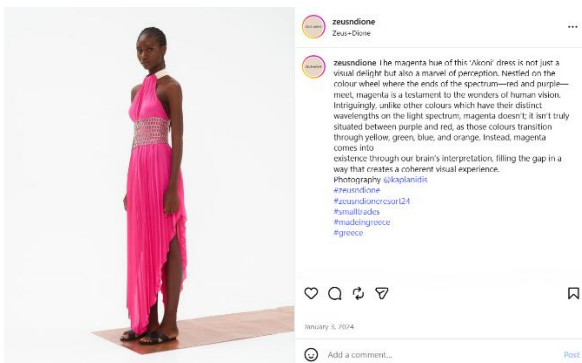
Ze2



Ze3



Ze4



Ze5



Ze6



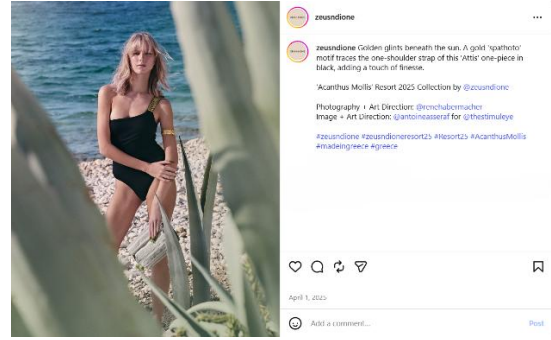
Ze7



Ze8



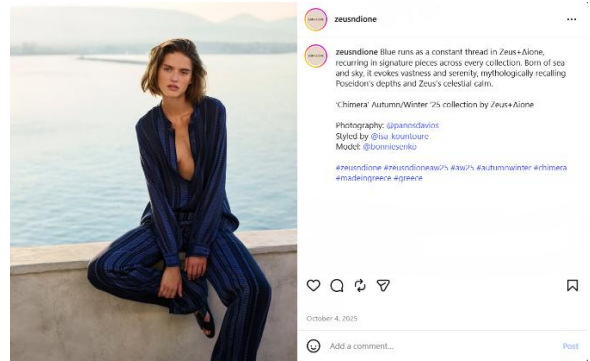
Ze9



Ze10



Ze11



Ze12