

Instagram likes and the images posted by fashion Influencers: A social semiotic analysis

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Abstract

The social media site Instagram is a photo sharing application that is popular with fashion Influencers. Through the sharing of images on the application, Influencers are able to promote products, brands and services to their many followers. The success of their promotional work, and indeed their reputations as Influencers, is typically realised through the number of likes that the images posted to their Instagram accounts receive. However a question remains as to what types of fashion images are more likely to be well received, and therefore 'liked' by their followers.

In order to evaluate which types of images the viewers of Instagram fashion Influencers are more inclined to 'like' and why, this study draws upon the social semiotic work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1999, 2006). The analysis primarily involved statistically examining the way that five different semiotic resources (i.e. participant distance, participant gaze, participant relationship, participant clothing and colour) were used in 1000 Influencer images, in relation to the number of likes the images received. This quantitative analysis was then followed up by a qualitative examination of those images which were statistically prominent, in order to consider, among other areas, the particular context of the image, the type of product being promoted, the identity portrayed by the Influencer, and the particular lived-moment that the image captured.

While a number of more generalisable findings about the relationship between the semiotic choices made by the Influencers, and the reception of these choices by their followers, emerged from the study, it was found that a follower's response to a particular semiotic

choice (e.g. the portrayal of their gaze directed at the viewer) was largely related to the specific identity or lifestyle of the Influencers. The study also found that, in many instances, the type of semiotic choices most frequently made by the Influencers in their images, often received the fewest number of likes. Ultimately, it was also found that semiotic realisations that Kress and van Leeuwen conceive as creating greater ‘involvement’ or ‘contact’ with the viewer, when used in the Influencers images, did not, on average, receive the greatest number of likes. Importantly, the study provides an innovative approach to the study of social semiotics, which combines the quantitative use of descriptive statistics, with qualitative observations.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	12
INTRODUCTION	12
1.0 Introduction.....	12
1.1 Social media Influencers	12
1.2 Instagram and Influencers	13
1.3 Instagram and the image	14
1.4 Instagram and likes.....	14
1.5 Likes and the Instagram image	15
1.6 This study	16
1.7 Benefits of the study	17
1.8 Significance of the study	17
1.9 Organisation of Chapters	18
Chapter 2	20
LITERATURE REVIEW	20
2.0 Introduction.....	20
2.1 Instagram	20
2.2 Instagram, marketing and Influencers	22
2.2.1 Instagram Influencing and Consumer Generated Content.....	23
2.2.2 Influencers, hedonic shopping motive and fast fashion	25
2.2.3 Instagram and marketing models.....	26
2.2.4 Instagram, persuasion and social influence	28
2.3 Instagram, marketing and the use of images	29
2.4 Conclusion	31

Chapter 3	32
METHODOLOGY	32
3.0 <i>Introduction</i>	32
3.1 <i>Social Semiotics</i>	32
3.1.1 <i>Inventorising semiotic resources</i>	34
3.2 <i>Methods</i>	36
3.2.1 <i>Data</i>	36
3.2.2 <i>Selecting the semiotic resources</i>	37
3.2.3 <i>Inventorising the five semiotic selected for analysis</i>	37
3.2.4 <i>Analytical procedures</i>	40
3.3 <i>Philosophical worldview</i>	42
3.4 <i>Chapter summary</i>	43
Chapter 4	44
PARTICIPANT DISTANCE	44
4.0 <i>Introduction</i>	44
4.1 <i>Analysis</i>	45
4.2 <i>Female Influencers and the category ‘Close Up’</i>	48
4.3 <i>Male Influencers receive an increase in mean likes number as the perceived distance between the participant in the image and the viewer increases</i>	49
4.4 <i>Ariana Jenner and Sebastian Williams had their lowest mean likes for images represented under the category No Participant</i>	51
4.5 <i>Normalised likes</i>	52
4.6 <i>Conclusion</i>	53
Chapter 5	54
GAZE	54

5.0 Introduction.....	54
5.1 Analysis	55
5.2 Contrasting results in the category <i>No Participant Eyes</i>	58
5.3 Influencers posted the most images representing the category <i>Directly Looking</i>	60
5.4 Inconclusive results as a whole.....	61
5.5 Normalised likes.....	61
5.6 Conclusion	62
Chapter 6.....	64
RELATIONSHIP.....	64
6.0 Introduction.....	64
6.1 Analysis	65
6.2 <i>Single Participant was the most frequently posted category</i>	69
6.3 <i>Correlation between the increases in intimacy and increase in mean likes</i>	70
6.4 <i>The inclusion of child participants increases the number of mean likes</i>	73
6.5 Normalised likes.....	74
6.6 Conclusion	76
Chapter 7	77
CLOTHING	77
7.0 Introduction.....	77
7.1 Analysis	78
7.2 <i>High number of mean likes for the categories <i>Partly Naked</i> and <i>Naked</i></i>	81
7.3 <i>Varying overall trends for the semiotic resource <i>Participant Clothing</i></i>	82
7.4 <i>Influencers posted the most images under the <i>Clothed</i> category</i>	83
7.5 <i>Naked is the least represented category</i>	84

7.6 <i>The different representations of the male gender in the semiotic resource of Participant Clothing</i>	85
7.7 <i>Normalised likes</i>	87
7.8 <i>Conclusion</i>	88
Chapter 8	89
COLOUR	89
8.0 <i>Introduction</i>	89
8.1 <i>Analysis</i>	90
8.2 <i>Each Influencer focused on a different range of colours</i>	93
8.3 <i>The categories White and Black were popular among Influencers, but not their followers</i>	94
8.4 <i>Yellow received the highest mean number of likes for two Influencers</i>	96
8.5 <i>Ariana Jenner and her use of colour</i>	96
8.6 <i>Normalised likes</i>	98
8.7 <i>Conclusion</i>	99
Chapter 9	100
DISCUSSION	100
9.0 <i>Introduction</i>	100
9.1 <i>Main findings</i>	101
9.2 <i>Other observations</i>	102
9.2.1 <i>Influencer lifestyles</i>	102
9.2.2 <i>The impact of Ariana Jenner’s image styling</i>	103
9.2.3 <i>Gender differences</i>	103

9.3 <i>Postscript to the study</i>	104
9.3.1 <i>Changes to Instagram's 'like' system</i>	104
9.3.2 <i>An update on the four Influencers</i>	105
9.4 <i>Implications</i>	107
9.5 <i>Limitations of the research</i>	108
9.6 <i>Possibilities for future research</i>	109
9.7 <i>Conclusion</i>	110

List of Tables

Table 4.1 Number of likes related to the semiotic scale <i>Distance</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	46
Table 5.1 Number of likes related to the semiotic scale <i>Gaze</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	56
Table 6.1 Number of likes related to the semiotic scale <i>Relationship</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	67
Table 7.1 Number of likes related to the semiotic scale <i>Clothing</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	79
Table 8.1 Number of likes related to the semiotic scale <i>Colour</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	91

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Brand resonance pyramid	27
Figure 3.1 Point of view system network	35

Figure 4.1 Percentage breakdown of the semiotic realisations of <i>Distance</i>	45
Figure 4.2 Mean number of likes for the semiotic scale <i>Distance</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	49
Figure 4.3 Normalised percentages.....	52
Figure 5.1 Percentage breakdown of the semiotic realisations of <i>Gaze</i>	55
Figure 5.2 Mean number of likes for the semiotic scale <i>Gaze</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	59
Figure 5.3 Normalised percentages.....	62
Figure 6.1 Percentage breakdown of the semiotic realisations of <i>Relationship</i>	66
Figure 6.2 Mean number of likes for the semiotic scale <i>Relationship</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	71
Figure 6.3 Normalised percentages.....	75
Figure 7.1 Percentage breakdown of the semiotic realisations of <i>Clothing</i>	78
Figure 7.2 Mean number of likes for the semiotic scale <i>Clothing</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	83
Figure 7.3 Normalised percentages.....	87
Figure 8.1 Percentage breakdown of the semiotic realisations of <i>Colour</i>	90
Figure 8.2 Mean number of likes for the semiotic scale <i>Colour</i> for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller	94
Figure 8.3 Normalised percentages.....	98

Attestation of Authorship:

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This study seeks to establish how the semiotic choices made by Instagram fashion Influencers in the images that they post to their account impact on their followers' reception of the images, in particular with regards to the number of 'likes' they receive. This chapter provides a background to the study by introducing the notion of the Influencer, the Instagram application, and the 'like' function used by the followers of Instagram Influencers to indicate their endorsement of a particular image or post. The chapter will conclude with the presentation of the research question and a brief outline of the contents of the study.

1.1 Social media Influencers

According to Antherton (2020), a social media Influencer is someone who, as a result of a successful social media presence, has developed an authenticity, reliability and reach that enables them to persuade their many followers to try or to purchase experiences or brands. Most Influencers create their own niche by focusing on a particular service or product (i.e. swimwear fashion), around which they build their social media content. While some Influencers are already celebrities, for example actors or successful models, most are just ordinary social media users, who through their Influencing work go on to develop celebrity status. As Ang, Khamis & Welling (2016) state:

Social media both accommodates ordinary users with distinctive stories and/or content, and furnishes them with highly visible metrics of popularity and endorsement. These

metrics are inextricably tied to self-branding: a following can evolve into a fan base and in this way ‘ordinary’ users find online fame.

(Ang, Khamis & Welling, 2016, p. 196).

Influencers are motivated to influence their followers for a multitude of reasons. For example, they may choose to promote a product or service because they truly believe in the product or service, or they may choose to promote a product for an exchange of goods or profit.

1.2 Instagram and Influencers

Instagram, a photo and video sharing social networking service owned by Facebook, is frequently used by Influencers. This is because Instagram provides tools for Influencers to make their jobs as easy and as efficient as possible. For example, the platform allows its users to create business accounts, enabling access to useful analytics and insights that can be used to track the progress of individual posts, as well as their profile as a whole. Instagram analytics can also provide information on a user’s followers including their age, gender and location demographics. It can also identify how well individual posts are performing by providing statistics on the different levels of exposure it has received. Besides these tools, the platform itself not only allows users to share images but it also provides a space to create stories and provide relevant information through captions, hashtags and a comment section. This opens up the lines of communication between Influencers and their followers and gives each post, which is centred on an image or video, a more personalised touch. Each of these affordances allows an Influencer to effectively influence their audience (Glucksman, 2017).

1.3 Instagram and the image

Instagram allows its users to post any kind of image (as long as they conform to the community guidelines), and similarly allows users to view other users' images and interact with them through likes and comments. However, the types of images that Influencers post on the platform are generally curated, well thought out, and planned in advance to fit their particular niche or aesthetic. Their content is also often produced using sophisticated photo editing equipment, much like traditional media such as the fashion magazine. Fashion Influencers, in particular, can also make use of Instagram's in-built editing features including filters, location tags, hash tags and direct user account tags. User account tags can be placed onto an image, to either show followers who the person is in the image (for instance, a friend of the Influencer) or more commonly, to identify the clothing brands that the Influencer is wearing in the image. This enables a follower to source a particular item of clothing. In some cases, this can indicate that the Influencer has a deal or sponsorship with the brand that has been tagged in the image.

1.4 Instagram and likes

The ability for a user to like any particular Instagram post is an imperative part of the social media platform and how it operates. Likes are the simplest measure of engagement in Instagram, but also the most effective, as they can indicate the success of a particular image and provide information to an Influencer about what they should continue posting, or how they might change their content to better suit their followers (Schivinski, Langaro & Shaw, 2019, p. 846). Liking an image on Instagram is straightforward and can be carried out very quickly with a double tap. Users also generally decide whether to like an image or not within seconds of first viewing it (Sherman, Greenfield, Hernandez & Dapretto, 2018).

Importantly, likes are a visual indicator of users' engagement with certain brands. Moreover, brands themselves can easily search an Influencer's profile to establish the reach that their posts are receiving. In July 2019, however, Instagram removed the likes count from Instagram posts in 9 different countries, with the intention to eventually remove the likes count from the application worldwide. While this decision was seen as encouraging creators to develop more genuine and engaging content, it was also praised for the positive impact it would have on the mental health of users, many of whom evaluated their social image on the number of likes they received (Tiggemann et al., 2018). However, the removal of the likes count was disadvantageous for Instagram Influencers as the brands they promoted were not easily able to identify the success of posts about their products or services, which negatively impacted on a brand's decision to support their Influencers.

1.5 Likes and the Instagram Image

The number of likes an image receives can vary greatly depending on its content. Certain images, for example those with faces (Bakhshi, Gilbert & Shamna, 2014), or those exposing the left rather than the right cheek (Lindell, 2018) have been found to receive a higher number of likes than other images. Furthermore, in the political context, it has been found politicians who convey statesmanship in their images tend to receive the most likes (Muñoz & Towner; 2017). There are also a number of popular online articles and websites that provide tips for users to increase the number of likes their Instagram images will receive. These include the use of high-quality photos, the use of certain types of filters, the frequency of posts, the kinds of stories portrayed through the image, and the relatability of the content to the followers (Hu, Kambhampati & Manikonda, 2014). However, in actuality, the production of an image does not involve the type of simple binary options, i.e. the decision to include a face or not, or to expose a left or right cheek, as is often the focus of Instagram marketing research and internet guidelines. Indeed, and from a social semiotic perspective

(van Leeuwen, 2004; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1999, 2006; van Leeuwen and Machin, 2016), the visual choices that are presented to an Influencer, or indeed any other content producer who is creating an image for an Instagram post, are complex, multifarious and overlapping. Not only might the inclusion of a face impact positively on an Instagram viewers' experience, but so will the direction of the participant's gaze, the distance of their face from the frame, the actual number of faces in the image, the relationship between these different faces, among other possibilities. Furthermore, context will also contribute to the way the viewer of an Instagram image will experience that image. The inclusion of a face, the exposure of a cheek, or the use of a particular filter might not be as relevant for the followers of a fashion Influencer, who are particularly interested in the fashion product on display.

1.6 This study

As a response to these criticisms, this study sets out to analyse the relationship between a broad range of semiotic resources found in the Instagram images of fashion Influencers and the number of likes that their Instagram images receive. Drawing, in particular, on the multimodal analysis of social semioticians, such as Kress and van Leeuwen (1999, 2006), the focus will be on the multifaceted semiotic articulations of the images used by the Influencers, including the varying distances between the participant(s) in the image and the frame of the image; the different directions of the participant's gaze; the different types of relationships between participants (i.e. if there is more than one participant in an image), the varying levels of clothing worn, and the dominant colour of the image. The aim is to ultimately answer the research question:

What types of images are the viewers of Instagram fashion Influencers more inclined to 'like' and why?

This use of a social semiotic approach for analysing the images of Instagram is relatively unique in the field of internet marketing studies. However, at the same time, the ability of Instagram to provide a countable measure (i.e. 'likes') to a specific semiotic realisation (i.e. a particular direction of gaze) also presents a unique quantitative potential in the field of social semiotics, where existing studies are predominantly qualitative and based on close interpretative readings of semiotic material.

1.7 Benefits of the study

The results of this study into the reception of Instagram fashion Influencer images may assist groups, such as social media marketers, Influencers and Instagrammers who wish to have more insight into how the images they post impact on, and influence, their audiences.

Furthermore, the study may help provide a better knowledge for these groups about the field of social semiotics, and how it might be used to develop a richer understanding of users' experience of Instagram posts. The study will also extend the field of social semiotics and multimodal analysis itself by contributing to the existing wealth of research carried out in these areas.

1.8 Significance of the study

This research is significant because it explores the potential of social semiotics for the study of social media platforms such as Instagram. It also provides a unique approach to the social semiotic analysis of the visual image through the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The results of the study are important for the social media world, in that they challenge some of the more taken-for-granted decisions made by social media Influencers

regarding their use of visual images. The findings of the study may also have some significance for the use of images in the wider marketing world.

1.9 Organisation of Chapters

Chapter 2 provides a background to Instagram. It then introduces the nature of Instagram as a marketing tool and the role played by Influencers in this context. Following that it will examine a number of marketing models relevant to the Instagram platform. Finally the chapter will discuss the use of images in Instagram, and how the production of an image might be conceptualised as the outcome of a range of different semiotic choices made by the Influencer.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in this study to answer the research question. It begins by providing a background to social semiotics, introduces the concept of the semiotic resource, and identifies how a semiotic resource can be ‘inventorised’ to identify its different articulations in order to carry out a social semiotic analysis. The chapter then identifies Instagram data collected for this study, and how it was selected and organised. Following this the chapter provides further details on the five semiotic resources and their respective articulations that were the focus of the analysis. Next for the procedure of statistical analysis, the Influencer images are discussed, followed by a discussion of the philosophical worldview underpinning the study.

Chapters 4 through 8 provide the results of the analysis. Each chapter focuses on the analysis of a different semiotic resource; Participant distance, Participant gaze, Participant relationship, Participant clothing and Colour. Each chapter first begins with an introduction defining the semiotic resource and the categories representing the different articulations of the semiotic resource (i.e. the different directions of the participant’s gaze). Following that,

the overall percentage breakdown of the different categories across all 1000 images is provided and discussed. Next, the number of mean likes received for each category by each Influencer is examined. Here, due to differences in the number of overall likes an individual Influencer receives, the statistical analysis focuses on each Influencer separately. This also allows for a qualitative examination of certain key images, for example, those that have received the most likes for a particular Influencer. Finally, the statistics are normalised and the mean number of likes received for each category is examined as a whole.

As well as summarising the more important findings of the study, Chapter 9 also provides a number of more general observations, or examines specific points of interest that appear in, or are related to the analysis. The chapter then provides a postscript, which briefly discusses recent changes with the like function in Instagram, and provides an update on the four Influencers whose images were examined for this study. After this, the limitations of the research will be discussed, followed by a focus on implications for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an introductory background to Instagram. It then introduces the nature of Instagram as a marketing tool and the role played by Influencers in this context. Following that a number of marketing models relevant to the Instagram platform are discussed. Finally, the chapter looks at the use of images in Instagram and how the production of an image might be conceptualised as the outcome of a range of different semiotic choices made by the Influencer.

2.1 Instagram

Instagram is a photo sharing social media site which is primarily accessed through a mobile app but can also be used (with a lesser capacity) through the Instagram website. Connecting with others and having a simple but effective way to communicate are at the core values of Instagram's ideologies (Evans, Jun, Lim & Phua, 2017), and as a result, like many other social media sites, networking, e.g. the capacity to follow users and 'like' their posts is a crucial function of Instagram. The approach to networking on Instagram is 'asymmetric'; that is, "if a user A follows B, B need not follow back" (Hu, Kambhampati & Manikoda, 2014, p. 596). This is because if each user was required to follow their followers, it would be essentially impossible to create a large following based on genuine engagement, as user 'feeds' would become overcrowded and difficult to use.

The image and video content uploaded by its users is what keeps Instagram accounts active and interesting for their followers. Furthermore, Instagram involves a visually orientated culture where users document their lives through images which they have often personally taken. These images typically express a feeling, a memory, or an event which users share with the connections they have established online, i.e. their followers (Lee, Lee, Moon & Sung, 2015). The motivations behind most Instagram users' repeated posting of images from their lives may involve ideals of self-expression and the freedom of speech which they may not feel is possible in their offline worlds (Lee, et al, 2015). Furthermore, it also enables a user to produce a 'highlight reel' of their life, which can be very appealing for both the user and their viewers. For Boyd (2019), however, to keep viewers interested there is a necessary element of artifice in the depiction of one's life on Instagram. He states that "the interplay between artifice and authenticity is essential here: artificial enough to make reality appealing to the senses; authentic enough to make it believable" (para. 20). Importantly, Instagram provides the tools to facilitate this deception. It enables the manipulation of imagery through photo editing applications which were previously impossible for the average person. With Instagram's in-house editing features (and now external applications tailored towards Instagram) it is easy for a user to alter images of their personal life to make them appear brighter, sharper, stronger and more interesting (Lee, et al, 2015).

Instagram has continued to grow since its beginnings in 2010. By December of its first year Instagram already had over one million users, and was the number one free photography platform on the App Store at the time. Its popularity began to increase and by 2012 the app was purchased by Facebook for \$1bn (Woods, 2013). In 2013, Instagram released three new features which essentially shaped the app into its current form; direct messaging, the ability for brands to pay for sponsored posts, and the inclusion of 15 second videos. Over the

following years, 2014 and 2015, Instagram began to expand into new markets, including Android phones (it was previously only available for Apple phones). Third party apps for image editing on Instagram, also began to appear in the different app stores, allowing for the further creativity of users posts. In 2016 users were able to change their accounts to a ‘Business’ profile which allowed users and brands using Instagram to carry out an analytics analysis to establish the progress of their content. It also allowed users to share their content with other users, currently as ‘sponsored content’. Another addition that Instagram implemented in August of 2016, was the ‘Stories’ feature. This allows users to upload an image or a video which remains on their profile for 24 hours in total (Belanche, Cenjor, & Pérez-Rueda, 2019).

In 2017, Instagram added features to further aid the creation and tracking of user engagement. This included easier ways to save and send content to other users without the complications of leaving a public comment. In 2018, Instagram added a shopping feature enabling users to tap on purchasable objects in an image and be directed to a 3rd party link to facilitate the purchase (Ivan, 2018). Today, Instagram has over one billion active monthly users (Statista, 2018). The next section looks at the use of Instagram for marketing and how various marketing models such as Keller’s (2009) CBBE model and Moriuchi’s (2016) CGC theory have been successfully implemented within the social media platform.

2.2 Instagram, marketing and Influencers

The focus of many of Instagram’s developments throughout the past decade has been to cultivate the platform as a marketing tool, and those who have made the most of this opportunity are users referred to as Influencers. According to Cauberghe, De Veirman & Hudders (2017), social media Influencers are “people who have built a sizeable social

network of people following them” and are seen as being “a trusted tastemaker in one or several niches” (p. 798). What this means is that Influencers have spent time on Instagram gaining the trust of their followers as purveyors of a particular trend or consumer item, who as a result, are then able to influence their followers to ‘like’ or purchase the products or services that that post about on their accounts (Ceyhan, 2019). As such, marketing on Instagram relies on an engagement between the producer of the Instagram account and their followers – or more precisely between the marketer and the consumer, and it is this social nature and sense of communication and trust which puts the ‘followers’ at ease, and which often means they are more likely to respond to Influencers marketing in a positive way (Dessart, Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2015). Nevertheless, in the context of Instagram Influencer marketing, this trust and the repeat customer base it creates requires a loyalty exchange. As a result Influencers will, for example, run giveaways or competitions to ‘give back’ to their followers. This resembles a ‘thank you’ for following me and for staying loyal (Ceyhan, 2019). Brand loyalty works in a very similar way to Influencer loyalty as Influencer’s run their own personal brand, so as well as promoting products and services which personally interest them, Influencers are also known to employ what is described in the marketing and online world, as a sponsored post. This involves an image posted on the Influencer’s ‘feed’ which has the aim of selling a product or a service which the Influencer has either been paid for or incentivised to post about (Evans, et al, 2017).

2.2.1 Instagram Influencing and Consumer Generated Content

An important and popular fixture on Instagram is the ‘repost’. This is where a follower reposts an Instagram user’s post, which, in the context of Instagram influencing, typically includes the product or brand being marketed by the user. This process, which can increase the Influencer’s following and gain more exposure for the brand, is known as ‘consumer

generated content' (Moriuchi, 2016). Moriuchi's work on consumer-generated content (CGC) indicates that a shift has been taking place in marketing, where not only are brands increasingly advertising on social media, but (as seen in the example of the Instagram Influencer) people are becoming online billboards. Moriuchi's work explores the different forms of CGC such as blogs, collaborative content and reviews and identifies why it is so popular in the current consumer market. He states that:

Social media has definitely taken a leap in capturing the intended audiences and building brand relationships. It has long overtaken the traditional, product-driven, one-way street in marketing communication. Moreover, the introduction of social media has adopted the approach of new information and consumer-driven objectives. (Moriuchi, 2016, p. 3).

Besides CGC and the various engagement techniques mentioned by Dessart et al's (2005), Keller's (2009) theory on Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) further explains why Instagram marketing is becoming so successful in today's digital world. For Keller, a brand will grow if it develops its voice, reputation, identity and resonance; criteria which all suit the affordances of social media. Furthermore, as Benedek (2018) points out:

... online interactions between the users and the brands can help the organizations find and maintain their competitive advantage. Social media sites also provide valuable and cost-effective channels for destinations to reach their target audience (Benedek, 2018, p. 46)

2.2.2 *Influencers, hedonic shopping motive and fast fashion*

Influencers and online brands also rely on their followers as having hedonic shopping motive.

Triwidisari, Nurkin & Muhsin (2018) describe hedonic shopping motive as:

... the behaviour of individuals who perform excessive shopping activities to meet their own satisfaction. The nature of hedonic shopping motive will be created by shopping while getting around choosing preferred items, or by visiting some online shops on web pages. (Triwidisari, Nurkin & Muhsin, 2018, p. 172)

Instagram influencing combined with hedonic shoppers boosts what is referred to as the online 'fast fashion' market (Kenton, 2019), a term used by fashion retailers "to describe inexpensive designs that move quickly from the catwalk to stores to meet new trends" (para. 1). According to Kenton, in order to stay on trend for these types of consumers, it is not unusual for fast-fashion retailers to introduce new products numerous times in a single week.

Furthermore, Influencers use Instagram as a marketing platform in partnership with various 'fast fashion' brands. As a result, companies such as FashionNova, Meshki and PrettyLittleThing have little to no real-world presence. These brands produce fast fashion at a rate which is seldom rivalled by real-world fast fashion brands such as Zara and Forever 21 (Kenton, 2019). This hedonic shopping style works incredibly well for time-poor and risk-taking consumers, many of who are the followers of Influencers. Instagrammers often idolise and take inspiration from Influencers, who market and provide links to these 'fast fashion' brands online. PrettyLittleThing generated 17 million pounds of revenue in 2016 alone, and the majority of these earnings resulted from the use of Instagram and Instagram Influencers for marketing.

2.2.3 Instagram and marketing models

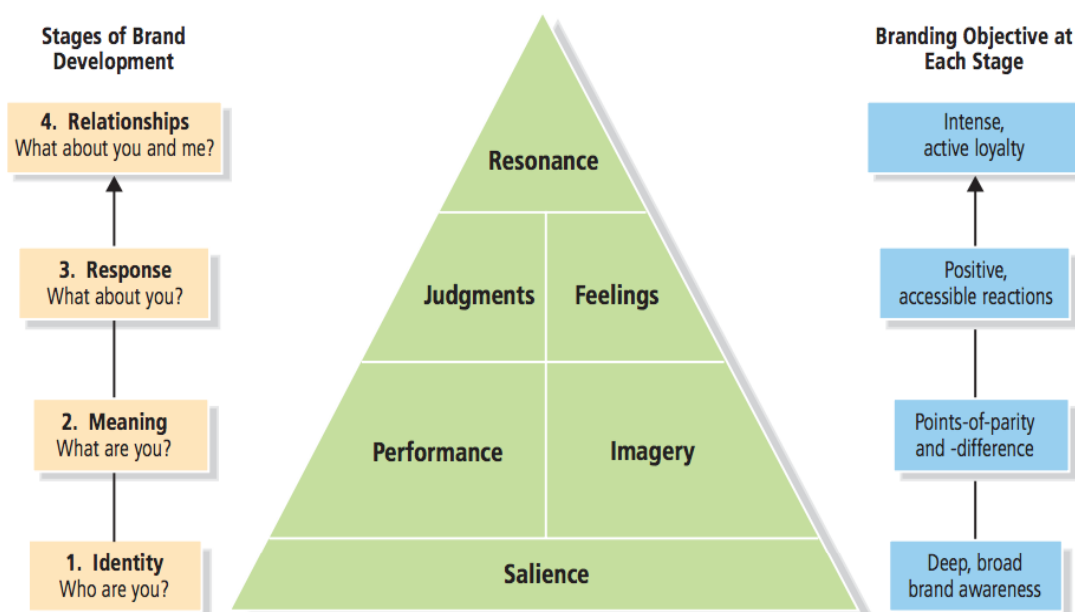
While unpredictable at times due to the unique approaches of different brands and Influencers, Instagram marketing can still be understood in terms of a number of marketing models. These include Electronic Word of Mouth, Customer-Based Brand Equity theory, and the Persuasion Knowledge Model.

Electronic word of mouth, or EWOM, is a form of marketing which aims to be organic, trustworthy and community based. The concept runs off of the trust built between the image producers (in this case the Influencers) and the viewers (in this case their followers) and the relationship these two parties have built together over time. In particular, the relationship involves the notion of consistency. For example, if an Influencer with a loyal following has promoted one particular brand of perfume for three years, and then suddenly promotes a different brand of perfume, this would come across as negative advocacy and would lead the Influencer's followers to trust the Influencer less than they did before and ultimately not purchase the promoted product or service (Evans, et al, 2017).

Customer-Based Brand Equity theory, or CBBE (Keller, 2009) is a pyramid marketing model containing six elements on four tiers. These are Salience, Performance/Imagery, Judgements/Feelings and Resonance (see Figure 1). These elements can not only be used to create a brand, but also to keep a brand alive. Keller (2009) explains that each of these tiers begs a question: Who are you? What are you? What about you? and What about you and me? The responses to each of these questions can contribute towards the development of a brand and more importantly the development of its relationship with the consumer. Each of these elements centres on creating loyalty between the marketer and the consumer, or in the case of

Instagram, the Influencer/brand and the followers/consumers. Brand equity can also be broken down into four points relating to these questions: Identity, meaning, response and relationships - as seen in Figure 1. An Influencer marketing a product will aim to make it known to their followers exactly who they are and whom they identify as, by posting images of their personal style, or of the activities they engage in. They might, for example, show that they frequently visit designer stores, or children’s hospitals for charity. Furthermore, an Influencer will tend to use a caption on their image which aims to connect with their followers. Examples might be ‘Tell me your favourite shoe brand’, ‘How do you give back to your community?’ or ‘Comment Below’. These comments also aim to encourage a response from followers so that their judgements and feelings towards the Influencer can be established. Lastly, the Influencer will aim to resonate with their followers by solidifying the relationship through activities such as competitions, such as ‘a like for a like’, ‘a follow for a follow’ or competition schemes which connect the Influencer and the follower together.

Figure 2.1: Kevin Lane Keller’s “Brand Resonance Pyramid” (Keller, 2013, p. 80).



The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) provides a conceptual understanding of how consumers understand and respond to persuasive messages.” (Evans, et al, 2017, p. 6).

Persuasive marketing occurs if the Influencer posts striking images and positive messages on a repetitive basis. Furthermore, if the consumer (follower) is able to see and understand the Influencer’s intent behind these images and messages, they are more likely to purchase the products and services promoted by that Influencer. Again, this process requires a consistent engagement between the producer (Influencer) and the viewer (follower).

2.2.4 Instagram, persuasion and social influence

Social influence is crucial for the Instagram Influencer. According to Cialdini (2009) there are six key factors that guide most attempts at social influence; reciprocity, commitment, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity. *Reciprocity* can be implemented by an Influencer when they offer a discount code for a brand they work with as this acts as a favour in return to the followers. *Commitment* is when an Influencer builds trust with their following on a regular and consistent basis, such as posting on a regular promised schedule and producing content which followers have actually asked for. *Social proof* is when the Influencer displays a common ground with their followers and builds a rapport with them. This frequently occurs when the Influencer actively responds to the user comments generated by an image caption. *Liking* involves the Instagram process of liking a follower’s post. *Authority* is when an Influencer will display expert knowledge on a product or brand they are involved in marketing. This process might also involve advance peeks of new products, or the posting of product reviews prior to the product being released. *Scarcity* refers to the influence that emerges from the ‘niche’. If an Influencer has a particularly distinctive quality or aesthetic, users are more likely to be influenced to follow this person who they view as a scarce ‘commodity’ (Juma, 2015). Each of these elements of persuasion can contribute to the

Influencer's process of acquiring new followers and developing an engagement with their users. Importantly, Instagram users also tend to follow Influencers with similarly aligned goals to themselves (Briñol, McCaslin & Petty, 2012). The next section reviews different marketing applications and how these apply to the use of visual resources on Instagram.

2.3 Instagram, marketing and the use of images

Engagement with Instagram is often created through the use of certain visual resources and as a result, Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) works on visual semiotics, among others, can provide useful analytical tools to examine the landscape of Instagram and its marketing agenda. According to Kress & van Leeuwen, "the image itself, and a knowledge of the communicative resources that allow its articulation and understanding, a knowledge of the way social interactions and social relations can be encoded in images" (p. 120). They go on to suggest that an individual's response to an image can be positive or negative depending on certain aspects of its content including the way it forms relationships between the producer and the viewer.

There are a number of ways an image can form a relationship or bond between a producer and viewer. For example, Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) have indicated that relationships are more likely to form if the subject of an image gazes directly at the viewer, rather than away from the viewer, or if they are presented from their torso upwards rather than a full body shot placed in the distance. Indeed, they suggest that the different representations of social distance in images can "allow us to imaginarily come as close to public figures as if they were our friends and neighbours – or to look at people like ourselves as strangers, 'others'" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 132). Furthermore, Thömmes & Hübner (2018), who explored architectural images on Instagram, suggested that the balance of an image can be

crucial in how a viewer's eye is drawn to, or away from, an image. They identify balance as based on the symmetry of an image, including symmetry of shape colour and contrast. They find that Instagram images that have balance are more likely to be liked by users.

Colour can also be used to create a connection between the viewer and the image, or image producer (van Leeuwen, 2011). Warm colours can remind a viewer of an enjoyable place in their life such as summer, a vacation or a passionate moment, whereas cooler colours can remind the viewer of more difficult times, both emotionally or physically, such as winter, being unwell, or being cold. As van Leeuwen (2011), citing Goethe's theory of colours points out:

... colour has direct sensory effects: 'Experience teaches us that particular colours excite particular states of feeling (ibid.: 305). Blue, for example (ibid.: 312) has a 'somewhat active character'. 'It's exciting power', however, is 'of a very different kind from that of red-yellow. It may be said to disturb rather than enliven'." (van Leeuwen, 2011, p. 23)

So in brief, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), images construct and encode certain social interactions and relationships between those represented in the image and the viewers of the image. As a result, certain semiotic resources such as *gaze* (where the gaze of a represented participant is directed) and *social distance* (whether the represented participant is depicted through a close-up or a long-shot) can be a deciding factor in whether Instagram users will like a post or follow an Influencer.

2.4 Conclusion

These studies highlight factors such as user engagement and trust as important for Influencers. However, as indicated here and in the Introduction chapter, the semiotic resources employed by Influencers in the images they post to their accounts are also crucial if they are to attract followers to their post. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research examining the semiotic choices made by Influencers, and the degree to which they encourage followers to like or share their content. As a result, and drawing upon Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) theories on visual semiotics, this study examines how certain semiotic resources, such as social distance, gaze, the relationship between depicted participants, clothing and colour influence Instagram users to like and/or follow certain Instagram posts. The next chapter will discuss the methodology employed for this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In order to answer the research question ‘What types of images are the viewers of Instagram fashion influencers more inclined to ‘like’ and why?’, an analysis of the images of 1,000 Instagram fashion Influencers was carried out. The analysis involved statistically examining the way that five different semiotic resources (i.e. participant distance, participant gaze, participant relationship, participant clothing and colour) were used in the images, in relation to the number of likes the images received.

This chapter provides the methodological details of this study. It begins by providing an overview of social semiotics, the framework that underpins the analysis. Following this, details of the collection and categorisation of the data is discussed, after which the analytical procedure is identified.

3.1 Social Semiotics

Social semiotics (van Leeuwen, 2004; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1999, 2006; van Leeuwen and Machin, 2016) primarily provides a framework for analysing the visual image. It draws upon systematic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1978; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004), a description of language which views language as an evolving system of signs that embodies “a positive reflection of the functions that language has evolved to serve in the life of social man” (Halliday, 1976, p. 26). In this view, language is a semiotic system which provides a resource of options which can be drawn upon by its users to construct and construe meaning for any specific context. For example, in English, the modal auxiliaries (i.e. could, may,

might, must, ought, shall, should, will, and would) provide a system of linguistic choices, through which a speaker is able to express their views as to the probability of something happening or being (Eggins, 2004). Using this functional and systemic view of language, Kress and van Leeuwen show how the production of the visual image, along with other semiotic modes, work in the same way; that is, the producer of an image has at their disposal a range of semiotic resources which function to construct different meanings. From an analyst's point of view, an understanding of the system underpinning semiotic production can help us understand how our social realities are constructed through semiosis.

Two concepts central to social semiotics are the *semiotic mode* and the *semiotic resource*. A semiotic mode¹ refers to a socially organised set of semiotic resources that are used for making meaning (van Leeuwen, 2004). Examples of semiotic modes are writing, speaking, the visual image, body movement, sound and layout, among others. Semiotic resources are the signifiers, actions or objects, related to a specific semiotic mode, that are used to communicate within that mode (van Leeuwen, 2004). They can be produced physiologically; that is, through the vocal apparatus or other body muscles, or through technologies, such as the pen, paint, computers, or musical instruments. As an example, the semiotic mode, visual image, can include the semiotic resource of *colour*, or the semiotic mode, sound, can include the semiotic resource of *volume*. Semiotic resources are related to context and may be understood differently in different modes, and by different cultures (van Leeuwen, 2004).

As indicated above, a semiotic resource can provide a range of semiotic potential; that is, they have multiple articulations or permutations that realise different meanings or particular

¹ The terms *semiotic mode* and *semiotic resource* are defined differently by different scholars working more broadly within the field of multimodality, and in some cases are used interchangeably (Seizov and Wildfeuer, 2017).

communicative goals (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2016). For example, a certain way of walking might be used to seduce, while another way of walking might be used to threaten, or impress (van Leeuwen, 2004). The meanings or communicative goals realised by a particular articulation of a semiotic resource, such as walking, have often been determined by past uses of the resource, however, future uses of any semiotic resource may uncover new semiotic potential (van Leeuwen, 2004).

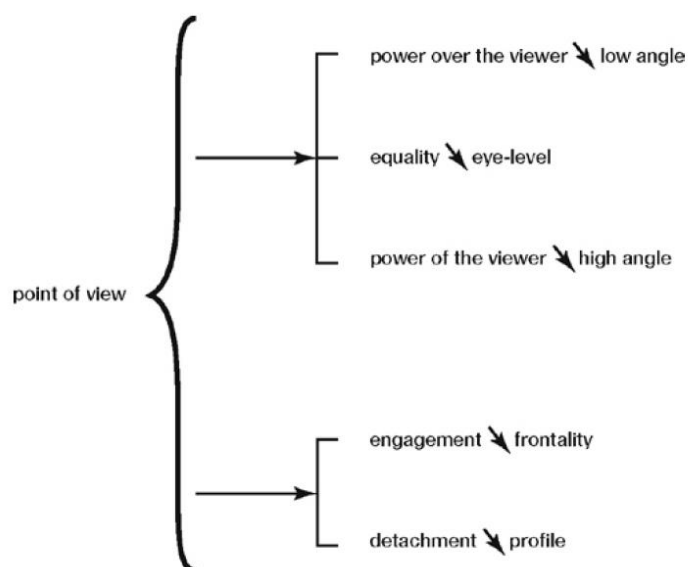
Hence, the different articulations of semiotic resources work to affect or influence the viewer in some way (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). For example, the participant in an image who smiles directly at the viewer of the image is asking that viewer to “enter into a relationship of social affinity” (p.118) with them, while a participant who stares with cold disdain is asking the viewer to relate to them “as an inferior relates to a superior” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 118). As such, it is also likely that certain articulations of certain semiotic resources represented within in a visual image, for instance gaze, will *attract* a viewer towards an image, while others could *repel* a viewer from an image.

3.1.1 Inventorising semiotic resources

In order to carry out a social semiotic analysis, the analyst needs to be familiar with the different possible articulations of a semiotic resource, and the potential meanings ascribed to these articulations. These are sometimes referred to as system networks and organised as schematic diagrams by social semiotic researchers who have investigated certain semiotic resources. A system network diagram for ‘point of view’ (Jewitt & Rumiko Oyama 2001), i.e., the position (e.g. low or high angle) that a viewer has in relation to the represented participant in an image, can be seen in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

System network for the semiotic resource ‘point of view’. Square brackets refer to ‘either-or’ choices, while the curly brackets refer to ‘both-and’ choices (Jewitt & Rumiko Oyama 2001, p. 4).



Without existing descriptions, however, a social semiotic researcher who is interested in analysing the use of a certain semiotic resource must develop an inventory of the different articulations, or permeations, of that semiotic resource; that is, its semiotic potential. The process for developing an inventory is identified by van Leeuwen (2004) in his analysis of the semiotic resource for *framing*, in particular, the different ways that text and images are framed in magazine adverts. He explains that the researcher must first develop a collection of different examples of the semiotic resource in use; in his case, a collection of magazine advertisements where different forms of pictorial framing are evident. Once the different types of framing are identified from the collection, the researcher establishes a more formal systematic inventory of the framing. The different articulations in the inventory are then given names that reflect their generalised essence and differentiate them from the other

articulations. The inventory can then be summarized as a system network diagram, as in Figure 3.1, or alternatively as a list (van Leeuwen, 2004).

3.2 Methods

Within the wider context of a social semiotic analytical framework, and in particular van Leeuwen's (2004) description of the process for developing an inventory for a semiotic resource, the remainder of this chapter describes the methods used in this study.

3.2.1 Data

In order to examine the types of images that viewers of Instagram fashion Influencers are more inclined to 'like', 250 images were collected from 250 consecutive posts of four Instagram fashion Influencer accounts (1000 images in total). They were collected from August 2018 to October 2018. The images collected were those presented as the lead image for the Instagram post, that is, the image that represents the post. No videos were collected. The accounts of the four Influencers were selected because they all had a large following, they posted regularly and their posts/images generally received over ten thousand 'likes'. Furthermore, in order to include a balance of gender, two of the Influencers were male, and two were female. The images were compiled chronologically into four separate collections, each representing one of the Influencers, and numbered for future reference. It should be noted that the names of the four Instagram Influencers used throughout this study, i.e. Ariana Jenner, Bevan Miller, Sebastian Williams and Heidi Smith are all pseudonyms, and replace the actual names of the four Influencers whose posts were examined for this study.

3.2.2 *Selecting the semiotic resources.*

Drawing upon the social semiotic analyses of Kress and van Leeuwen (1999, 2006), van Leeuwen and Machin (2016) and van Leeuwen (2004), the next stage involved establishing which semiotic resources would be the focus of the analysis. This involved an examination of the collected Instagram images to identify key recurring key semiotic resources used by the image producers. Although they should not be seen as an exhaustive list, the following five semiotic resources emerged as the focus for the analysis:

1. Participant² Distance: the distance between the participant(s) in the image and the camera lens (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)
2. Participant Gaze: the direction of the gaze of the participants in the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)
3. Participant Relationship: whether a participant is alone or accompanied in the images and if a participant is accompanied in the image - the level of intimacy conveyed
4. Participant Clothing: the amount of clothing visibly worn by the participants within an image. (van Leeuwen, 2004)
5. Colour: the dominant colour, or hue, of an image (van Leeuwen, 2011)

3.2.3 *Inventorising the five semiotic selected for analysis.*

The next stage of the methodology was to develop an inventory of the five semiotic resources selected for the analysis; i.e. participant distance, gaze, participant relationship, participant clothing and colour. Following the process described by van Leeuwen (2004) in Section 1.2, this involved the examination of the collection of images to establish the different possible

² Kress and van Leeuwen (1999, 2006) use the term *represented participants* to refer to the people, places or things depicted in images, and *interactive participants* to refer to the producers and viewers of an image. In this study the term *participants*, refers solely to the people depicted in an image, and in most cases refers to the Influencer themselves.

articulations of each of the five semiotic resources. These were then categorised and given the appropriate names. The six semiotic resources and their categorised articulations are as follows:

1. Participant distance

- i. No Participant (no participants found to be in the image)
- ii. Extreme Close Up (e.g. an image of the participant's hand showing their manicure, or an image of the participant taking a picture of just the shoes on their feet)
- iii. Close Up (an image of the participant from the shoulders upwards)
- iv. Medium (an image of the participant from the hips upwards)
- v. Longshot (an image of the participant from the feet upwards)
- vi. Extreme Longshot (an image of the participant including their full body as well as the vast majority of the landscape around them)

2. Gaze

- i. No Participant Eyes (e.g. the participant was not in the photo, the participant was wearing sunglasses or the participants eyes were hidden from the frame)
- ii. Directly Looking (the participant was looking directly into the camera lens)
- iii. Looking at Something (the main participant appears to be looking at another participant, object or landscape within the frame)
- iv. Looking Out of Frame (the main participant appears to be looking away from the camera, but not looking at anything in particular)
- v. Looking Vacant (the main participant does not appear to be looking at anything in particular, or they have a vapid look in their eyes)

3. Participant Relationship

- i. No Participant (e.g. there is no human participant in the photo, or only an insignificant part of a human body, such as a hand, was in the photo)
- ii. Single Participant (the participant is alone in the image)
- iii. More Than One (the main participant was seen with other participants in a setting where others are present but not connected to the main participant). A minimal or no degree of intimacy between participants can be observed
- iv. Minor Physical (the main participant appears to be engaging in light physical contact with one or more other participants, e.g. holding hands or shaking hands). An emerging degree of intimacy between participants can be observed
- v. Strong Physical (the main participant is seen engaging in moderate physical connection with one or more other participants, e.g. an embrace or a kiss on the cheek). A strong degree of intimacy can be observed
- vi. Full Physical (e.g. the main participant is seen engaging in full physical contact with one or more other participants, e.g. passionate kissing and cuddling) A full degree of intimacy is observed in these images

4. Participant Clothing

- i. No Participant (no human or animal participant could be seen in the photo, or only a small part of a participant, such as a hand, could be seen in the photo)
- ii. Naked (the participant was wearing no clothes, or there was no evidence of the participant wearing clothes)
- iii. Partly Naked (e.g. the participant was wearing a bikini, lingerie, underwear or a towel)

- iv. Partly Clothed (e.g. a male participant was wearing street shorts, or a female participant was in shorts and a crop top)
- v. Clothed (the participant was mostly clothed, e.g. a forearm, calf or midriff was showing)
- vi. Fully Clothed (no skin apart from face, neck and hands were showing)

5. Colour

- i. White
- ii. Red
- iii. Orange
- iv. Brown
- v. Yellow
- vi. Green
- vii. Blue
- viii. Pink
- ix. Purple
- x. Grey
- xi. Black

3.2.4 Analytical procedures

The next stage of the methods involved the analysis of the 1000 Influencer images. The analysis primarily involved a quantitative statistical analysis, although it did contain a qualitative dimension, as will be discussed below. The quantitative analysis involved

examining each of the 1000 images and identifying which of the categories³ (articulations) they represented for each of the five semiotic resources (see Section 3.2.3). For every individual image, a number correlating with the category identified for each of the five semiotic resources was entered into an SPSS spread sheet, along with the number of likes that particular image received. SPSS software was then used to provide the following statistical information for each of the five semiotic resources (i.e. participant distance, participant gaze, participant relationship, participant clothing and colour):

- i. A pie chart identifying the overall percentage of images representing each category
- ii. Tables identifying the mean, standard deviation, standard error as well as the maximum and minimum number of likes for each category of the semiotic resource, for each individual Influencer
- iii. A line graph indicating the number of likes each category received for each Influencer
- iv. A bar chart indicating the normalised percentages of the overall mean likes for each of the categories in the semiotic resource

The aim of the statistical analysis was to identify patterns or trends in the data that may be able to identify the types of images Instagram fashion Influencers are more inclined to ‘like’. Although the descriptive statistics used in the study simply describe ‘what’s going on’ in the data (Trochim, 2006), they nonetheless can provide new knowledge about the phenomenon being studied that could inform further research in the field. Each of the following Chapters 4 to 8 focuses on the analysis involving one of the five semiotic resources.

³ For clarity, the word *category*, instead of *articulation* will be used here and in Chapters 4-8 for the discussion of the data.

While the statistical information provides valuable quantitative information about the type of images that are more likely to receive ‘likes’ from the Influencers viewers and/or followers, a qualitative aspect was included in the study to further extend and corroborate the results. For example, at times, it was found useful to examine the images, which received the highest or lowest number of mean likes for a particular category. Furthermore, it was important to consider the particular context of the Influencer, the type of fashion product they were promoting (e.g. swim suits or handbags), their identity, and particular moments in their lives (e.g. getting married), to establish why certain categories received higher likes than others. The captions of Influencers and the comments of followers were also, at times, examined in relation to the statistical results, in order to provide further insights as to why certain categories, or individual images, received a greater mean number likes than others. So in brief, while the statistical analysis was central for identifying which types of images the viewers of Instagram fashion Influencers were more inclined to ‘like’, the statistical results were also able to direct the researcher towards particular images and posts that helped provide insights as to why certain semiotic categories were favoured over others.

3.3 Philosophical worldview

Social semiotics is underpinned by a social constructionist worldview, in that language (and other semiotic modes) are viewed as resources that both construct, and allow us to express, our social realities (Halliday, 1978). Perhaps in contrast to this understanding, the analysis in this study primarily employs quantitative statistical methods for identifying the relationship between the semiotic choices made in the Instagram images, and the number of likes these images receive. Contemporary quantitative analysis is largely underpinned by what Creswell (2014) refers to as a post-positivist worldview. A post-positive worldview draws upon the early work of positivism which “reduces ideas into a small, discrete set to test” (p. 7) and is

based on “careful observation and measurement” (p. 7). Nevertheless, while post-positivism depends on quantifiable observations that lead to statistical analyses, it also recognises that “we cannot be positive about our claims of knowledge when studying the behaviour and actions of humans” (p. 7). Hence, as indicated the results of the statistical analysis are also informed by a qualitative dimension whereby the researcher’s interpretative knowledge of the Influencers’ unique contexts and individual posts can provide additional insights into the relationship between the semiotic choices made in the Instagram images and the number of likes these images receive. Given this fusion of worldviews, the study could be seen as informed by pragmatism (Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism has “a concern with applications - what works - and solutions to problems” (p. 10). It focuses on the research problem, rather than a particular method and employs all approaches necessary to understand a problem (Creswell, 2014). A pragmatic worldview, therefore, often results in mixed-method research.

3.4 Chapter summary

This chapter provided the methodological details of this study. It began by providing an overview of social semiotics as the framework that has shaped the analysis. Following this, the chapter provided details of the collection and categorisation of the data and the analytical procedure used in the study. It concluded with a brief discussion of the worldview underpinning the study. The next chapter is the first of five results chapters, each of which focuses on a different semiotic resource. Chapter 4 examines the semiotic resource Participant Distance.

Chapter 4

Participant Distance

4.0 Introduction

The semiotic resource Participant Distance can be articulated as six different categories for the purpose of analysing the semiotic choices made in the images posted by Instagram Influencers. These categories define the perceived distance between the participant in the image and the viewer. There is also a category to represent an absence of the participant in the image. The semiotic resource Participant Distance and the respective categories within this resource were influenced by the Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotic analysis of the image and social distance. The six categories are:

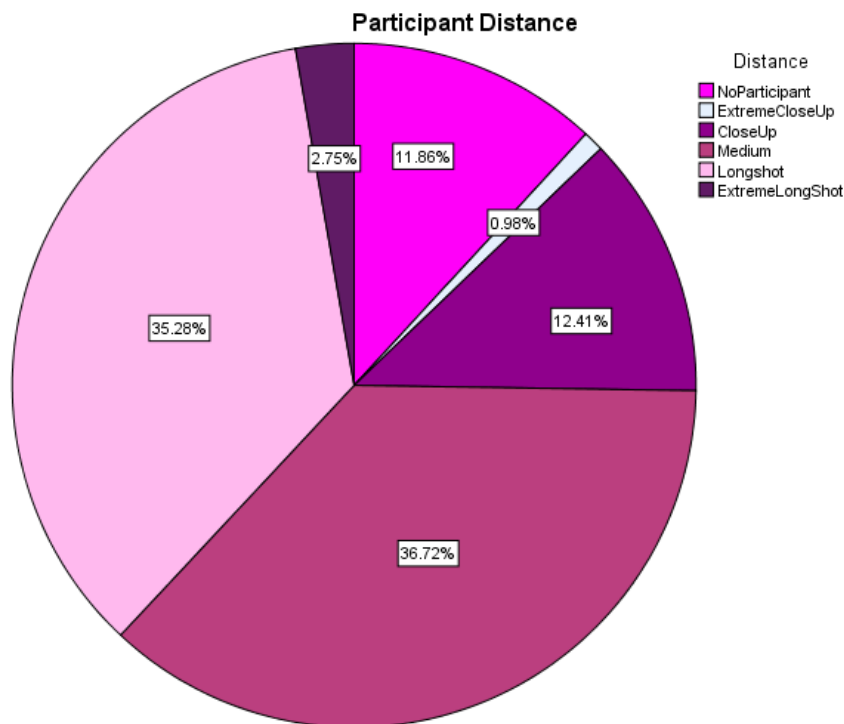
- i. No Participant (no participants found to be in the image)
- ii. Extreme Close Up (e.g. an image of the participant's hand showing their manicure, or an image of the participant taking a picture of just the shoes on their feet)
- iii. Close Up (an image of the participant from the shoulders upwards)
- iv. Medium (an image of the participant from the hips upwards)
- v. Longshot (an image of the participant from the feet upwards)
- vi. Extreme Longshot (an image of the participant including their full body as well as the vast majority of the landscape around them)

This chapter will examine the four Influencers' use of these six different articulations of the semiotic mode Participant Gaze in their images, and how they may increase or decrease the number of likes their posts receive.

4.1 Analysis

Figure 4.1 shows the overall percentages of the categories for Participant Distance in the 1000 Instagram images posted by the four Instagram Influencers.

Figure 4.1
Overall percentages of the categories for Participant Distance



As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the majority of all images posted by the four Influencers represented the semiotic category Medium at 36.72% and the semiotic category Longshot at 35.28%. Following this, was Close Up at 12.41%, although interestingly, Close Up images received the highest number of mean likes for both female Influencers (Table 4.1). 11.86% of the Influencers' posts contained No Participant at all. This category was only found in two Influencers results, and for both received the lowest in mean likes. Figure 4.1 also shows that the Influencers posted very few images representing the more extreme categories. Only

2.75% images represented the Extreme Longshot category, and only 0.98% represented the Extreme Close Up category. This was perhaps surprising considering the category Extreme Longshot received the highest number of mean likes for both male Influencers. Extreme Close Up, however, was only represented in the Influencer Ariana Jenner's posts.

Table 4.1 shows the number of Instagram posts related to each of the categories for the semiotic resource Participant Distance, and the number of mean likes that each Influencer received for each of the categories. 250 images were analysed for each Influencer. All statistics in the table and elsewhere in the chapter pertaining to likes represent thousands (i.e. 116 refers to 116, 000).

Table 4.1

Number of mean likes (in thousands) related to the semiotic resource Participant Distance for the Influencers, Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller

Ariana Jenner	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
No Participant	116	33.903	24.2527	2.2518	10.3	147.0
Extreme Close Up	12	65.408	30.7046	8.8637	15.6	128.0
Close Up	29	103.648	25.6394	4.7611	65.9	152.0
Medium	36	103.756	29.5951	4.9325	40.2	151.0
Longshot	57	94.437	25.4103	3.3657	51.6	176.0
Total	250	67.366	41.1085	2.5999	10.3	176.0
Sebastian Williams						
No Participant	8	9.988	4.1609	1.4711	4.7	17.9
Close Up	24	49.567	47.5211	9.7002	16.2	180.0
Medium	70	58.586	50.5621	6.0433	11.0	182.0
Long Shot	128	62.313	48.1016	4.2516	14.3	198.0
Extreme Long Shot	20	81.290	58.3990	13.0584	13.0	185.0
Total	250	59.889	49.8841	3.1549	4.7	198.0
Heidi Smith						
Close Up	24	473.96	146.563	29.917	278	871
Medium	121	453.92	148.376	13.489	213	1000

Long Shot	101	439.47	137.606	13.692	239	1000
Extreme Long Shot	4	465.50	195.967	97.983	293	681
Total	250	450.19	144.128	9.115	213	1000
Bevan Miller						
Close Up	55	321.69	49.670	6.698	240	442
Medium	137	342.82	98.197	8.390	207	1001
Long Shot	49	347.37	93.198	13.314	238	712
Extreme Long Shot	9	359.89	93.637	31.212	253	554
Total	250	339.68	88.663	5.608	207	1001

A number of important observations can be made from Table 4.1. Firstly, none of the Influencers posted images representing every semiotic category belonging to the semiotic resource Participant Distance. Ariana Jenner, for example, was the only Influencer who posted images representing the category Extreme Close Up ($M = 65.4$, $SD = 30.7$). Secondly, the highest number of mean likes for images posted by the male Influencers, both belonged to the category Extreme Longshot (Sebastian Williams = 81.2 and Bevan Miller = 359.8), although interestingly, Bevan Miller posted his lowest number of images in this category (9) and Sebastian Williams his second lowest (20). As for the female Influencers, Ariana Jenner ($M = 103.6$, $SD = 25.6$) and Heidi Smith ($M = 473.9$, $SD = 146.5$) received the highest number of mean likes for their posts representing the category Close Up (There was a 0.01 difference between Ariana Jenner's Close Up and Medium categories, but this is statistically negligible). Thirdly, Sebastian Williams and Ariana Jenner received their lowest number of mean likes for the category No Participant (Ariana Jenner 33.9 and Sebastian Williams 9.9). They were the only two Influencers who had posts representing this category. These observations will be discussed in more detail below.

4.2 Female Influencers and the category Close Up

As seen in Table 4.1, the two female Influencers Heidi Smith ($M = 473.9$, $SD = 146.5$) and Ariana Jenner ($M = 103.6$, $SD = 25.6$), both received the highest number of mean likes for their posts representing the category Close Up, if the negligible difference of 0.01 between Ariana Jenner's Close Up and Medium categories is discounted. It can be seen from these results that images of females at a closer distance to the camera lens receive more likes on average than images representing the other Participant Distance categories. This is in contrast to the male Influencers Sebastian Williams ($M = 49.5$, $SD = 47.5$) and Bevan Miller ($M = 321.6$, $SD = 49.6$) who respectively received the lowest and second lowest number of mean likes for the Close Up category.

It could be suggested that female Influencers receive more likes for images that are closer to the camera due to western societal beauty norms where the lips, eyes and facial skin often determine attractiveness (Jung, 2018). This focus can be seen in the comments regularly left on the Influencers' posts. One user, for example, commented on a selfie of Ariana Jenner that, "Red lips look stunning on you (heart eyes emoji x3) I mean anything looks stunning on you but I'm soooo loving the red! Love youuuuu! (heart eyes emoji x3)", while another commented "@heidismith what makeup brand do you use? It looks so flawless! You look beautiful! #momgoals (smiley face emoji)".

Furthermore, and following the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), when the face of the participant in an image is close to the camera lens, a more intimate connection with the viewer is created, which for female Instagram Influencers ultimately results in an increased number of likes. This seems to be the case whether the female Influencer primarily markets swimsuits (Smith), or clothes, make-up and accessories (Ariana Jenner). However, as seen

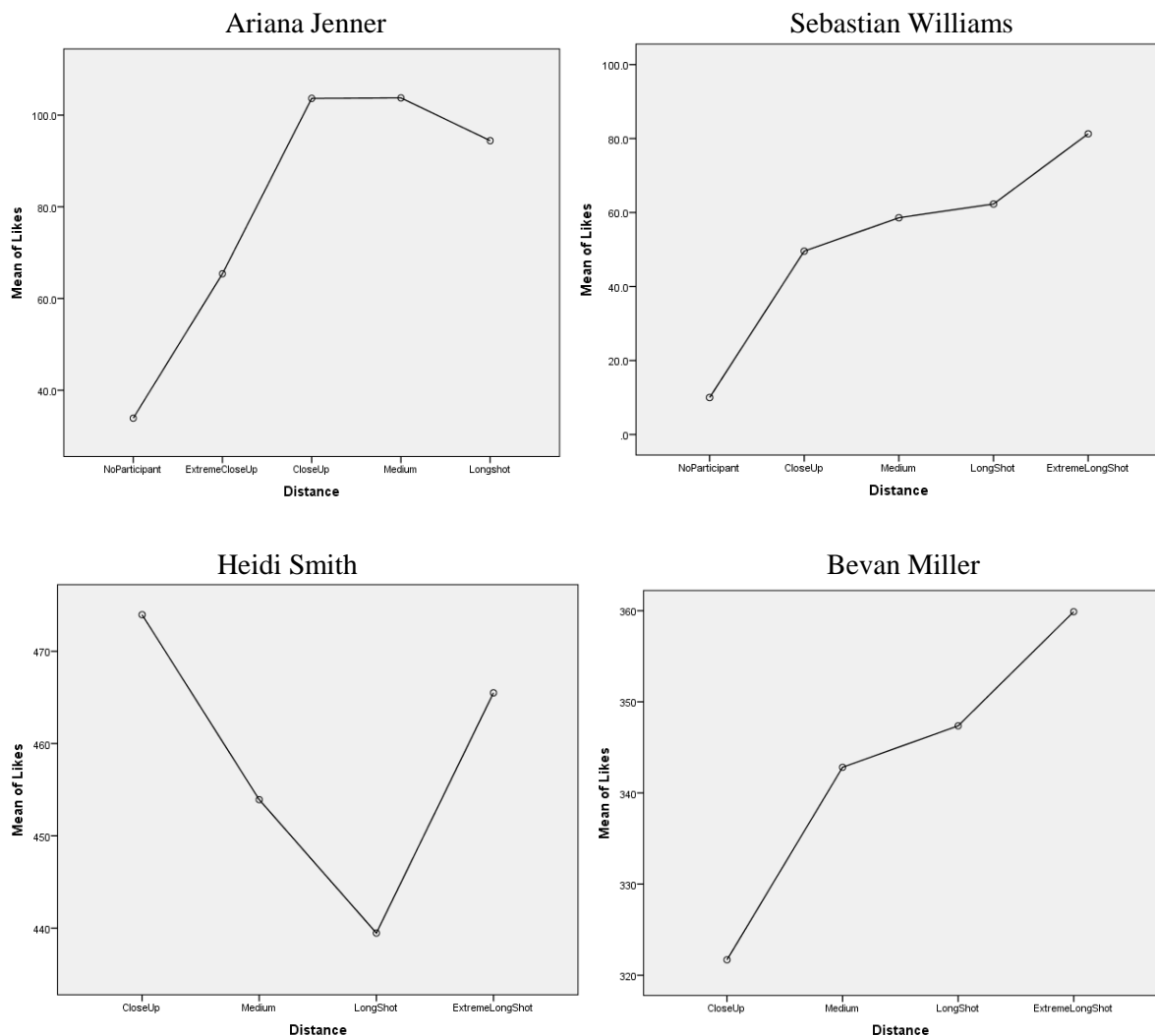
with Ariana Jenner, when the female participants face becomes too close to the camera lens/viewer, the number of mean likes received by that image decreases.

4.3 Male Influencers receive an increase in mean likes number as the perceived distance between the participant in the image and the viewer increases.

The trend lines in Figure 4.2 provide a graphic representation of the mean number of likes received by each Influencer for their posts in the categories related to the semiotic resource Participant Distance.

Figure 4.2

Mean number of likes for the semiotic resource Participant Distance for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



A clear trend can be evidenced for the two male Influencers in the study. The trend lines of Bevan Miller and Sebastian Williams both increase from left to right, with their highest number of mean likes being for the category Extreme Longshot. It would appear that the further away the participant in the image is perceived as being from the viewer, the greater number of likes the image is likely to receive. Furthermore, as seen in Table 4.1, Bevan Miller ($M = 359.8$, $SD = 93.6$) and Sebastian Williams ($M = 89.2$, $SD = 58.3$) received a significantly higher number of mean likes for posts representing the category Extreme Longshot.

These findings are the more surprising from the analysis of this semiotic resource, as in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), an image is more likely to create a positive connection if the participant in the image is perceived as being positioned close to the viewer, for example as a close up. Hence it might be considered that an Influencer's aim to create a connection with their followers would typically be more successful through the use of images where they are perceived as positioned closer to the viewer of that image. Nevertheless, Figure 4.2, however clearly indicates that as their social distance of male Influencers from the viewer increases, the higher the number of mean likes they receive.

It could be suggested that for the followers of the male Influencers a focus on the background or setting of the image in which the participant is located attracts the viewer. For example, in Sebastian Williams' most liked Longshot images, the Influencer is situated within a visually interesting, albeit somewhat ambiguous setting, perhaps the edge of an infinity pool. A culturally exotic structure can be seen on the right hand side of the image. In the distance, and just above the edge of the pool, one can view a city which lies beneath a powerful and

emotive sky. The aesthetically intriguing nature of the composition is enhanced by the image's use of a black and white filter. An image such as this, which also makes it appear as if Sebastian Williams is standing 'on top of the world' is likely to catch the viewer's eye and encourage them to like the post. Similarly, in another of Sebastian Williams' popular Longshot images, he is positioned in front of the bold red of a large door which encompasses the majority of the background. The red matches the participants clothing, creating a striking image.

It could be argued that the mean likes were higher for images representing the category Extreme Long Shot because the viewer's eye is able to indulge in the whole scene. In contrast, a Close Up image provides much less to focus on. However, I would also argue that the participant must also be included in the image to guarantee a favourable response from the follower.

4.4 Ariana Jenner and Sebastian Williams had their lowest mean likes for images represented under the category No Participant

Only Ariana Jenner ($M = 33.9$, $SD = 24.2$) and Sebastian Williams ($M = 9.9$, $SD = 4.1$) had posts representing the No Participant category, and images representing this category received, by a large percentage, the lowest number of mean likes for both Influencers. Images in this category generally included images of landscapes or products. It is, perhaps, difficult for followers of an Influencer to make a connection to an image where the Influencer is absent. As indicated in Section 4.3, even when a landscape, or city background fills the majority of the of an image, it is still crucial that the Influencer is included. Ariana Jenner's extremely high number of posts in this category is of interest. As will be indicated in Chapter 8, her posts intentionally followed a particular colour structure, and so often included images

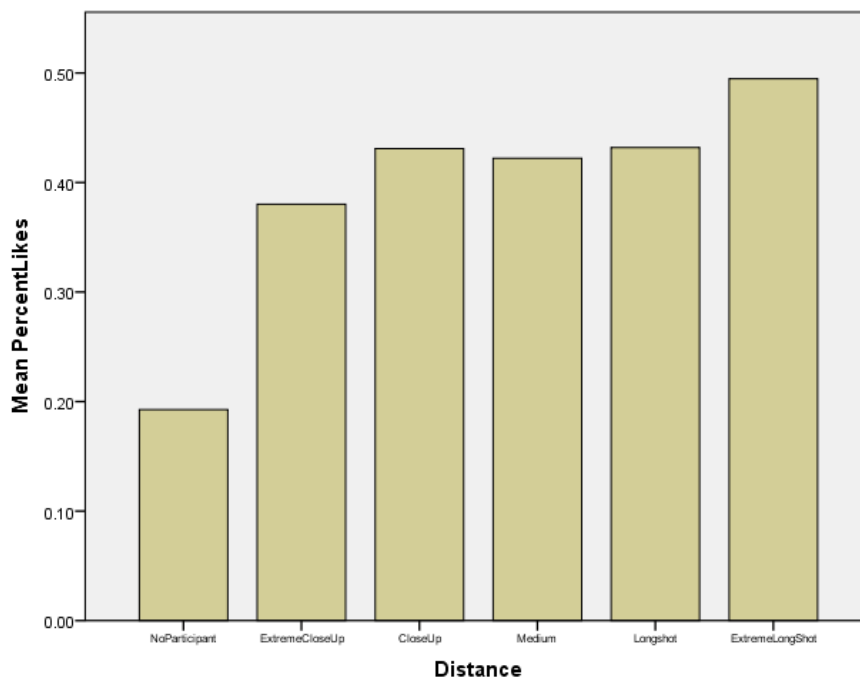
of settings that aligned with the colour of the clothes and products she was marketing at a specific time.

4.5 Normalised likes

Table 4.3 shows the overall number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic resource Participant Distance for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller. To enable this comparison, the number of likes received by the Influencers was normalised.

Figure 4.3

Normalised number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic resource Participant Distance for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



The figure shows that, perhaps with the exception of Close Up, that in general there is a gradual increase in the number of mean likes from No Participant to Extreme Longshot. The normalised results also exhibit a slight spike in mean number of likes for the category Extreme Longshot. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while images in this category

received the highest in mean likes for both of the male Influencers, this was not the case for either of the female Influencers. The categories Close Up, Medium and Longshot show very little difference between one another. Lastly, the graph shows that images representing the categories Extreme Close Up and No Participant received the lowest overall mean number of likes. Images representing Extreme Close Up were only posted by the Influencer, Ariana Jenner. Jenner also posted the largest number of images representing the No Participant category.

4.6 Conclusion

The analysis of the semiotic resource Participant Distance reveals that the gender of the Influencer may have an influence on how the different articulations of certain semiotic modes are received by their followers. As seen in the results, the female Influencers received the highest number of mean likes for images representing the category Close Up and the male Influencers received the highest number of mean likes for images representing the category Extreme Long Shot. It also showed that images that do not portray the Influencer, or another participant, are less likely to be received positively. The next chapter analysis the semiotic resource Gaze.

Chapter 5

Participant Gaze

5.0 Introduction

The analysis in this chapter of the semiotic resource Participant Gaze is influenced by Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotic approach to analysing gaze in images. It can be articulated as five different categories for the purpose of analysing the semiotic choices made in the images posted by Instagram Influencers. These categories relate to where the participant in an image directs their eyes. The category No Participant Eyes is also included to represent images where there was no participant in the image, when a participant's eyes were covered by sunglasses or hair, or when a participant's face was not in frame.

Observations and issues involving the No Participant Eyes category will be further discussed in the analysis below. The five categories contained in the semiotic resource Participant Gaze are:

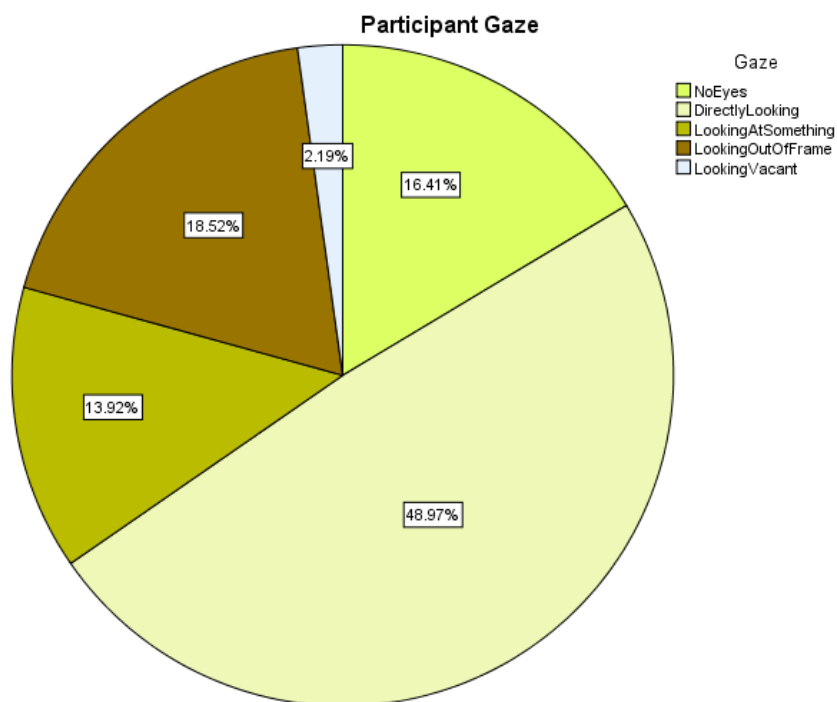
- i. No Participant Eyes (e.g. the participant was not in the photo, the participant was wearing sunglasses or the participants eyes were hidden from the frame)
- ii. Directly Looking (the participant was looking directly into the camera lens)
- iii. Looking at Something (the main participant appears to be looking at another participant, object or landscape within the frame)
- iv. Looking Out of Frame (the main participant appears to be looking away from the camera, but not looking at anything in particular)
- v. Looking Vacant (the main participant does not appear to be looking at anything in particular, or they have a vapid look in their eyes)

This chapter will examine the four Influencers' use of these six different articulations of the semiotic mode Gaze in the Influencers' images, and how they may increase or decrease the number of likes that their posts receive.

5.1 Analysis

Figure 5.1 shows the overall percentages of the categories for Participant Gaze in the 1000 Instagram images posted by the four Instagram Influencers.

Figure 5.1
Overall percentages of the categories for Participant Gaze



As illustrated in Figure 5.1, 48.97% of all 1000 images represented the category Directly Looking, with all four Influencers regularly posted images in this category. This was followed by the category Looking Out of Frame at 18.52%, which was also employed by all Influencers, although interestingly it was Ariana Jenner's highest category in mean likes.

Next was the category No Participant Eyes at 16.41%, perhaps one of the more surprising results, and again largely attributed to Influencer Ariana Jenner, as 133 of her 250 posts had no visible evidence of participant eyes. Following this was the category Looking At Something at 13.92%. With the exception of the Influencer, Heidi Smith who had 80 of her 250 posts in this category, the gaze of most Influencers tended not to focus on objects in the frame. Lastly, Looking Vacant was the least popular category, and was represented by only 28 of all 1000 posts.

Table 5.1 shows the number of Instagram posts related to each of the categories for the semiotic resource Participant Gaze and the number of mean likes that each Influencer received for each of the categories. 250 images were analysed for each Influencer. All statistics in the table and elsewhere in the chapter pertaining to likes are measured in thousands (i.e. 113 refers to 113, 000).

Table 5.1

Number of mean likes (in thousands) related to the semiotic resource Participant Gaze for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller

Ariana Jenner	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
No Participant Eyes	133	38.861	28.0748	2.4344	10.3	147.0
Directly Looking	83	99.729	28.2178	3.0973	40.2	176.0
Looking At Something	5	91.920	12.2869	5.4949	71.1	103.0
Looking Out Of Frame	29	101.241	26.4298	4.9079	60.6	143.0
Total	250	67.366	41.1085	2.5999	10.3	176.0
Sebastian Williams						
No Participant Eyes	12	24.325	40.1017	11.5764	4.7	149.0
Directly Looking	180	58.843	48.5609	3.6195	11.0	198.0
Looking At Something	6	50.050	46.8644	19.1323	16.2	143.0
Looking Out Of Frame	40	70.725	54.2474	8.5773	13.1	192.0
Looking Vacant	12	79.942	50.9817	14.7172	14.3	144.0

Total	250	59.889	49.8841	3.1549	4.7	198.0
Heidi Smith						
No Participant Eyes	22	511.77	152.804	32.578	235	771
Directly Looking	118	441.10	138.159	12.719	213	1000
Looking At Something	80	454.11	156.507	17.498	239	1000
Looking Out Of Frame	28	435.68	120.926	22.853	216	667
Looking Vacant	2	355.00	22.627	16.000	339	371
Total	250	450.19	144.128	9.115	213	1000
Bevan Miller						
No Participant Eyes	11	359.00	72.868	21.971	277	479
Directly Looking	103	343.76	91.043	8.971	230	712
Looking At Something	46	354.26	123.021	18.138	238	1001
Looking Out Of Frame	76	325.01	61.384	7.041	207	546
Looking Vacant	14	326.14	68.333	18.263	240	482
Total	250	339.68	88.663	5.608	207	1001

A number of important observations can be made from Table 5.1. Firstly, while the category Directly Looking was the most frequently employed category of the semiotic resource Participant Gaze, it was not any of the Influencers' highest in mean likes. Secondly, the category No Participant Eyes received the highest number of mean likes for the Influencers Heidi Smith ($M = 511.7$, $SD = 152.8$) and Bevan Miller ($M = 359$, $SD = 72.8$), but the lowest for Ariana Jenner ($M = 38.86$, $SD = 28.07$) and Sebastian Williams ($M = 24.32$, $SD = 40.10$). Thirdly, Influencer Sebastian Williams ($M = 79.9$, $SD = 50.9$) received the highest number of mean likes for their posts represented under the semiotic category Looking Vacant, whereas the other Influencers who employed this category, such as Heidi Smith ($M = 355$, $SD = 22.6$), received their lowest mean likes for this category. The Influencer Ariana Jenner did not have any posts representing the Looking Vacant category. These observations will be discussed in more detail below.

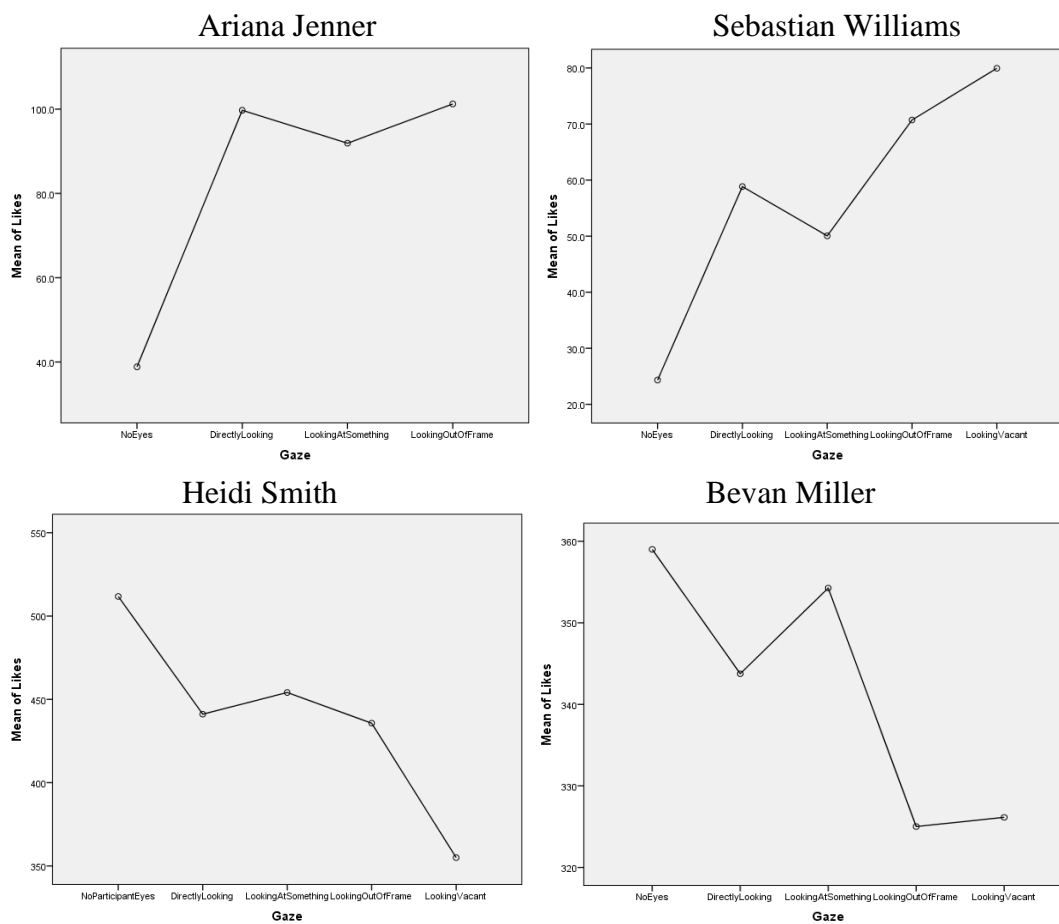
5.2 Contrasting results in the category No Participant Eyes

Both Influencers Heidi Smith ($M = 511.7$, $SD = 152.8$) and Bevan Miller ($M = 359$, $SD = 72.8$) received the highest number of mean likes for their posts in the semiotic category No Participant Eyes. This result perhaps contrasts with Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) suggestion that direct eye contact establishes a pseudo-social relationship between the viewer of the image and the participant in the image, and therefore assists in capturing the audience's (in this case the 'Followers') attention. However, it is nevertheless of note that while Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller received the highest number of mean likes for this category, the Influencers Ariana Jenner and Sebastian Williams received the lowest number of mean likes for the category. The contrast between the two groups could be due to two different factors: Ariana Jenner's unique image style, and the different lifestyles between Smith and Miller, and Jenner and Williams. Firstly, Ariana Jenner's image styling involved the posting over time of successive images containing the same colour hues. These images not only included herself with the clothes and products she was promoting, but also images of objects, architecture and landscapes that often lacked a human participant. However, and as will be found throughout this study, it is clear that such images receive less likes on average than those pictures involving a participant. Secondly, Ariana Jenner and Sebastian Williams predominantly project a metropolitan lifestyle, which involves images of the architectural landscape of the city, including locations such as art galleries, cafés or city streets. These types of No participant Eyes images generally received a low number of likes. In contrast, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller project a very domestic lifestyle, which included images of their homes, their children and/or partners. These types of No Participant Eyes images generally received a higher number of likes.

Figure 5.2 identifies the trends for each Influencer. Although somewhat uneven, and also acknowledging that the successive categories do not form an ordinal scale, there is nevertheless a clear overall increase or decrease in the trend line for each of the individual graphs and in particular, a clear distinction between Ariana Jenner/Sebastian Williams and Heidi Smith/Bevan Miller, as indicated earlier.

Figure 5.2

Mean number of likes for the semiotic resource Participant Gaze for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



As can be seen in Figure 5.2, the trend lines for the Influencers Ariana Jenner and Sebastian Williams, both move upwards from the category No Participant Eyes, to Directly Looking, decrease to the category Looking at Something, and then increased to the category Looking

Out of Frame. The trend line for the Influencer Sebastian Williams also further increased for the category Looking Vacant. In contrast, the trend lines for Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller decreased from No Participant Eyes to Directly Looking, spiked upwards to Looking at Something and then decreased again to Looking Out of Frame (this occurred more dramatically for Bevan Miller in both instances). The only difference between these two latter Influencers was that Heidi Smith's lowest point was the category 'Looking Vacant' whereas this was Bevan Miller's second lowest. As indicated above, it is interesting to note that the lifestyles of Ariana Jenner and Sebastian Williams were distinctly different from Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller.

5.3 Influencers posted the most images representing the category Directly Looking

The images that were most frequently posted by the Influencers belonged to the semiotic category Directly Looking. The one exception was Ariana Jenner. Due to her consistent posting of images in the No Participant Eyes category to suit her particular image styling, her Directly Looking posts were her second most frequent. Interestingly, however, while Directly Looking posts were generally the most frequently posted category by the Influencers, they did not receive the highest in mean likes for any Influencers (Sebastian Williams, $M = 58.8$; Heidi Smith, $M = 441.1$; Bevan Miller, $M = 343.7$ and Ariana Jenner, $M = 99.729$). It should also be mentioned that, with the exception of Sebastian Williams, the standard deviation for this category was also relatively high and Heidi Smith received the lowest and highest number of mean likes for this category compared to her other results. These results were surprising as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest that viewers tend to respond more favourably to images where direct eye contact is prevalent. For Kress and van Leeuwen, "the participant's gaze (and the gesture, if present) demands something from the viewer, demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her" (p. 118). It could

be suggested that the Influencers also believe that Directly Looking gaze aids in creating a connection with their audience, whereas in actuality, this is not always the case.

These findings, which show that the types of images most often posted by the Influencers do not necessarily correlate to those that are most liked by viewers, raises an important issue.

Given that Influencers are often being paid by product producers, and that the success of their influencing work was measured by the number of likes that their posts receive, it seems unusual that Influencers are not more aware of the types of posts that are more likely to be favourably received.

5.4 Inconclusive results as a whole

Perhaps with the exception of the Directly Looking and No Participant Eyes categories discussed above, the results regarding the semiotic resource Participant Gaze were otherwise relatively inconclusive in terms of providing information on the way images in the different categories representing this semiotic resource influenced viewers. This perhaps indicates that the effect an Influencer's gaze and eye contact has on a viewer of an Instagram image differs for the followers of different types of Influencers.

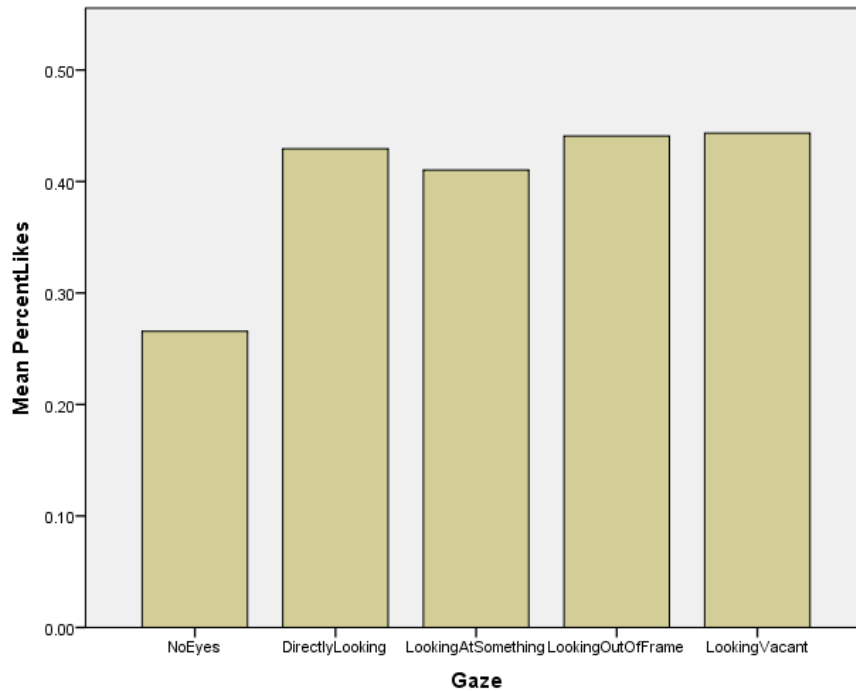
5.5 Normalised likes

Table 5.3 shows the overall number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic scale Participant Gaze for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller. To enable this comparison, the number of likes received by the Influencers was normalised. The normalised percentages provided a slightly different result to what was found in the individual analysis of the four Influencers' posts. With the exception of the category, No Participant Eyes', the differences between the number of mean likes for each of the

categories was marginal. It is also of interest that the category, No Participant Eyes only received approximately half the number of mean likes than the other four categories.

Figure 5.3

Normalised number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic resource for categories in the semiotic scale Participant Gaze for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



5.6 Conclusion

The analysis of the semiotic resource Participant Gaze was relatively uninformative as there was no consistency across all four Influencers. This would suggest that the way a participant's eyes are directed in an image does not *in general* influence whether an Instagram follower likes an image. The analysis of other resources such as Participant Distance (Chapter 4) and Participant Relationship (Chapter 6) were better indicators of what type of semiotic choice would receive more likes on average. It is important to note however, that while there was little evidence of regularity across most of the semiotic categories in this analysis of Participant Gaze, it was nevertheless informative in terms of shedding light on the

way people respond to No Participant Eyes images. This was expected to be relatively low in mean likes, but was in fact the highest in mean likes for the posts of the Influencers Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller. The study on Participant Gaze also provided insights into the image trends that the Influencers follow, for example their overwhelming use of the category Directly Looking. However, while 48.97% of the images posted belonged to Directly Looking, the category did not receive the highest number of mean likes for any of the Influencers in the study. The next chapter analysis the semiotic resource Participant Relationship.

Chapter 6

Participant Relationship

6.0 Introduction

The analysis of the semiotic resource Participant Relationship in this chapter was influenced by Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) research on social semiotics, as well as Klassen, Jasper and Schwartz's (1993) study of the portrayal of men and women when they are pictured together in magazine advertisements. Drawing upon these studies, the semiotic resource Participant Relationship is articulated into six different categories for the purpose of analysing the semiotic choices made in the images posted by Instagram Influencers. These different categories identify whether a participant is alone or accompanied in the images - or the level of intimacy conveyed, if a participant is accompanied in the image. The six categories contained in the semiotic resource Participant Relationship are:

- i. No Participant (e.g. there is no human participant in the photo, or only an insignificant part of a human body, such as a hand, was in the photo)
- ii. Single Participant (the participant is alone in the image)
- iii. More Than One (the main participant was seen with other participants in a setting where others are present but not connected to the main participant). A minimal or no degree of intimacy between participants can be observed
- iv. Minor Physical (the main participant appears to be engaging in light physical contact with one or more other participants, e.g. holding hands or shaking hands). An emerging degree of intimacy between participants can be observed

- v. Strong Physical (the main participant is seen engaging in moderate physical connection with one or more other participants, e.g. an embrace or a kiss on the cheek). A strong degree of intimacy can be observed
- vi. Full Physical (e.g. the main participant is seen engaging in full physical contact with one or more other participants, e.g. passionate kissing and cuddling) A full degree of intimacy is observed in these images

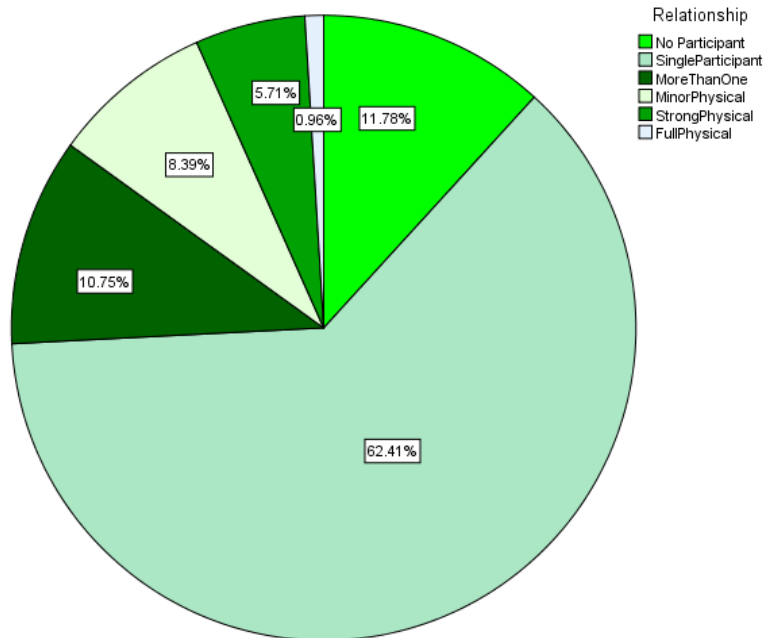
This chapter will examine the four Influencers' use of these six different articulations of the semiotic resource Participant Relationship in their images, and how they may increase or decrease the number of likes that their posts receive.

6.1 Analysis

Figure 6.1 shows the overall percentages of the categories for Participant Relationship for the 1000 Instagram images posted by the four Instagram Influencers.

Figure 6.1

Overall percentages for the categories of Participant Relationship



As illustrated in Figure 6.1, 62.41% of all images posted by the Influencers represented the category Single Participant, which was by far the largest category for the semiotic resource Participant Relationship. The second largest category was No Participant at 11.78%. Again, this was largely due to the Influencer Ariana Jenner’s data in which 117 out of the 250 images contained no participants. Following closely behind was the category More Than One at 10.75%, and then the category Minor Physical at 8.39%. The second smallest category represented among the data was Strong Physical at 5.71%. The number of images posted that represented Full Physical was a very small 0.96%.

Table 6.1 shows the number of Instagram posts related to each of the categories for the semiotic resource Participant Relationship, and the number of mean likes that each Influencer received for each of the six categories. 250 images were analysed for each Influencer. All

statistics in the table and elsewhere in the chapter pertaining to likes represent thousands (i.e. 117 refers to 117, 000).

Table 6.1

Number of mean likes (in thousands) related to the semiotic resource Participant Relationship for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
Ariana Jenner						
No participant	117	33.580	23.3981	2.1632	10.3	147.0
Single participant	130	97.178	27.9248	2.4492	24.2	176.0
More than one	3	93.167	52.9001	30.5419	40.2	146.0
Total	250	67.366	41.1085	2.5999	10.3	176.0
Sebastian Williams						
No participant	8	9.988	4.1609	1.4711	4.7	17.9
Single participant	185	60.651	48.0822	3.5351	11.0	185.0
More than one	38	62.726	52.1147	8.4541	12.2	192.0
Minor physical	16	76.844	65.1975	16.2994	13.1	198.0
Strong physical	3	19.633	5.4903	3.1698	13.8	24.7
Total	250	59.889	49.8841	3.1549	4.7	198.0
Heidi Smith						
Single participant	140	398.47	98.875	8.356	216	682
More than one	17	456.76	148.347	35.979	239	726
Minor physical	50	486.08	180.052	25.463	213	1000
Strong physical	36	569.00	141.185	23.531	382	1000
Full physical	7	601.14	106.432	40.228	413	727
Total	250	450.19	144.128	9.115	213	1000
Bevan Miller						
Single participant	151	329.91	64.489	5.248	230	565
More than one	47	345.94	90.109	13.144	236	656
Minor physical	28	351.25	95.308	18.012	244	712
Strong physical	24	375.38	169.939	34.689	207	1001
Total	250	339.68	88.663	5.608	207	1001

A number of observations can be made from Table 6.1. Firstly, images representing the semiotic category Single Participant were the most frequently posted by each of the Influencers, with no single Influencer posting less than 130 images in this category. Nevertheless, Influencers Heidi Smith ($M = 398.4$, $SD = 98.8$) and Bevan Miller ($M = 329.9$, $SD = 64.4$) received the lowest number of mean likes for their posts in this category. In contrast, Ariana Jenner received the highest number of mean likes for her posts in this category.

Secondly, for the Influencers Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller there is an overall correlation between the increase in intimacy represented in their images and the increase in the number of mean likes these posts received. For example, Smith only receives 398.47 mean likes for Single participant where there is no intimacy at all, but receives 601.14 mean likes for Full Physical where the images often involve passionate kissing and cuddling. However this correlation does not occur with Sebastian Williams, who receives his lowest number of mean likes for Strong Physical ($M = 19.633$).

Thirdly, the images posted by Ariana Jenner only represented half of the six semiotic categories in the semiotic resource Relationship. She did not post images representing the Minor Physical, Strong Physical or Full Physical categories. Furthermore, although she posted a large number of images in the No Participant category, these (not unexpectedly) received the lowest number of mean likes.

Another observation, not evidenced statistically in Table 2.1, but emerging from an analysis of the images themselves, is that those including child participants received a comparatively high number of mean likes. This was observed in Heidi Smith's Full Physical category, for

example, where six of seven images representing this category were images of her with her children. These initial observations and others will be discussed in more detail below.

6.2 Single Participant was the most frequently posted category.

As seen in Figure 6.1, 62.41% of all posted images were categorised as representing the semiotic category Single Participant. Each Influencer posted more than 130 posts in this category. However, while images representing this category were the most frequently posted by each of the Influencers, two received the lowest number of mean likes for their posts in this category (Smith and Miller), while another received the highest number of mean likes for this category (Ariana Jenner). It was perhaps not surprising that the Single Participant category was represented so often in the data, as Influencing primarily involves constructing the self as a brand. To achieve this, Influencers generally post images of themselves to promote a message or a product, which people (followers) engage with through likes and comments (Krantz, 2016). Nevertheless, it is of interest why Smith and Miller received the lowest number of mean likes for this category. It could be suggested that followers may have lost interest in the oversaturation of images containing only the Influencer and that the images containing other participants, including the friends and family members of the Influencer, were viewed as be fresh and exciting.

This excitement can be seen in some of the comments, which provide support for the multi-participant content that these Influencers have posted. On an image containing a ‘shoulder to shoulder’ selfie of Heidi Smith and her sister Emilee, one user comment states, “SISTA GOALS x3 pink double heart emoji i love you both SO much!!!! 1x mind blown emoji 1x heart eyes emoji”. On a selfie which Bevan Miller posted of himself and his mother hugging

to show her recovery from her cancer battle, a user commented, “Lovely picture, god bless your mum. Keep fighting 1x hands praying emoji she looks beautiful x”.

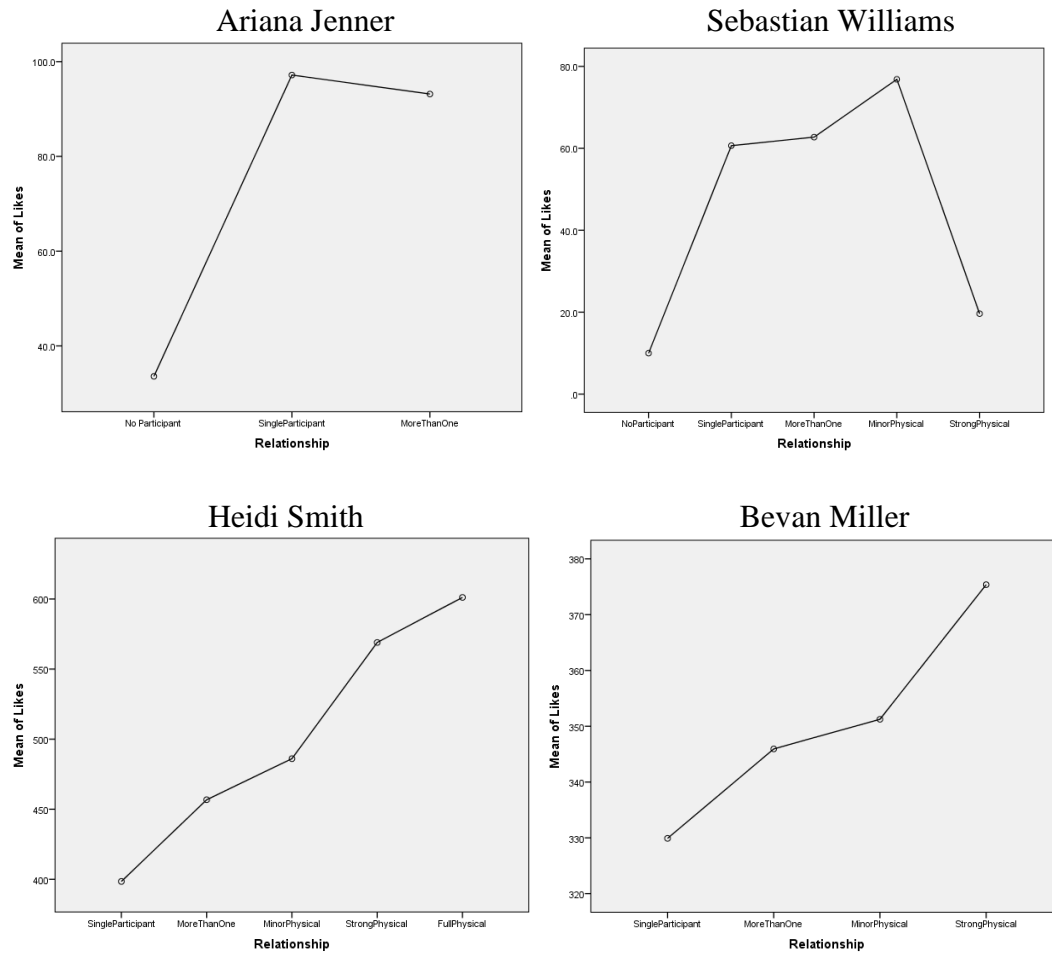
In contrast, of the 250 images analysed for Ariana Jenner, 117 represented the No Participant category. The mean number of likes received by this category was approximately one third of that received by her Single Participant category. Ariana Jenner’s Instagram feed was creatively stylized so that, besides having a focus on colour as mentioned previously, every second or third image that she posted represented the category ‘No Participant’. This approach may have avoided the oversaturation of self-images that the other Influencers produced, and which as I argued above led to a decrease in the mean number of likes they received for their ‘Single Participant’ posts. This is perhaps why Ariana Jenner’s posts containing a single participant - almost always herself - were more favourably viewed by her followers (her ‘Single Participant’ category received her highest mean number of likes at 97.1).

6.3 Correlation between the increases in intimacy and increase in mean likes

Figure 6.2 identifies the trends of each Influencer for the semiotic resource Participant Relationship. It can be seen that the number of mean likes in Smith and Miller’s graphs increase as the level of intimacy between participants in the images increase, Ariana Jenner’s number of mean likes increases from No Participant to Single Participant, but drops slightly when there is more than one participant in the image, while Williams’ graph also shows a general increase from No Participant to Minor Physical, but interestingly the mean number of likes received drops remarkably when images showing a strong physical relationship are posted.

Figure 6.2

Mean number of likes for the semiotic resource Participant Relationship for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



Smith and Miller’s posts generally reflect a particular type of domestic lifestyle, and as a result many of the participant relationships seen in their images repeatedly involve images of their children and partners. It would appear that the images containing these recurring relationships attract their viewers and followers and hence receive a higher number of mean likes than images that do not depict these Influencer relationships.

One noticeable exception to the observation that the more intimacy in an image, the more mean likes it will receive can be seen in the line graph representing Sebastian Williams, where there is a strong drop from Minor Physical to Strong Physical. However as indicated in Table 6.1, Strong Physical was only found to represent 3 of the 250 images posted by Sebastian Williams ($M = 19.6$, $SD = 5.4$), and so could be considered an anomaly within the data. This is particularly likely given that the number of mean likes for the category Minor Physical (one level of intimacy below Strong Physical) was his highest at $M = 76.8$.

It was also observed that the type of participant included within the image influenced the number of likes that a post received. In some of the images, the participants appearing alongside the Influencer were celebrities and/or models. For example, a Minor Physical image posted by Sebastian Williams where he was accompanied by the Louis Vuitton head menswear designer, Virgil Abloh, was his most liked image within the data at 198⁴. In comparison, a Minor Physical image of Williams with a relative, which was posted around the same time period, received 173 likes. These can also be contrasted with another image posted at the same time of Sebastian Williams alone, which only received 137 likes. A similar situation was also found for Bevan Miller. An image he posted of himself with the singer Camila Cabello received 654 likes, while a Single Participant image he posted directly after this - a selfie of himself - only received 343 likes. Hence, it could be argued that while the resource of Participant Relationship can contribute to the number of likes a post receives, (i.e. the greater the level of intimacy between participants, the more likely the images are to be seen favourably by followers), the nature of the participants seen along the Influencer can also impact strongly upon how the image is received by the followers. It is also of note that celebrities are often tagged in the images posted.

⁴ As indicated earlier, all likes represented are in thousands, i.e. 198 likes refers to 198,000 likes.

6.4 The inclusion of child participants increases the number of mean likes

It was also observed that child participants were regularly represented in both Heidi Smith and Bevan Millers data. In many instances, the children in the images were the Influencer's own. Bevan Miller had welcomed the birth of his son during the study, and Heidi Smith already had one daughter and one son before the study had commenced.

With only one exception, all of Heidi Smith's images for the categories Strong Physical and Full Physical included images with her children, and as indicated, these categories received her highest number of mean likes. While Bevan Miller only included two images with his child for the category Strong Physical, the individual images were amongst his highest in maximum likes. For example, as seen in Table 6.1, the maximum number of likes Bevan Miller received for the category Strong Physical was 1001. The particular image that received 1001 likes involved a medium shot image of Miller shirtless, holding his newborn son. Heidi Smith had two images in the data that received her highest like count of 1000, one of which represented the category Strong Physical. This image was reproduced from a professional black and white photoshoot and shows Smith deeply embracing her children.

Given these observations, one could argue that the inclusion of child participants in an image, especially when they are the Influencers own, generate a relatively higher number of likes per image. This is most likely to be due to the emotional attachment that the followers have developed between themselves and the lives of the Influencers. In some instances, this attachment is evident in the followers' comments. One user, for example, referring to an image of Heidi Smith with her son and daughter commented, "Wolfie looks like such a big boy with his haircut! Heart eyes emoji x2", and another user, referring to Bevan Miller's first image with his newborn son commented "May you and your family, omg you are all a

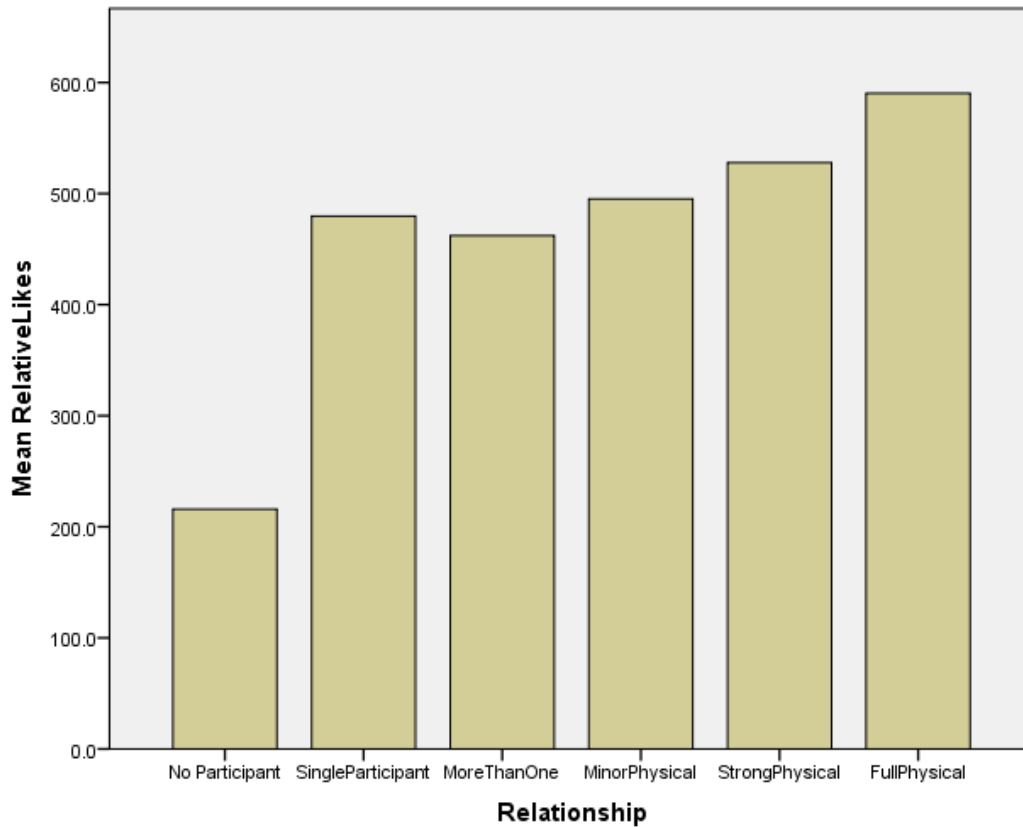
family, how beautiful is that? BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL !!!!!!! My you be blessed with the most precious moments.”

6.5 Normalised likes

Table 6.5 shows the overall number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic scale Participant Relationship for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller. The table indicates that, with the exception of a slight dip in More Than One, there is an increase in the number of mean likes from No Participant to Full Physical. Firstly, this reiterates the observation that having participants in an image is more likely to increase the number of likes an image receives than if the image had no participants, and secondly that the more intimacy exhibited in an image between the Influencer and other participants, the more likes that image would be expected to receive.

Figure 6.3

Normalised number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic resource Participant Relationship for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



As indicated in Table 6.1, the slight dip in More Than One can be attributed to Ariana Jenner, who only posted three images represented by this category. The other three Influencers, Williams, Smith and Miller all showed an increase in mean likes from Single Participant to More Than One. It is important to note, that while the category Full Physical exhibited the highest number of normalised mean likes, this category was only found in Heidi Smith’s data.

6.6 Conclusion

The semiotic resource Participant Relationship organised the Influencers' images into categories according to whether a participant in the image was alone or accompanied, as well as the level of intimacy conveyed, if a participant was accompanied in the image. As Instagram Influencers have a job which is centred around self-promotion, many of the images within the data were represented by the semiotic category Single Participant. Interestingly, however, while the percentile was over 60% for this category, it was only found to receive the highest number of mean likes for the Influencer Ariana Jenner. In contrast, the Influencers Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller received the lowest number of mean likes for this category.

In general, the analysis of the semiotic resource Participant Relationship provided evidence that the more intimacy exhibited in an image between the Influencer and other participants, the more likes that image would be expected to receive. A closer examination of the images themselves also indicated that the Influencers Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller, were found to receive more likes for images which represented child participants, particularly when the children were their own, and the inclusion of celebrities also increased the like count. There were a few exceptions. The mean number of likes for Sebastian Williams dropped drastically for the category Strong Physical, whereas the mean number of likes he received for the category Minor Physical were his highest. Overall, however, the analysis of the semiotic resource Participant Relationship was informative and provided generalisable information that could help support future Influencer marketing. The next chapter analysis the semiotic resource Participant Clothing.

Chapter 7

Participant Clothing

7.0 Introduction

The semiotic resource Participant Clothing can be articulated into six different categories for the purpose of analysing the semiotic choices made in the images posted by Instagram Influencers. These categories define the amount of clothing visibly worn by the participants within an image. Categorising the amount of clothing worn by the participants in the images was at times difficult, as the participants' full bodies were often partly obscured by the image frame, or by another object in the image, so that the actual extent of their clothing was not always evident. As an example, it was not always clear whether a topless man with his lower torso obscured was fully naked or not. However, the images were categorised according to what could be assumed by the viewer, so in this case the image was categorised as naked. Indeed, Naked proved to be a problematic category, and this will be further discussed in the analysis below. The six categories contained in the semiotic resource of Participant Clothing are:

- i. No Participant (no human or animal participant could be seen in the photo, or only a small part of a participant, such as a hand, could be seen in the photo)
- ii. Naked (the participant was wearing no clothes, or there was no evidence of the participant wearing clothes)
- iii. Partly Naked (e.g. the participant was wearing a bikini, lingerie, underwear or a towel)

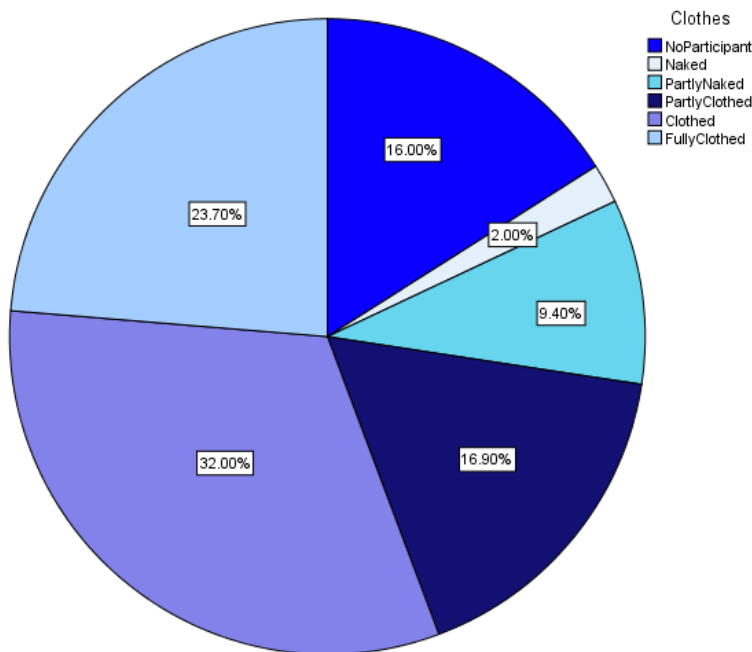
- iv. Partly Clothed (e.g. a male participant was wearing street shorts, or a female participant was in shorts and a crop top)
- v. Clothed (the participant was mostly clothed, e.g. a forearm, calf or midriff was showing)
- vi. Fully Clothed (no skin apart from face, neck and hands were showing)

This chapter will examine the five different articulations of the semiotic resource Participant Clothing in the Influencer’s images, and how they may increase or decrease the number of likes that their posts receive.

7.1 Analysis

Figure 7.1 shows the overall percentages of the categories for Participant Clothing for the 1000 Instagram images posted by the four Instagram Influencers.

Figure 7.1
Overall percentages of the categories for Participant Clothing



As illustrated in Figure 7.1, 32% of the 1000 posts analysed for this study represented the semiotic category Clothed. Images representing this category were posted by all Influencers except Ariana Jenner. Following this, 23.70% of the posts represented the Fully Clothed category. 16.90% of all images contained Partly Clothed participants, followed closely by images that contained No Participant (16%). The No Participant images can again mostly be attributed to the Influencer Ariana Jenner who posted 133 images that contained no human participants. 9.40% of all images contained Partly Naked participants, and lastly, only 2.0% of all images contained Naked participants.

Table 7.1 shows the number of Instagram posts related to each of the categories for the semiotic resource Participant Clothing, and the number of mean likes that each Influencer received for each of the categories. 250 images were analysed for each Influencer. All statistics in the table and elsewhere in this chapter pertaining to likes represent thousands (i.e. 113 refers to 113, 000).

Table 7.1
Number of mean likes (in thousands) related to the semiotic resource Participant Clothing for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
Ariana Jenner						
No Participant	133	38.926	28.6448	2.4838	10.3	152.0
Naked	4	84.200	12.8382	6.4191	66.4	97.0
Partly Naked	22	109.345	25.9041	5.5228	60.6	176.0
Partly Clothed	41	101.654	27.8490	4.3493	51.9	163.0
Fully Clothed	50	95.086	25.8596	3.6571	40.2	146.0
Total	250	67.366	41.1085	2.5999	10.3	176.0
Sebastian Williams						
No Participant	12	11.975	4.7092	1.3594	4.7	19.4

Partly Naked	4	49.225	52.2673	26.1336	18.1	127.0
Clothed	74	67.508	55.5645	6.4592	13.1	198.0
Fully Clothed	160	60.226	47.1502	3.7275	11.0	192.0
Total	250	59.889	49.8841	3.1549	4.7	198.0
Heidi Smith						
No Participant	3	598.33	44.004	25.406	554	642
Naked	5	554.20	186.932	83.599	399	871
Partly Naked	48	477.85	116.068	16.753	216	707
Partly Clothed	59	431.27	140.102	18.240	240	991
Clothed	113	430.87	148.636	13.983	213	1000
Fully Clothed	22	495.95	156.864	33.444	314	1000
Total	250	450.19	144.128	9.115	213	1000
Bevan Miller						
No Participant	12	321.25	50.393	14.547	265	431
Naked	11	318.09	41.256	12.439	262	399
Partly Naked	21	390.86	159.249	34.751	285	1001
Partly Clothed	68	349.96	83.712	10.152	250	656
Clothed	83	328.61	82.751	9.083	207	712
Fully Clothed	55	332.45	73.257	9.878	236	549
Total	250	339.68	88.663	5.608	207	1001

A number of observations can be made from Table 7.1. Firstly, Ariana Jenner ($M = 109.3$, $SD = 25.9$) and Bevan Miller ($M = 390.8$, $SD = 159.2$) received their highest number of mean likes for the category Partly Naked, although the standard deviation for Miller in this category was relatively high. Furthermore, Heidi Smith received her second highest number of mean likes for the category Naked ($M = 554.2$, $SD = 186.93$), again, however, there was a relatively high standard deviation. Although these statistics might point to the trend of nakedness or partial nakedness encouraging a viewer to like a post, a closer look at Figure 7.1 indicates a varied response to the posts in term of Participant Clothing. For example, Sebastian Williams received his highest number of mean likes for his images in the Clothed

and Fully Clothed categories, and both Bevan Miller's and Ariana Jenner's Fully Clothed category had higher mean likes than their Naked categories.

Lastly, Heidi Smith's results for this category were unusual in that her category No Participant uncommonly received the highest mean number of likes, but also the lowest maximum number of likes. It is also of interest that Smith had the biggest difference between her minimum and maximum number of likes for the category Clothed. These observations and others will be discussed in further detail below.

7.2 High number of mean likes for the categories Partly Naked and Naked.

Ariana Jenner ($M = 109.3$, $SD = 25.9$) and Bevan Miller ($M = 390.8$, $SD = 159.2$) both received the highest number of mean likes for their images representing the semiotic category Partly Naked, even though both participants posted substantially more Instagram posts in other Clothed categories. Bevan Miller's data for the Partly Naked category was particularly interesting for this category, as he received his highest dispersion of likes - from a minimum of 285 to a maximum of 1001 - for this category. While not as widely dispersed, the variation between Ariana Jenner's lowest number of likes at 60.6 and her highest number of likes at 176 was also of note. Furthermore, with the exception of her three No Participant images, Heidi Smith received the highest number of mean likes for her images representing the Naked category. Again, she received her highest standard deviation for this category, perhaps suggesting that while largely popular among viewers, they tend to have varying reactions to these type of posts.

It could be suggested that other semiotic resource may strongly influence the way the partly naked images are received. For example, the most liked image of Ariana Jenner's data set

(176) was a Partly Naked image of Ariana Jenner wearing a bright orange and extremely revealing bikini. It was also a Longshot image which placed Ariana Jenner in front of a beautiful swimming pool with luscious tropical greenery in the background. Furthermore, the particular of colour of the bikini may have also influenced the number of likes the image received. Colour will be discussed in the next chapter.

Like Ariana Jenner, Bevan Miller's most liked image (1001) also represented the Partly Naked category. However, unlike Ariana Jenner, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the success of the image can also be linked to his domestic and family oriented lifestyle focus. The image showed him shirtless, holding his newborn child against his bare chest. The popularity of this image could therefore be attributed to both his portrayal as shirtless, showing off his toned physique (Participant Clothing resource), combined with the portrayal of his intimate relationship with his child (Participant relationship resource).

7.3 Varying overall trends for the semiotic resource *Participant Clothing*

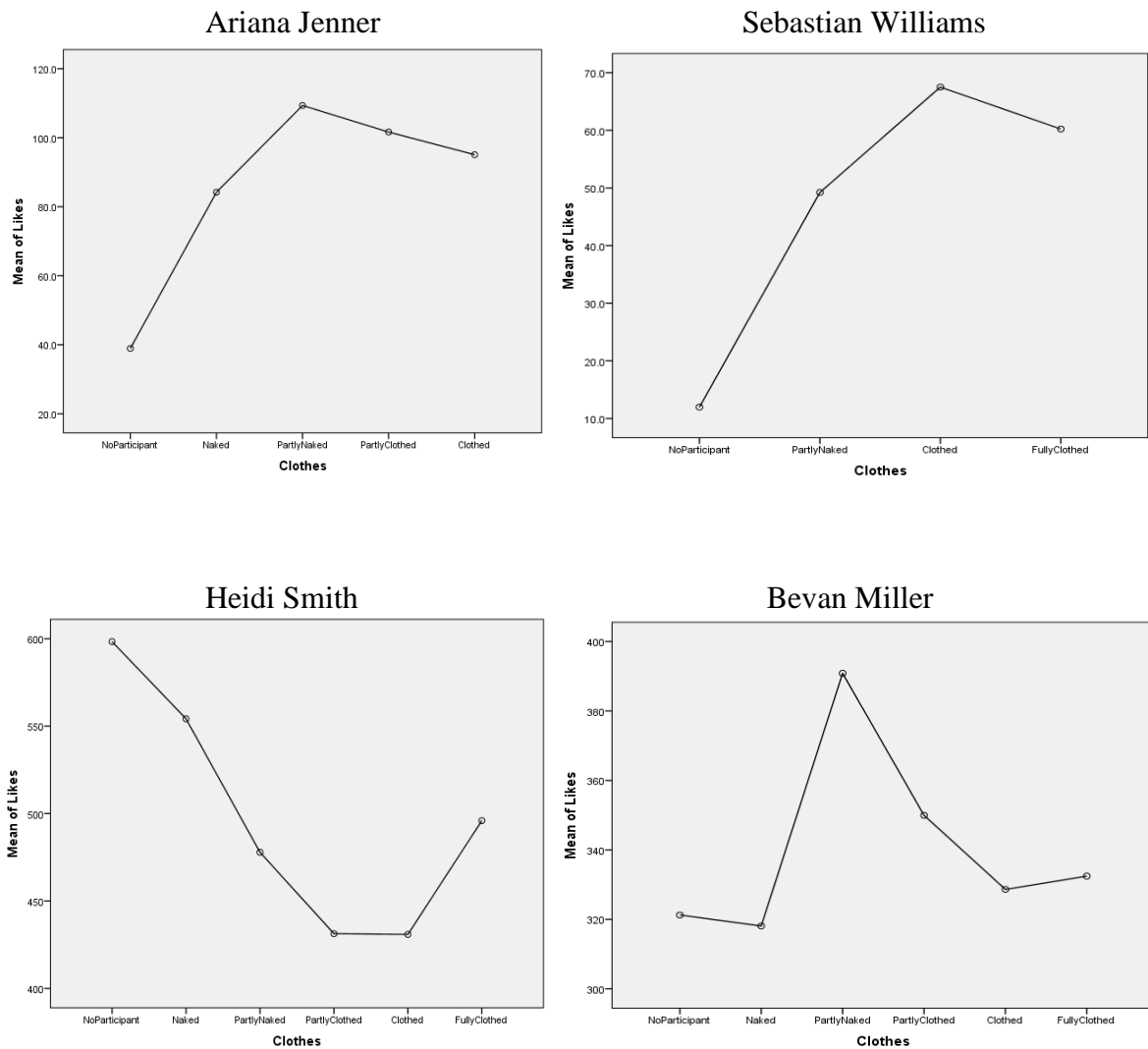
The trend lines in Figure 7.2 provide a graphic representation of the mean number of likes for each of the Participant Clothing categories received by the individual Influencers. They exhibit a range of different trends.

The trend lines of Ariana Jenner and Sebastian Williams appear similar upon first glance, indicating a gradual increase in mean likes until the participants in the images are more fully clothed, after which a fall in mean likes is observed. However, Ariana Jenner's mean likes begin to fall at the Partly Clothed category, while Williams' mean likes begin to fall at the Fully Clothed category. Heidi Smith's number of mean likes progressively falls until the

Fully Clothed level, where there is then a small increase. In contrast, the mean likes for Bevan Miller - the only Influencer representing all categories – are more or less alike, with the exception of Partly Naked which shows a significant spike.

Figure 7.2

Mean number of likes for the semiotic resource Participant Clothing for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



7.4 Influencers posted the most images under the Clothed category

As seen in Figure 7.1, the semiotic category Clothed was the most popular category within the overall data at 32%. While Ariana Jenner did not post any images representing this

category, a large percentage of Heidi Smith's (45.2%) and Bevan Miller's (33.2%) images represented this category. The Influencer Sebastian Williams ($M = 67.5$, $SD = 55.5$), received the highest number of mean likes, as well as his highest maximum number of likes, for this category, but surprisingly he posted over twice as many images representing the Fully Clothed category. The category of Clothed is possibly the most commonly posted category overall, largely because, with the exception of swimwear, it provides an Influencer with the most clothing possibilities for the image, and in particular the most options for the brands being advertised.

It is of interest that Smith received both her lowest and highest number of likes for the Clothed category. Her lowest liked image (213) is a image of Smith and three other female participants all wearing black long sleeved, sports jackets which covered most of their bodies. In contrast, her highest liked image (1000) was an image of her two children in a dress or shorts, and a shirt engaging in eye contact and holding hands. It could be suggested that the clothing seen in her image that received the lowest number of likes was quite different from the style of clothing normally found in her images. Furthermore clothing most likely had little impact on her most liked image, which clearly involved the portrayal of her relationship with her children (See chapter 6).

7.5 Naked is the least represented category

For this study, the category Naked was solely based on what could be seen in the image. This is because a sense of nakedness is often only suggested, rather than explicitly portrayed, by the Influencer, for example, by cropping the image at the waist for a shirtless male, or by only depicting naked shoulders and a towel wrapped around the head for a female. Out of the 1000 images analysed for the study, the semiotic category Naked only represented 2% of all

the Influencer's posts. Ariana Jenner posted 4 images that were categorised as Naked; no images representing the naked category were found for Williams, and for Miller (11) and Smith (5) the Naked category contained their second lowest number of posts (after No Participant).

Of these images, the category Naked was mainly represented by selfies posted by the female Influencers and Medium images posted by Bevan Miller. The Influencer Ariana Jenner ($M = 84.2$, $SD = 12.8$) received her second lowest number of mean likes and her lowest maximum like for the category Naked. As an Instagram model, her role is to sell and advertise clothing and when clothes were not included in her images, it appeared as if her followers were less interested in her images. Interestingly, Wirtz, Sparks & Zimbres (2018) studied changes since the 20th century in how the public view nude and sexualised women and men in advertising, stating that "we did not find a significant positive effect for sexual appeals on brand" (p. 186-187). The study also indicated that women often feel negatively towards other women in sexualised advertisements, or naked women in images, as it can have a negative impact on their own body image. Wirtz et al. also stated that the male reaction to advertisements appealing to sex was more positive, but regardless of gender the purchase intention for consumers was no more or less if the person within an advertisement was sexualised/naked or not.

7.6 The different representations of the male gender in the semiotic resource of Participant Clothing

While the focus of the study was not specifically on gender, the different responses in the category Participant Clothing to the images of the two males was of interest. In Figure 7.2 it can be seen that Sebastian Williams' mean likes clearly increase as he is seen wearing more

clothing in his images, only exhibiting a slight dip at Fully Clothed. It could be suggested that the presence of more clothing, for example the wearing of a suit and tie, in various circumstances can enhance certain masculine qualities. Furthermore, for a male, the wearing of full layers of clothes was, and is still often seen, as a symbol of wealth and personal success (Edwards, 1997). This could be one suggestion as to why Williams' followers were more engaged with his images represented by the category Clothed and Fully Clothed. In one of the images posted by Sebastian representing the category 'Clothed', for example, he is pictured in an orange shirt, blue trousers and cowboy boots with a flower in his hair. One user commented, "The flower, the light, the shadows, the pose... dog gone it! Errrthang! Doppity Dopeness". While the comment was relatively colloquial in nature, the intention behind it appears to be in support of Sebastian' appearance and it reads as providing words of appreciation for Sebastian's outfit – and his particular portrayal of masculinity (Edwards, 1997).

In contrast to this, however, the other male Influencer in the research, Bevan Miller, had the highest mean number of likes for the category Partly Naked ($M = 360.8$, $SD = 159.2$). Partly Naked for the male Influencers in the study almost exclusively represented images where they had their shirts off and were only wearing shorts or swimming trunks. Only 22 of Bevan Miller's 250 images represented this category, and they were his highest in mean number of likes. As an Influencer, Miller constructs for himself a particular type of masculine identity involving a muscular body that is toned and defined. As Durante, Fasoli, and Mari, et al. (2018) state, "a way to emphasize masculinity and dominance is by portraying men as fit and muscular to convey a representation of physical strength." (p. 344), and it is this type of portrayal through largely sexualised images which results in Miller's's higher engagement levels with his followers. As an example, one user commented "So shredded wow, bodygoals

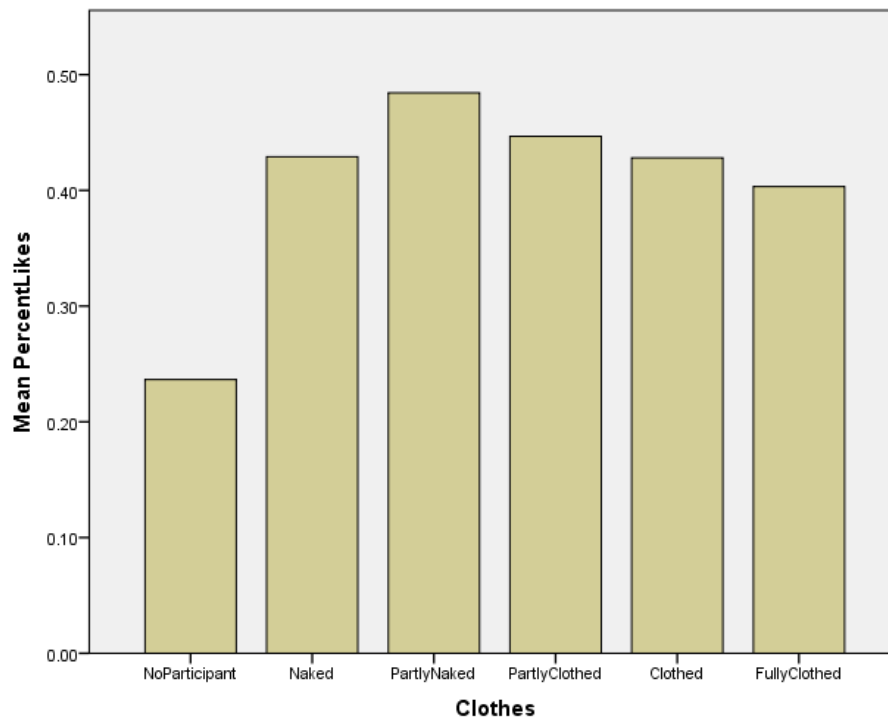
fire emoji” to an image of Miller cut off from the lower crotch down and showing him shirtless, but wearing grey shorts. Another user commented on the same image, “I had to tell my man about my insane crush on you. Its gotten to THAT point where im like so invested that it feels like cheating because I stare for more than 10 seconds at each photo. This one received at MINIMUM a 20 second stare. Just. Fuck”.

7.7 Normalised likes

Table 7.3 shows the overall number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic resource Participant Clothing for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller. To enable this comparison, the number of likes received by the Influencers was normalised.

Figure 7.3

Normalised number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic resource Participant Clothing for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



The figure shows an increase in mean likes from No Participant to Partly Naked, followed by a very gradual, and relatively insignificant decrease to Fully Clothed. Overall, this suggests that Partly Naked images are only slightly more likely to receive more likes than other images, and as with the analysis of other semiotic resources, images without participants at all are more likely to receive fewer likes.

7.8 Conclusion

The semiotic resource Participant Clothing aimed to identify whether the amount of clothing a participant was wearing in an Instagram image had a noticeable impact on the number of likes that image would receive. In this chapter it was observed that while images representing the category Clothed were those most frequently posted by the Influencers (with the exception of Sebastian Williams), they consistently did not receive the highest in mean likes. Secondly, the semiotic category Naked was the least represented, and repeatedly received the lowest, or near lowest, number of mean likes, however in comparison, the category Partly Naked received the highest number of mean likes for two of the Influencers. Nonetheless, just over 9% of the images were found to represent this category. The chapter also briefly explored the different constructions of masculinity employed by the male Influencers and how these impacted on their followers' engagement with their posts. The next chapter examines the semiotic resource Colour.

Chapter 8

Colour

8.0 Introduction

The semiotic resource Colour refers to the dominant colour, or hue, of an image, and is articulated into 11 categories for the purpose of analysing the semiotic choices made in the images posted by Instagram Influencers. The selection of these 11 colours are based upon van Leeuwen's (2011) "seven basic colours (white, black, red, yellow, brown, violet, green and blue)" (p. 5), the three tones, black, white and grey, and the colour orange, which was not included as a basic colour by van Leeuwen. In general, the semiotic analysis of colour in this chapter was largely influenced by van Leeuwen's (2011) work *The Language of Colour: An Introduction*. The 11 categories of the semiotic resource Colour were:

- i. White
- ii. Red
- iii. Orange
- iv. Brown
- v. Yellow
- vi. Green
- vii. Blue
- viii. Pink
- ix. Purple
- x. Grey
- xi. Black

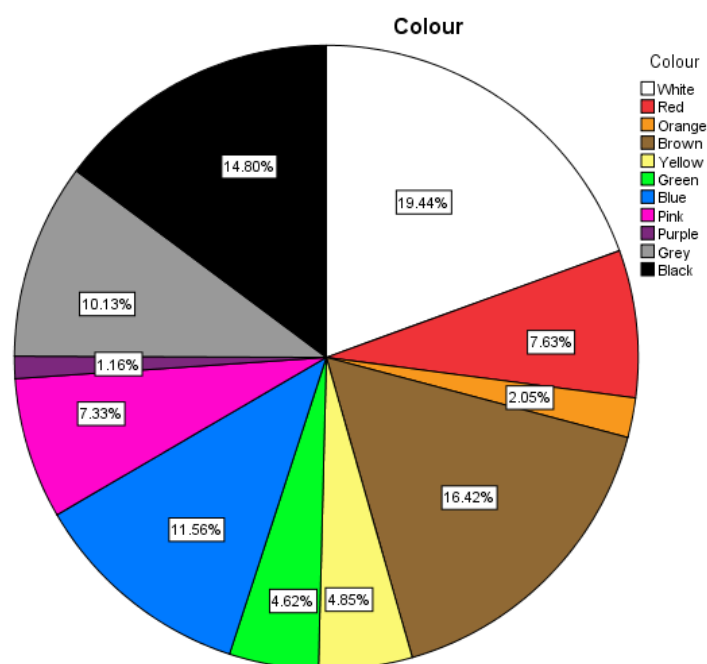
It is worth noting that what might be referred to as ‘tan’, a hue that dominated many images of participants wearing swimwear, was for simplicity, categorised in this study as brown.

This chapter will examine the four Influencers’ use of these eleven different articulations of the semiotic mode Colour in their images, and how they may increase or decrease the number of likes their posts receive.

8.1 Analysis

Figure 8.1 shows the overall percentages of the categories for the semiotic resource Colour in the 1000 Instagram images posted by the four Instagram Influencers.

Figure 8.1
Overall percentages of the categories for Colour



As illustrated in Figure 8.1, the colour that most dominated the 1000 Influencers’ images analysed for this study was white at 19.44%. This was then followed by the category Brown

at 16.42%. In contrast to this, the two lowest percentages were for the category Orange at 2.05%, and the category Purple at 1.16%. It is of interest that the category Purple (as seen in Table 8.1) was only found in the Influencer Ariana Jenner’s results ($M = 80.2$, $SD = 36.7$).

Table 4.1 shows the number of Instagram posts related to each of the categories for the semiotic resource Colour, and the number of mean likes that each Influencer received for each of the categories. 250 images were analysed for each Influencer. All statistics in the table, and elsewhere in the chapter, pertaining to likes represent thousands (i.e. 62 refers to 62, 000).

Table 8.1:
Number of mean likes (in thousands) related to the semiotic resource Colour for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller

Ariana Jenner	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
White	62	66.050	41.0082	5.2080	10.3	147.0
Red	21	65.448	34.3748	7.5012	24.2	129.0
Orange	7	77.957	60.8693	23.0064	17.2	176.0
Brown	67	68.424	42.3345	5.1720	12.1	152.0
Yellow	29	64.452	42.9855	7.9822	15.6	143.0
Green	4	78.975	43.9189	21.9594	18.0	113.0
Blue	2	61.600	58.5484	41.4000	20.2	103.0
Pink	42	67.514	42.6325	6.5783	12.2	163.0
Purple	8	80.238	36.7076	12.9781	31.6	141.0
Black	8	57.038	26.9337	9.5225	28.0	96.9
Total	250	67.366	41.1085	2.5999	10.3	176.0
Sebastian Williams						
White	40	55.268	43.6900	6.9080	4.7	169.0
Red	31	48.726	47.0579	8.4518	13.8	182.0
Orange	8	54.338	41.2302	14.5771	17.6	143.0
Brown	18	54.778	46.4012	10.9369	11.0	146.0
Yellow	26	76.727	57.7784	11.3313	10.4	192.0

Green	20	71.690	57.9949	12.9681	16.3	198.0
Blue	24	74.596	58.5725	11.9561	16.3	185.0
Pink	3	20.967	3.3710	1.9462	17.2	23.7
Grey	34	46.706	37.3992	6.4139	12.2	126.0
Black	46	64.359	52.8382	7.7906	10.0	180.0
Total	250	59.889	49.8841	3.1549	4.7	198.0
Heidi Smith						
White	75	419.13	123.460	14.256	235	727
Red	19	403.95	74.841	17.170	277	528
Brown	30	490.03	120.736	22.043	338	871
Yellow	7	598.71	171.810	64.938	388	927
Green	7	425.71	88.276	33.365	308	538
Blue	32	508.56	110.671	19.564	248	726
Pink	15	425.73	119.323	30.809	239	620
Grey	23	489.78	199.922	41.687	240	1000
Black	42	420.00	179.919	27.762	213	1000
Total	250	450.19	144.128	9.115	213	1000
Bevan Miller						
White	25	326.28	95.374	19.075	207	712
Red	7	352.00	71.919	27.183	284	498
Orange	4	353.00	79.246	39.623	261	449
Brown	58	361.81	123.968	16.278	240	1001
Green	22	334.41	78.622	16.762	244	524
Blue	47	333.70	61.118	8.915	230	554
Grey	42	327.67	68.844	10.623	238	628
Black	45	335.51	78.839	11.753	236	565
Total	250	339.68	88.663	5.608	207	1001

A number of observations can be made from Table 8.1. Firstly, the range of colours that could be identified as dominating Influencers images was different for each Influencer, suggesting they each have their own unique colour preferences. Secondly, images dominated by the colours White and Black were frequently posted by Influencers, but as seen in Table 8.1, these images only received a mediocre level of mean likes, with images categorised as

White receiving the very lowest number of mean likes for three of the Influencers. Many of the images that had White as the predominant colour were often less dramatic or striking images, and typically contained less detail. They also and tended to rely more on artificial lighting, which tended to render the image as flat. Referring to the dynamism of colour, van Leeuwen (2011) points out that “aspects of colour interaction have a single aim – increasing the illusion of three-dimensionality and textuality in two-dimensional, flat images” (p. 38). Thirdly, as seen in Table 8.1, the category Yellow received the highest number of mean likes for the Influencers Sebastian Williams ($M = 76.7$, $SD = 57.7$) and Heidi Smith ($M = 598.7$, $SD = 171.8$). These observations, and others, will be discussed in more detail below.

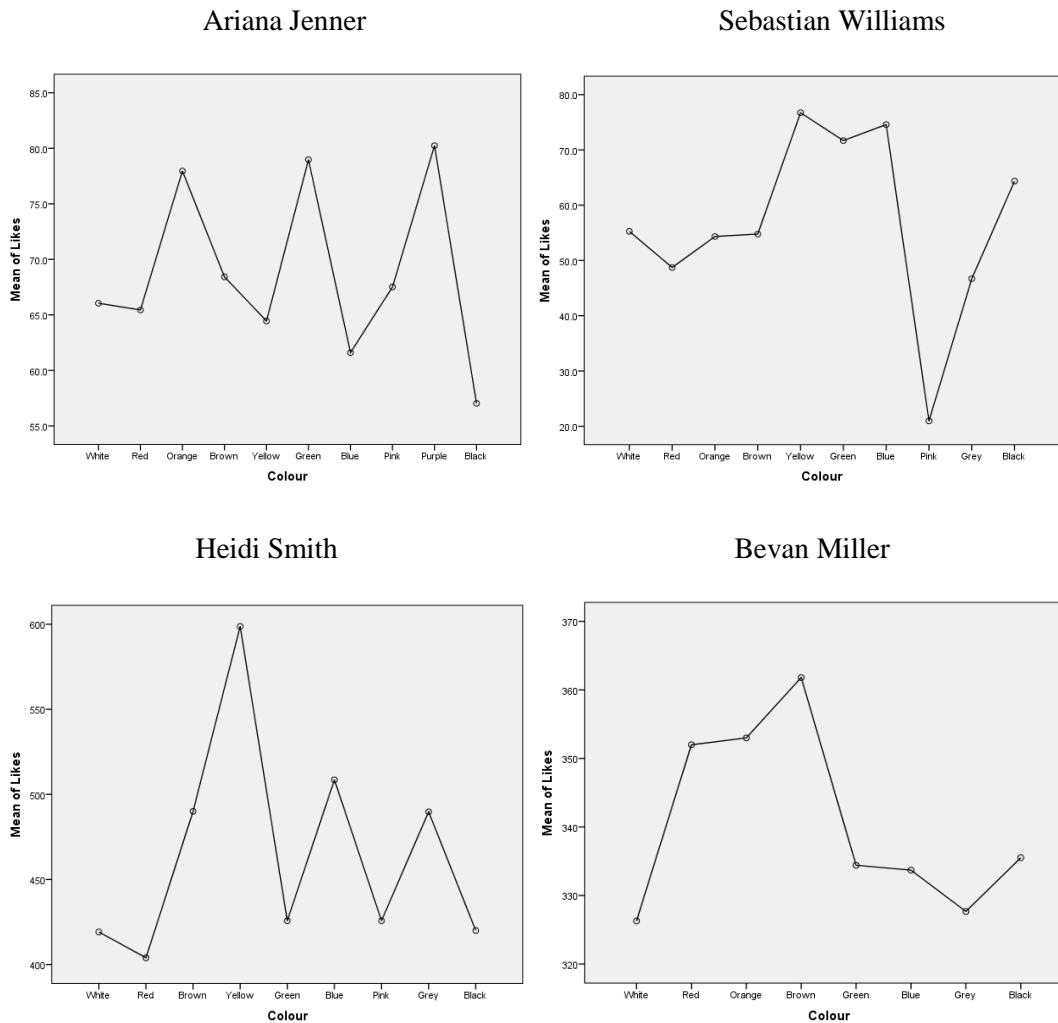
8.2 Each Influencer focused on a different range of colours

Figure 8.2 visually identifies each Influencer’s use of colour using line graphs. It is acknowledged here that the successive categories do not form an ordinal scale, as typically found in such graphs. Nevertheless, Figure 8.2 does provide visually accessible information about each Influencer’s use of colour relative to mean number of likes.

What is of interest is that the graphs seen in figure 8.2 for each Influencer noticeably show either an upward or downward spike in mean likes for one colour in particular. For Ariana Jenner it is Black (downward), for Williams it is Pink (downward), for Smith it is yellow (upward) and for Miller it is Brown (upward). Smith also shows a relatively noticeable downward spike for the category Red as well. Other observations are that the categories Blue and Green never received the highest or the lowest in mean likes, and the categories White and Black were generally seen receiving lower mean likes across all Influencers, in particular for the female Influencers.

Figure 8.2

Mean number of likes for the semiotic resource Colour for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



8.3 The categories White and Black were popular among Influencers, but not their followers

Overall, the categories White and Black were found to be more frequently posted than other categories by the Influencers, even though they repeatedly received a lower number of likes. As indicated in Figure 8.1, 19.44% of the 1000 images posted by the Influencers represented the category White, while 14.80% of the 1000 images posted by the Influencers represented the category Black.

In Table 8.1 it can be seen that both of the female Influencers Ariana Jenner ($M = 57.03$, $SD = 26.9$) and Heidi Smith ($M = 420$, $SD = 179.9$) received some of their lowest mean likes for the category Black, even though, for example, 17% of all Heidi Smith's posts were dominated by the colour Black. Furthermore, although images categorised as White were the most frequently posted, three of the Influencers, Ariana Jenner, Williams and Miller received their lowest number of likes for a White image.

A examination of these three White images shows that the images posted around the same time in the respective Influencers feed received a far higher number of likes. It was also observed that all of these White images, which only contained the Influencer themselves, were tonally very minimal. The White image posted by Bevan Miller, which portrayed him in bed, under white sheets with his dog, received 275⁵ likes, while the image posted directly afterwards, which had Blue as the dominant colour, received 329 likes. These two images were only posted 24 hours apart.

Furthermore the White image posted by Sebastian Williams, which portrayed him as Fully Clothed in all white (including his shoes) against a white doorway, received 34 likes, whereas a Red image posted four days prior received 39 likes, and a Yellow image posted 72 hours afterwards received 37 likes. The White image posted by Ariana Jenner, which portrayed her clothed in white, against a white background received 70 likes, whereas a very similar image from around the same time in the Yellow category received 135 likes. Ariana Jenner, as mentioned, tends to post images in colour series, and this will be discussed further in Section 8.4 below.

⁵ As indicated all numbers referring to likes represent thousands. So 275 here, refers to 275,000 likes.

It could be argued that these two categories were unpopular with followers, as images exhibiting dominant hues of black and white could be perceived as indistinct or uninteresting due to their monochromatic qualities. Deng et al (2014) suggests that black and white imagery initiates ‘a streamlined response’, that is, the consumer (in this case follower) of a monochromatic image loses focus, because they feel that the choice to view the image is not their own. In contrast, colour imagery captures the consumers’ (followers’) focus, and making it appear as a voluntary response.

8.4 Yellow received the highest mean number of likes for two Influencers

Sebastian Williams and Heidi Smith both received the highest number of mean likes for the category Yellow ($M = 76.7, SD = 57.7$ and $M = 578.7, SD = 171.8$ respectively). The colour yellow is traditionally known as a colour which evokes happiness due to its bright and vibrant features (van Leeuwen, 2011). Research also suggests that the colour yellow promotes positive feelings such as joy, praise and surprise (Duh & Kolar, 2014). As such, it could be suggested that images represented by the category Yellow receive more likes on average by the viewers of the Influencers posts due to the feeling that the colour offers. As van Leeuwen (2011) suggests “yellow is bright, serene, gay, softly exciting” (p. 23). It is important to note, however, that Influencer Bevan Miller posted no images representing this category and Ariana Jenner’s Yellow category images received neither her highest in mean likes or her lowest at $M = 64.4, SD = 42.9$.

8.5 Ariana Jenner and her use of colour

While not directly seen in the statistical results, Ariana Jenner styled her Instagram feed in a way which stood out from the other Influencers in the study; that is, she would consecutively

post a series of eight to ten images, all having the same dominant colour. Furthermore, whenever a new series began, Ariana Jenner would include a hashtag in the caption of the image to indicate the colour series, for example, #PinkSeries. She would also often post a ‘transitional’ image between a colour series that was ending, and the new series. This image would generally contain the two dominant colours of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ series. As the results in Table 8.1 show, some colour series contained fewer images than others. The colour series that contained the most images were Brown (67), White (62), Pink (42), Yellow (29) and Red (21). The largest number of her posts represented the category Brown. This was primarily due to Ariana Jenner’s tanned skin tone being a dominant feature in her Partly Naked and Partly Clothed images. The colour series were very popular with her followers and regularly received positive comments, with the followers often expressing their anticipation for the next post in a series, or the next colour series. For example, upon the transition to the #WhiteSeries, a user commented on the white focused image of a handbag “I’m here for every series!!! No matter the color; Ariana Jenner SLAYS!!!”.

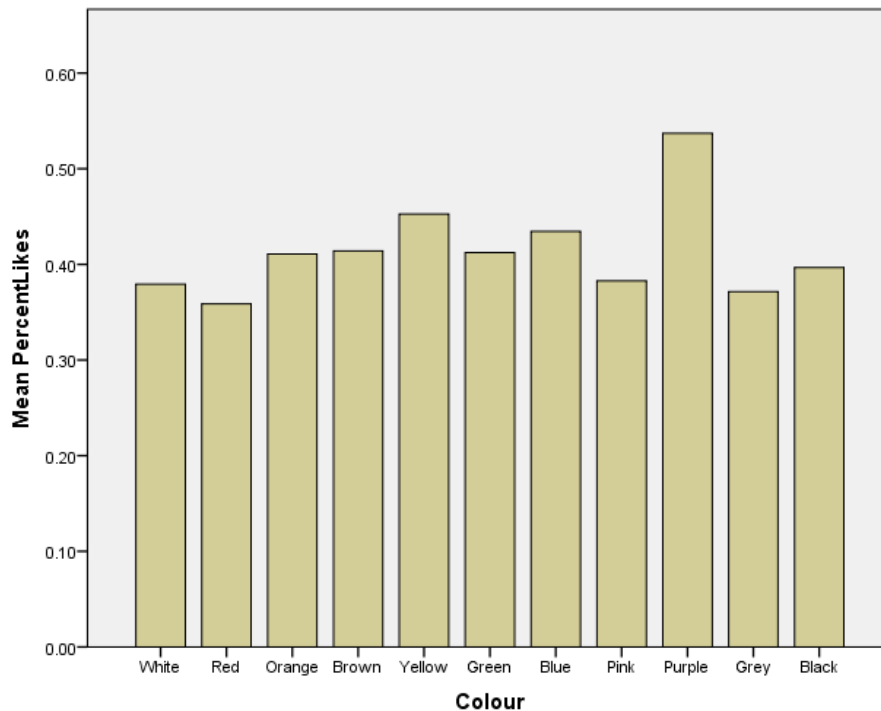
Ariana Jenner’s #PinkSeries from the data received 67.5 mean likes and included her second highest liked image from the study at 163. Her followers were particularly drawn to this series and provided very supportive comments, such as “I love how you do series! It also helps that you are totally stunning! Love from New Orleans kiss emoji”. Overall, Ariana Jenner’s strategic use of colour, provided insights into how Influencer’s creative use colour online can have a positive effect on user engagement. This will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

8.6 Normalised likes

Table 8.5 shows the overall number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic resource Colour for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller. To enable this comparison, the number of likes received by the Influencers was normalised.

Figure 8.3

Normalised number of mean likes for categories in the semiotic resource Colour for Ariana Jenner, Sebastian Williams, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller



The only noticeable observation here is posts categorised as being dominated by the colour purple received the highest number of mean likes overall. However, it is important to note that as previously mentioned, images representing the category Purple were only found in Influencer Ariana Jenner's results ($M = 80.2$, $SD = 36.7$). Otherwise, and perhaps with the slight exception of Yellow, the normalised percentages do not indicate that any Colour in general was more likely to make a viewer of an image like that image. As a result, I would

suggest that colour is more likely to be linked to the specific preferences of the individual followers of specific Influencers, rather than followers more generally.

8.7 Conclusion

The analysis of the semiotic resource Colour provided a few observations regarding which colours or dominant hues in an image are more likely to receive positive responses from the followers of specific Influencers. For example, while the categories Black and White were frequently represented in the images posted by the Influencers, they were not as popular with their followers as might be expected. The category Yellow was the more surprising finding, with two of the Influencers receiving the highest in mean likes for images representing this colour. It was also found that throughout the period during which the data was collected, none of the Influencers posted images representing every colour category in their posts. In general, and as stated above, it could be argued that colour is more likely to be linked to the specific preferences of the individual followers of the Influencers, rather than Instagram followers more generally.

Chapter 9

Discussion

9.0 Introduction

The research carried out in this study on the relationship between the types of images posted by Instagram Influencers and the reception of these images, was influenced by Kress and van Leeuwen (1999, 2006) and van Leeuwen (2004, 2011). Drawing upon their social semiotic framework, I was able to articulate the different categories of a number of key semiotic resources used in the images, and evaluate the impact of these different categories on the Influencers followers, measured primarily through the number of likes received. The research is distinctive in its use of descriptive statistics to evaluate viewers' responses to the different articulations of a social semiotic resource. The primary aim of the study was to answer the research question:

What types of images are the viewers of Instagram fashion Influencers more inclined to 'like' and why?

While Chapters 4 to 8 provide responses to this question which are more specifically related to each of the semiotic resource analysed, a number of the more important responses to these questions are summarised in the next section. Following that, the chapter provides a number of more general observations, or examines specific points of interest that appear in, or are related to the analysis. The chapter then provides a postscript, which briefly discusses recent changes with the like function in Instagram, and also provides an update on the four Influencers whose images were examined for this study. After this, the limitations of the research will be discussed, followed by a focus on implications for future research.

9.1 Main findings

This section briefly reiterates the more general findings that emerged from Chapters 4 to 8.

1. Many of the findings do not always follow the social semiotic discussions of Kress and van Leeuwen (1999, 2006). For example, Instagram images that portray a participant with their gaze directed at the viewer, or as representing close social distance do not typically provide a more favourable response as might otherwise be expected, particularly given that these images are often conceptualised by Kress and van Leeuwen as portraying greater ‘involvement’ or ‘contact’ with the viewer.
2. While a number of more generalisable findings about the relationship between the semiotic choices made by the Influencers, and the reception of these choices by their followers, emerged from the study, it was often found that a follower’s response to a particular semiotic choice (e.g. the portrayal of gaze directed at the viewer of the image) was related to the specific identity or lifestyle of the Influencers
3. In many instances, the type of semiotic choices most frequently made by the Influencers in their images often receive the fewest number of likes. This can be seen in particular, in the analysis of the semiotic resources, Participant Gaze and Participant Relationship.
4. Often the response received by the image is the result of the interaction between two or more semiotic resources, for example Bevan Miller's most liked image can clearly be linked to its categorisation as both an image that shows him shirtless (Participant Clothing) and intimately holding his newborn child against his bare chest (Participant Relationship).

5. The impact of colour on the reception of an image is more likely to be linked to the particular preferences of the individual followers of specific Influencers, rather than having inherent properties that have a broader, more generalisable impact.
6. The No Participant category generally received the lowest number of mean likes for the semiotic resources analysed, and thus images not containing participants are generally less favoured by followers than those that do.

9.2 Other observations

This section includes a number of broader observations related to the study.

9.2.1 Influencer lifestyles

An important observation from the study is that the Influencers had unique lifestyles. These were sometimes portrayed in their images and often impacted on the way these images were received. For example, some characterised their lifestyles as urban or domestic, or as centred around their children, their partners, or their careers outside of Instagram. In some instances, there were commonalities amongst the Influencers' lifestyles, for example, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller both had children who were frequently included in their images as part of their portrayal as members of a relatively domestic, suburban lifestyle. In places, these commonalities could be recognised as having a comparable impact on the reception of their images. For instance, Smith and Miller's domestic images with their children were often very well received by their followers.

Another notable commonality was that the Influencers Ariana Jenner and Sebastian Williams had urban lifestyles, with both residing in Los Angeles and New York. They also both worked as models, although Sebastian Williams is a professional model outside the Instagram

context, while Ariana Jenner is an Instagram model. As a result, Sebastian was pictured in his Instagram images during photo shoots, billboard advertisements and runway shows, images which were again well-received by his followers. A longshot image of Sebastian modelling for Evian Water brand, for example, with Blue as the Colour category received an unusually high number of likes compared to his other images.

9.2.2 The impact of Ariana Jenner's image styling

The findings related to the Influencer Ariana Jenner often contrasted with those of the other Influencers because of the particular aesthetic approach she took to the images posted in her Instagram feed. This approach involved the consecutive posting of a series of eight to ten images, all exhibiting the same dominant colour, and often making use of Instagram filters and editing programs such as Lightroom where users can create, or buy, custom presets to develop an image feed in a particular colour tone or style. Ariana Jenner's commitment to this approach was also evident in her frequent posting of No Participant images, which for some of the semiotic resources analysed included over half of all her images. However for every semiotic resource with the category No Participant (including No Participant Eyes), Ariana Jenner received the lowest number of likes for her images that represented this category. As a result, her approach often strongly impacted on the Normalised Percentages section of the analysis of each semiotic resource. Ariana Jenner was also the only Influencer to use the category Purple in the semiotic resource Colour, for which she received the highest mean number of likes.

9.2.3 Gender differences

While the impact of gender was evident in places, the expectations that might be characteristically associated with gender and certain semiotic resources, such as Participant

Clothing, were not evident. This can be seen in the way that the Influencers Heidi Smith, a female, and Sebastian Williams, a male, both had their highest number of mean likes for the category Clothed, whereas Ariana Jenner, a female, and Bevan Miller, a male, both had their highest number of mean likes for the category Partly Naked. This finding was particularly interesting as, following the discussion in 9.2.1, it was observed that these clothing-related findings were most likely due to the portrayals in these particular images of their respective lifestyles.

In contrast, the semiotic resource Participant Distance also produced less surprising findings potentially related to gender. Both Sebastian Williams and Bevan Miller exhibited a steady upward trend in the mean number of likes their images received from the category No Participant to the category Extreme Longshot. In contrast, the two female Influencers Ariana Jenner and Heidi Smith had more mean likes for the category Close Up⁶.

9.3 Postscript to the study

9.3.1 Changes to Instagram's 'like' system

On the 18th of July 2019, almost one year after this study commenced, Instagram started running a test in seven countries, New Zealand included, that would hide from the public the total number of likes that each Instagram post had received. This test was for the mobile version of the app, and not the desktop version. The other countries included were Australia, Brazil, Canada, Ireland, Italy and Japan (Fitzgerald, 2019) and later in November 2019, the USA was also included in this test (Yurieff, 2019). Instagram carried out the ongoing test “with the intention of freeing Instagram users from judgment and helping people focus ‘less

⁶ Ariana Jenner technically had a 0.108 higher number of mean likes for Medium, but this is statistically negligible in the context of this discussion.

on likes and more on telling their story’” (Scott, 2019, para. 5). Users of the app had varying opinions on the test, with many acknowledging its underlying ideals. One Twitter user wrote, for example, “Likes have officially dropped off my Instagram and I really love it. I already feel like I’m not looking for how many people have engaged and I just pay attention to what’s written and been posted. #InstagramLikes” (Bassi, 2019). Other users, such as Influencer Mikaela Testa, claimed that the change would hurt the livelihood of Influencers, such as herself, who were dependent on making a living through the photo-sharing app. This is because brands and advertising firms who work with Influencers use likes as a statistic to establish the reception of an image representing their particular brand in comparison to that representing another similar brand. The likes system was also used to establish the amount of money allocated to an advertising budget spent on Influencers. In brief, likes are a simple way for a brand to figure out an Influencers engagement with their followers. Nevertheless, this study commenced one year before the ‘likes test’ took place, and meant that the study was able to go ahead as planned. However, this change, which may affect related studies with a similar focus, does not deter from the valuable data recorded for the present study.

9.3.2 An update on the four Influencers

The data was captured for this study in 2018. This section provides a brief update on the four Influencers in order to identify if there any notable changes in the types of images they are posting, or the number of likes they are receiving, and so on, two years after the data was first collected.

In 2020, all four Influencers are still active on Instagram and continuing to collect earnings for their Influencing work, promote brands and carry out sponsored posts or advertisements.

The Influencer Ariana Jenner continues to post 'colour series' images and the number of likes she tends to receive for her posts are similar to the findings of this study. Images of herself receive approximately 90k likes or more, and her No Participant images tend to receive between 20 and 30k likes. Interestingly, Jenner also recently married, and the images that she posted of her wedding tended to receive approximately 200k on average. This was an increase on her most popular image in the present study, which received 176k likes.

The number of likes received by the images of the other New York based Influencer, Sebastian Williams, has notably increased since the data for the study was collected. His posts now frequently receive over 200k likes. Furthermore, the minimum number of likes he has received for an image since the collection of the data for the study is 104k, which is a stark contrast compared to the minimum number of likes he recorded for the data (4.7k). A major reason for this increase could be due to his increasing popularity within the celebrity world as a result of his appearances on the runway in New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week, as well as his appearance at the Met Gala in 2019.

There has been little change in the reception of Bevan Miller's images. He is still posting images of himself, his child, his partner, his dog and his friend, and is still receiving 250-350k likes on average. He is also still endorsing similar products. Like Ariana Jenner, he has married, and similarly the images of his wedding received a higher number of likes than usual, with the most popular receiving 726k likes.

There has also been little change in the Influencer Heidi Smith's images and their reception. Heidi Smith, however, was the only Influencer from a country affected by Instagram's like removal test, and following the two weeks after this took place, the average number of likes

her images received was approximately 25k less than prior to this change. However, her likes eventually began to return to their previous numbers. This suggests that Influencer followers, accustomed to the viewing the number of likes a post receives, are - at least initially - less inclined to like an image when this function is absent.

9.4 Implications

Given the results of the research, the study has implications for Instagram Influencers and the brands or agencies looking to market their products on Instagram. While likes are now not displayed on the profiles of users or their posts, the function to like a post is still relevant, as the account owner can still personally view the number of likes a post receives. There are also of course wider implications as to the way any image is received by a viewer or follower, whether it can be liked or not.

Firstly, the study found that the type of semiotic choices most frequently made by the Influencers in their images often received the fewest number of likes. Hence, given that the reception of their images can impact on their success as Influencers, it is important that a systematic semiotic analysis, not unlike that carried out in this study, is undertaken by Influencers to evaluate the success of their semiotic decision making.

Secondly, and perhaps with the exception of the finding that images with human participants are most likely to be received more favourably than those that do not, it appears that the reception of semiotic choice is inherently connected with the particular identity of an Influencer, and that identity is often related to lifestyle, gender and location. This also suggests that the more general advice as to which types of images and posts receive the most likes, should be treated with caution, and as stated above, Influencers should carry out their

own inquiries as to the responses that their images receive; at least until further studies are carried out that connect followers' reception of social media images with the different distinct identities of the Influencers they are following.

Hence Influencer identity is important, and it often creates a particular narrative that the followers of an Influencer can pick up on, and provides a sense of meaning and connection to the Influencer's feed beyond the presentation of a brand's products. This is perhaps why images depicting the weddings of Influencers, or why images of Influencers with their children at home, typically result in a spike in the number of likes received. These narratives can also provide the sense of an authenticity that followers appear to appreciate. The Influencers, Heidi Smith and Bevan Miller both received their highest number of maximum likes for images in which they were seen with their children.

Furthermore, as well as the importance of aligning semiotic choice with an Influencer's identity, variation and a degree of surprise is also important. For example, if an Influencer posts a stream of images where they are consistently the only participant, it can then be useful to add the element of a relationship into the stream. This change can increase a follower's interest and ultimately provide increased attention to the product or service being promoted. Sebastian Williams, for instance, received the highest number of mean likes for an image categorised as Looking Vacant, one which might be considered a direct contrast to the Directly Looking images which encompassed 72 percent of his 250 images.

9.5 Limitations of the research

There are some limitations to the study, mostly resulting from the time constraints of postgraduate study. Firstly, while the focus was on the semiotic choices made in images

posted by the Influencers, the analysis of other components of the Influencers' posts, for example, the captions added to the image, the followers' comments, or the emoticons used, might have provided further insights into the overall reception of the posts and the number of likes received. The captions that Influencers on Instagram choose to place under their images can contain a lot of information to do with an image and provide it with context and personality. Captions are also a way in which Influencers are able to interact with their followers by asking questions or simply explaining what the image is about. This creates further engagement as it opens the line of communication between the two parties.

Furthermore, although the number of images analysed and the number of Influencers selected for the analysis was appropriate for this particular study given the time constraints, a study including a greater number of images, and which examined images from a greater number of Influencers may provide further findings, as well as more generalisable results. Moreover, and again due to time constraints, the study only examined five semiotic resources. Although these were all perceived as important semiotic resources to evaluate at the outset of the study, the social semiotic work of van Leeuwen (2004) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1999, 2006), among others, refers to other semiotic resources that might also be included in such an analysis.

9.6 Possibilities for future research

There are a number of possibilities for future research. Firstly, the reception of the images posted by other types of Influencers beside fashion Influencers could be analysed. The images posted by travel Influencers would be of particular interest, for example. Secondly, Interviews with the followers of Instagram Influencers could be carried out to determine why they are encouraged to like an image or not. Thirdly, Influencers themselves could be

interviewed to find out about whether they are consciously aware of the types of semiotic resources discussed in this and other studies, and if so how, and why, they make these choices. Finally, and as mentioned above, future research might focus on a larger number of Influencers to increase the generalizability of the results.

9.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sought to answer whether certain semiotic choices made by Instagram fashion Influencers in the images they posted to their accounts were more inclined to be liked by their viewers, or not, and why. To achieve this, an analysis of the images of 1,000 Instagram fashion Influencers was carried out. The analysis involved statistically examining the way that five different semiotic resources (i.e. participant distance, participant gaze, participant relationship, participant clothing and colour) were used in the images, in relation to the number of likes each image received. The research found that the semiotic choices made by the Influencers did impact on the number of likes received, although these were often related to the specific identities and lifestyles of the individual Influencers. Many of the study's findings also contrasted with the social semiotic deliberations of Kress and van Leeuwen (1999, 2006). Importantly, the study also provided an innovative approach to the study of social semiotics, which combined the quantitative use of descriptive statistics with qualitative observations of the semiotic data.

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