



Storytelling in Nordic Fashion Marketing on Instagram

Mira Hartikka

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

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Abstract

Author Mira Hartikka
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<p>Marketing and organizational communications are nowadays happening mostly on social media. Because of the enormous amount of information found online and the brief amount of time in which the content creator has to impress the viewer of the content, it is important to know strategies that attract the audience.</p> <p>The idea for this thesis was born from the author's interests and experiences concerning fashion, communications and storytelling. Storytelling is an effective way to make connection with the audience. Social media is a dominant factor in many areas today. The objective of the thesis was to bring some ideas about fashion marketing and storytelling in the Nordics together. The research was limited to Nordic storytelling on Instagram. The theoretical framework deals with fashion industry and marketing, storytelling and artificial intelligence. Methods used to convey the study were observation and semiotic picture analysis.</p> <p>In the empirical part content analyses of five different Nordic fashion brands and the brand which was used as an example for the content creation were conducted. On the basis of the theoretical framework and analyses, nine images depicting suggested content for the example brand created with the use of AI tool were generated. The author planned the content and prompts, only the visualization of the images for the mock-up were generated with AI.</p> <p>While conducting the study, it was established that the Nordic storytelling in fashion marketing on Instagram is quite subtle in general. The analyzed brands mainly focused on cohesion between the content and brand's essence, while keeping the target audience in mind. Observations made while conducting the study supported the arguments that emotions and relatable protagonists play a big part in effective storytelling. Breaking the pattern, challenging the existing perceptions and raising questions with the content of stories created are often visible strategies used in fashion marketing.</p>
Key words Storytelling, fashion, Instagram marketing, communications

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1 Introduction

The topic of this thesis is “Storytelling in Nordic Fashion Marketing on Instagram”. With the term “Nordic”, I am referring to Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. I chose this topic, because I wanted to create a thesis that combines both business and fashion. I have studied both of these subjects; I am a fashion designer and a stylist and soon-to-be Bachelor of Business Administration specializing in communications and events. I am really interested in communications and the phenomenon around it, and also, deeper meanings behind different matters, so it felt natural to study storytelling while finalizing my studies. I thought about doing my previous thesis about storytelling too, but I chose another topic for that, so now I got to study storytelling in-depth finally. The topic combines business, communications, marketing and fashion, so the study is multidimensional by its nature. I would also love to work with these topics in the future. In general sense, the study is timely, because people living in this digital age are attracted to stories and emotions. Stories are an effective way to be used not only in discussions, but in business too. Briefly, using stories in marketing and communications makes the product or service memorable.

In the thesis, I used a qualitative approach, and the research problem was “How is storytelling utilized in Nordic fashion marketing on Instagram?”. The sub-problems were: “What are the typical themes in Nordic storytelling?”, “What makes storytelling an effective tool in marketing” and “What to take into account from the storytelling perspective when creating fashion marketing material?”.

The most important objective was to implement the project so, that some new information was to be created and/or the ideas about fashion marketing and storytelling would be brought together. And of course, it was important for me to develop myself during the process. The purpose of the thesis was to gain and gather knowledge about storytelling in the world of fashion. Fashion business is a huge business, so the results can be easily utilized. The research may interest people working in communications, marketing and fashion. The research is limited to Nordic fashion marketing because it would be a really vast area to examine if the perspective was global. I concentrated on content created during the last year. Fashion business is among technology business the kind, which is rapidly changing, so it isn't beneficial to study “old” content in this case.

The theory concentrated on fashion marketing and storytelling on general level, but the empirical part focused on Instagram, because it is the most effective platform of the current social media platforms for fashion marketing, and fashion marketing is nowadays happening mostly on social media. Also, the target group used in fashion marketing on Instagram is the most versatile of the available ones. Instagram content is also easier to study in a thesis compared to TikTok videos for example.

I studied theory about fashion, marketing, storytelling and AI. I inspected fashion photos, which had different stories to tell, and analyzed what the stories and the meanings behind them were, and what kind of reactions the content had caused in the audience. I used semiotic picture analysis method while studying the material, supported with the observation method. With the usage of theory and observations I was able to discuss and draw conclusions about the importance of storytelling in fashion marketing. Based on the theory, observations and analyses, I created a mock-up of an Instagram feed with AI, to demonstrate how to create effective stories while doing fashion marketing.

The key concepts are:

(Corporate) branding: Branding is about managing company's identity. It includes defining the company's values, mission and culture. These determine the company's public image. (American Marketing Association s.a.)

Content marketing: Content marketing is brand content published through different channels, like videos, images, campaigns, articles et cetera (Huggard & Cope 2022, 15).

Editorial photo: Editorial photos are images which have a connection to the text in a magazine for example. Editorial photos aim to tell a story or to educate. In editorial fashion photography text is not necessary, and photos like these attempt to depict a theme or represent a mood. (Chin 2012.) When talking about fashion editorials, they can be defined as a storytelling medium which convey narratives, that are behind the fashion collections (Audaces s.a.).

Hashtag: Hashtag, the sign “#” used in tweets originally, helps you search posts with specific keywords. Hashtags categorize the post, engage the audience and function as search engines. (O'Brien 2023.)

Social media: Social media refers to mass media communications happening on the Internet. They are used for sharing videos, messages, photos et cetera. (Britannica 2023.) An example of a social media platform is Instagram, what was used as a source for finding marketing material in this thesis.

Visual marketing: Visual marketing includes anything the people can see, which has something to do with the business, for example logo and website (Ross 2021).

2 Theoretical framework

The focus areas of this thesis are artificial intelligence, fashion, marketing, social media and storytelling. In this chapter I will inspect the theory concerning them and the relationship between them. The fashion industry and the main concepts around it will be briefly discussed, so that the reader gets an idea of the industry. Also, the trends of the industry are important to study because they affect the content created enormously. Marketing and its concepts will be examined, so that the understanding of its relationship with storytelling can be phrased. Marketing environments, segmentations, targeting and positioning are concepts, which are in the background of both marketing actions and storytelling elements. When creating narratives and marketing plans for a specific brand, the essence of brand has to be taken into consideration. The chapter 2.2.3 concerning social media in fashion marketing discusses the main social media platforms used in fashion marketing. The sub-chapter about storytelling examines what storytelling is and how to create or examine stories and how it can be seen in fashion marketing and social media. Semiotics is briefly introduced to get a better understanding of interpreting messages conveyed with the usage of various signs and symbols. AI is used to create the mock-up of a narratively effective feed, that appeals to the audience, and it is important to acknowledge the basics and ethics around the usage of AI.

2.1 Fashion industry

Fashion industry is a modern product, which involves designing and manufacturing fashion garments. It is a vast, globalized and international industry. Usually, fashion products are made in a country different from where they are designed. There are four levels in the fashion industry: the production of (raw) materials, production of the goods, retail sales and promotion and advertising. The three main categories of manufacturing are, from the most expensive and highest quality to the cheapest and lowest quality: haute couture, ready-to-wear and mass-market. (Dillon 2018, chapter 1.) The biggest fashion company of 2023 was the LVMH (owner of not-only different fashion brands, such as Louis Vuitton and Dior, but also, other luxury brands like Tiffany & Co.) with the value of market capitalization of 400 billion U.S. dollars (Smith 2024). Global fashion business made \$1.53 trillion in 2022 (Upmetrics 2024). In 2022, an average Finn spent about 730 euros for clothes, 129 euros for shoes and 103 for home textiles. The combined amount of money that Finns spent on clothes was 4.1 billion euros. (Salonen s.a.)

The current trends in the field of fashion are diversity and inclusivity, gender neutral fashion, smart textiles and the empowerment of women (Solomon & Mrad 2022, 50). And of course, sustainability is an essential value to have, if the business wants to succeed in not only financial way, but in a reputational way too. The fashion industry has been criticized for being unsustainable business, but some brands are willing to make changes to that.

2.2 Fashion marketing

Before defining fashion marketing, marketing should be defined. In their book Solomon and Mrad (2022, 5) quote the definition of American Marketing Association: "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large". Solomon and Mrad quote also the British definition, the Chartered Institute of Marketing decrees: "Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably". An important part of marketing is the marketing mix, which includes the four P's: Product, Price, Promotion and Place (Solomon & Mrad 2022, 7). Product defines the service or item which satisfies the customer's needs. Price is, of course, the price of the product. Placement determines where the product is sold. Promotion involves the advertising of the product among other things. These 4 P's can be expanded to 7, and the additional P's are People, Physical evidence, and Process. People are the employees, physical evidence can be the layout of the store for example, and process usually concerns the logistical issues. (Kenton 2024.)

Fashion marketing combines some elements of advertising, promotion, business administration and design (Dillon 2018, chapter 5). Fashion marketing is different from other kind of marketing, and one of the reasons is that the trends in fashion business tend to change more rapidly than in the other industries. In fashion marketing, it is important to deeply understand the customer's desires so that the target group is defined correctly, and they are provided with suitable services and products. (Solomon & Mrad 2022, 7.) When marketing fashion, it is important to understand the different aspects of fashion industry: trends, audiences, buyers, and with these in mind, create the positioning and messaging strategies for reaching target market. Fashion marketing differs from fashion merchandising. Fashion marketing is about reaching a target market by creating strategies and campaigns, while fashion merchandising means buying, managing, presenting, and selling fashion items in stores. (Pahwa 2023.) Fashion marketing is a broad field, and it includes such tasks as social media marketing and visual merchandising.

2.2.1 The marketing environment, market segmentation, targeting and positioning

There are two categories of the environmental forces that affect the functioning of fashion brands. The macro-marketing environment includes the external factors that affect the company's functions. These are political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental dimensions (PESTLE). Natural environment concerns the effects of the industry on nature. Political and legal environments describe the regulations and laws which affect marketing. Economic environment takes into account recession for example. Sociocultural environment includes people in society and culture and values. Technological environment includes the internet and its effects. The micro-

marketing environment includes the strengths and weaknesses of the company. These are company and departmental structure, customers, employees, suppliers, competitors, marketing intermediaries and publics. Company and departmental structures are responsible, for example, for value creation for customers. Customers are, of course, the most important factor to the company, because every company is concerned about understanding and fulfilling the needs of the customer in order to succeed as a business. Employees are the responsible ones for the success of the company. Suppliers supply the materials. Following competitors' moves is important, so that the company can develop. Marketing intermediaries connect the members of the distribution channel to the end customer. Publics are different kinds of entities, for example, financial publics have an effect on how the brand gets funds. The other publics are media, government, citizen-action, local, general and internal publics. (Solomon & Mrad 2022, 122-132.) These environments should be taken into account while planning the marketing. The communications mix, brand activations, aims at actions that make the brand known. These include several kinds of actions. Interactive marketing makes the customer take part in competitions for example. Sales promotions are not only discounts, but also, member only discounts and free shipping. Events can stay in people's minds for a long time. Advertising is non-personal communication, for which the company has paid. PR aims to build relationships with the customers. The use of social media and influencers and ambassadors are vital in today's brand building. (Lowe 2023, 243-246.)

Market segmentation aims to tailor products and services for identified target groups (Tarver 2023). Demographic segmentation includes variable features, which are measurable. These are age and lifecycle, gender, ethnicity, income and social status. Then there is geographic segmentation, which in addition to the geographic location includes climate for example. Psychographic segmentation includes reaching out consumers with their activities, interests and opinions in mind. (Solomon & Mrad 2022, 153-161.)

In targeting, the company chooses the best segments. The key question is whether the company aims to target larger or smaller segments. When targeting is undifferentiated, the company chooses to supply for larger number of people. Grocery stores use this for example. Differentiated targeting is used when the brand serves services and products to multiple target groups. Positioning means that the marketer uses the marketing mix to affect consumer's opinions (Product, Price, Promotion and Place, and People, Physical evidence, and Process added if needed) (Solomon & Mrad 2022, 167-170).

2.2.2 Brand

A brand is a feature, like a symbol, that differentiates the service or product from others. Brand image is the image that customers have on their mind about the brand. (Huggard & Cope 2022, 2.)

Digital brand communication includes brand apps, social media, brand websites, email marketing and advertising (Huggard & Cope 2022, 14). To stand out from other companies, the enterprise should not create only products, but a brand too (Lowe 2023, 162). The aim of branding is to create an identity, which the customer recognizes and has feelings about. Also, one point in branding is that even though the product can be copied, the brand cannot be copied. Areas of brand development are the brand's essence, purpose, vision, mission and values. Brand pillars, that define the brand's DNA, are purpose, perception, personality, positioning and promotion. (Lowe 2023, 163-168.) A brand's visual identity consists of the colors, logo, typography, film and photography that it uses (Lowe 2023, 175).

2.2.3 Fashion marketing and social media

The main social media platforms of fashion marketing are Instagram, TikTok and Pinterest. Instagram is designed to be the means to share photos and videos and comment and like them. Instagram achieved to have two billion active users in 2022. (Eldridge 2024.) TikTok is a platform meant to share videos. It sets and spreads viral trends, such as DIY styling tips, trend transformations and innovative fashion challenges (Uphance s.a.). The information about the number of users varies, but it has at least one billion users according to different sources. Pinterest can be described as a digital mood board platform. Depending on the source, Pinterest has about 450-490 million users. These three platforms can be summarized like this: Instagram is the means for visual storytelling, TikTok is the dynamic trendsetter and Pinterest is a curated source for inspiration. Especially the two first ones are accelerating the growth of trends and fast fashion. (Uphance s.a.)

Campaigns in social media can affect a lot of things, such as attitudes concerning the human body in society. The content created for social media should have a balance between educational, inspirational and entertainment purposes. Today, the strategies to be considered in marketing fashion in social media are authentic storytelling, engagement over promotion, value-driven content, inclusivity and diversity and collaborations with influencers. (Uphance s.a.)

In general, social media in fashion marketing is beneficial, and those platforms are being used to promote and market the brand or the product or service. The main reasons to use social media are to increase brand awareness, to create engagement with the target group and to improve customer loyalty. There are also several types of marketing in social media. Influencer marketing involves working with an influencer, who helps promoting your brand or product to a larger audience. Paid social media advertising boosts your visibility through ad-usage. Content marketing is about increasing awareness and creating engagement with different kind of content, such as posts. User-generated content is what the name says, content including your brand or product created by

customer(s). Contests and giveaways are a great way to reach new audiences. (Fashion Retail Academy 2023.)

2.3 Storytelling

Stories are much more than just fairytales, and we face stories every day. Researchers have determined that 65 percent of the content of the conversations we have is made up of personal stories and gossips (Bendoni 2017, 157). A traditional story includes beginning, change and ending, and these connect to each other. Also, there is a protagonist in a story. One of the most important things in a story is that either the audience can feel empathy towards the protagonist, or that the protagonist is relatable. Storytelling can also be defined as a way to communicate. Stories make you relate, they convince, change attitudes and they help to remember and to understand. (Rauhala & Vikström 2014, chapter 2.) Rodriguez (2023,17) has defined storytelling as: "The emotional transfer of information (opinions, assertions, facts, data, ideas and arguments) through the introduction of a character, plot and conclusion". Feelings are important when creating a story, and so is knowing your audience. Maya Angelou, a poet and civil right activist, has said: "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel" (Bendoni 2017, 152). These words have much truth in them. Also, Ana Maria Escobar, the creative director of Orotan, Australian luxury brand, has captivated the meaning of storytelling in marketing with these words: "You can't design a bag anymore and just leave it there for people to buy it. You need to create a dream around it. You need to create a story around it. You need to place that bag where it is supposed to go or where it is supposed to live". (Bendoni 2017, 157.)

Maven (2023) has described several storytelling elements through the use of numbers, letters and steps. When you tell a story, you should keep 5 Cs in mind. These are conflict, circumstance, curiosity, characters and conversations. Together, they create a compelling story. A story can be told in four ways: performatively, orally, visually and in writing. The 4 Ps in storytelling are purpose, people, place and plot. These are must haves in a story. There are 6 steps in storytelling:

1. Know your audience
2. Define the core message
3. Decide the story type
4. Establish a call-to-action
5. Choose the media
6. Plan and structure the story

So, what can be told through stories, when talking about business? Rauhala & Vikström (2014, chapter 4) describe that stories can be utilized in these situations for example:

- when you want the people to make a change or take action
- when you want to tell, who you are
- when you want to tell, how your brand or enterprise is
- when you want to share and talk about your values
- when you want to strengthen the collaboration
- when you want to share knowledge

When crafting a story, the facts should be gathered and after that, use the five W's, sometimes including H. Who? is the first W. Who can be the target audience or the subject of the story. What? is the message which you want to deliver to the audience or what the product is. Where? defines where the product is used. When? is usually now, when talking about marketing. When do you want the audience to take action? Why? Why the audience needs your product? How? This is thought when the campaign involves an event. How do you tell the story? These questions and their answers define the outline of the story. (Bendoni 2017, 144-145.)

2.3.1 Storytelling in fashion marketing

When brands are creating their stories, they have to take the culture their customers are living into consideration (Huggard & Cope 2022, 39). When telling something through a narrative, people hearing the narrative are more likely to remember the details, relating to the message and they will be more engaged (Lowe 2023, 171). Rodriguez (2023, 14-17) presents a storytelling mission design template in their book. It is mainly created for brand storytelling, but in my opinion, can be utilized elsewhere too. The template includes these steps:

- Story topic(s)
- Story mission
- Brand positioning
- Key audience(s)
- Feelings
- Make it believable
- Format and structure

First, you should think about the topic of story; what is your brand statement, and what and who is the story telling about? Story mission defines what the objectives of the story are. Brand positioning includes listing the brand attributes, such as slogan, tone, voice, personality, archetype. Key audience is the main target group. Feelings define what you wish the audience to feel after learning about the story. Make it believable means the action steps which are needed to take in order to create the narrative. Format and structure are the way to convey the story.

2.3.2 Storytelling and social media

There have been huge changes in digital storytelling. For example, the brands are not the only storytellers, but also, the consumers tell stories when promoting the brand. This happens, for example, when a consumer mentions in their post where they bought their bag and what the brand is. According to Tombleson and Wolf (2023, 82), there has been talk about a hero's journey not being valid in today's storytelling. Because stories and the channels used are very different from what they used to be, this can be considered true. The audience has become a part of the story. Consumers online want to find entertaining stories from social media, which create discussions. Technologies can play big part in digital storytelling, for example, personalized content can be created by utilizing CRM (customer relationship management) data. (Bendoni 2017, 142-143.)

According to Bendoni (2017, 144), you should think about these questions while creating the story to create an emotional connection with the audience:

- How does the audience feel emotional connection to the story?
- What does the story give to the audience? Believability, entertainment, experience, or curiosity?
- Who tells the story?
- What is the point-of-view? Consumer, brand or third party?
- Does the story include a character, that the audience likes and wants to engage with?
- To bond a relationship, does the story involve a relatable connection? A voice that is unique, trustworthy, authentic or transparent?
- How and how many times the story will be delivered?
- What kind of expectations does the audience have about the medium?

In digital storytelling, there can be seen eleven elements according to Tombleson's and Wolf's book (2023, 14.) First, we can think about the overall purpose of the story. Then the narrator's point of view should be examined, so the target group and the biases can be voiced. Dramatic questions keep the audience engaged in the story. The choice of the platform and the content defines the structure of the story obviously. Clarity of voice and the pacing of the narrative do this too. With usage of audio, you can create different atmospheres. Quality of visuals can convey a message that who are you or the brand. Economy of story detail, language and authenticity should also be considered.

2.3.3 Semiotics

Semiotics refers to science, which examines how people interpret symbols and signs, and what the literal and non-literal meanings behind them are. Semiotic picture analysis, a method used in this

thesis, is based on semiotics. Semiotics cannot only be used in creating purposeful meaning to digital narratives but also, to understand what the meanings to the viewer are. In content creation, it is vital to understand, how the audience will respond to content. In order to apply semiotics to content, the four key modes of social semiotics, created by Kress and van Leeuwen in 2017, should be understood. These are: representation, interaction, composition and modality. In digital storytelling, representation can be how people are depicted through their body language, clothes, or the choice of background. Interaction is the relationship between the image and the viewer (audience). Composition is about how the graphical elements are arranged. Modality is the way to present the information, such as the filters used in a photo. (Tomblason & Wolf 2023, 27-33.)

2.4 Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence, aka AI, is a topical phenomenon in many fields. AI is a software imitating the way that humans learn and make decisions. Usually, these software packages work on the basis of algorithms, which humans have created. Algorithms can be described as a list of instructions. So, AI is about making actions on computer, which are considered to be smart. (Kolari & Kallio 2023, chapter 1.) AI has developed considerably in the last few years. People do not use it only for simple processes, such as translation, but also for generating creative solutions and ideas, like reimagining a modern action video game as an 80's fantasy movie. The most well-known AI service is ChatGPT, created by OpenAI, which was published in March 2022 (Salo 2023, 7). The use of creative AI, which creates creative solutions and generates info, has been on rise lately. DALL-E 2, the program developed by OpenAI, creates pictures from descriptive texts. (Salo 2023, 16.) The creative AI can be divided into five categories: translators, code generators, content creators, chatbots and "info pickers" (Salo 2023, 23).

A justified fear that many people have, is whether AI can replace us, and whether we can trust anything anymore being authentic, created by a real person? Ethics, the moral principles which define the right and wrong for us, should be thought thoroughly when using AI. The main issues of AI usage are technology misuse, data responsibility and privacy, fairness, explainability, robustness, transparency, environmental sustainability, inclusion, moral agency, value alignment, accountability and trust. The main principles when using AI are to respect people, justice, and beneficence. (IBM s.a.)

3 Methodology

The research is qualitative by its nature, which is really appropriate concerning this thesis is about storytelling. Qualitative research is based on non-numerical data, such as images, sounds and words, unlike quantitative research, which is based on numerical data. Qualitative research aims to explore subjective opinions, attitudes and experiences, and also, to uncover new meanings and insights. Quantitative research is used to make predictions, test hypotheses and identify patterns. While doing qualitative research, the most common question asked is “Why?”, which is a question asked a lot in storytelling too. (Mcleod 2023.)

3.1 Research problems

The research problem is: “How is storytelling utilized in Nordic fashion marketing on Instagram?”

The sub-problems are: “What are the typical themes in Nordic storytelling?”, “What makes storytelling an effective tool in marketing” and “What should be taken into account from the perspective of storytelling when creating fashion marketing material?”

The research problem aims to uncover the secrets of storytelling used by Nordic fashion brands on Instagram. These findings can be used to create more efficient stories and understand the meaning and/or importance of storytelling in fashion marketing. The sub-problems support the research problem and its aims. Typical themes used in Nordic storytelling tell something about the values of the Nordic society. The question concerning what makes storytelling an effective tool in marketing inspects the importance of storytelling. What to take into account when creating fashion marketing material for Instagram sums the findings around this topic.

3.2 Methods of analysis

My intent was to interview people who had worked with storytelling and fashion marketing. This would have provided more in-depth information concerning the topic. I contacted people from every Nordic country except Iceland, and the people contacted were fashion photographers, stylists and fashion designers. Unfortunately, I was not able to get any answers, so I had to rely only on the theoretical framework and my own analyzes and observations. The interviews would have been semi-structured interviews. The planned interview questions can be found on appendix 1. In the end, the methods I used in analyzing the content created by different brands were semiotic picture analysis and observation.

There are different forms of picture analysis but in this thesis, semiotic picture analysis was chosen to be used in analyzing the content created by various Nordic fashion brands. I analyzed (in visual

terms) the overall feeling of the accounts and the content of the account within last year. Semiotic picture analysis is the most versatile method in studying this kind of content. The following paragraphs concerning the semiotic picture analysis is based on Muotio's article (2022.) Pictures are a way to communicate and can convey messages in a direct way or subconsciously. Semiotic picture analysis focuses on the message conveyed by the picture. There are three different levels in semiotics concerning the interpretation of pictures:

1. Denotation: It is the basic meaning of the photo, and it is usually the same even for different cultures. In this phase everything factual in the picture is described
2. Connotation: It is the interpretation with emotions. What does the picture include? The interpretation is reliant on info and experiences about the theme.
3. Personal level

The content analysis of pictures starts with questioning of the contents of the picture, then the interpretations are justified (themes, motifs, etc.) and lastly the concluding interpretation is made on the basis of analysis.

These questions can be asked when analyzing pictures:

- Who has sent the picture?
- How is the picture formed?
- How is the message conveyed to the viewer?
- What are the channels used in messaging?
- Who is the recipient of the message?
- What is the meaning of the sender of the message?
- What is the effect that the picture causes in the viewer?
- How is the interpretation of the picture linked to the reality outside the picture?
- How do the factors outside the picture affect to the interpretation of the picture?

Observation is a method used mainly as a supporting method, and when there is no vast knowledge concerning the phenomenon, whereupon it is difficult to structure the interview questions. My original intent was to use observation as a supporting method for interviews and picture analyses. The observation style used in this thesis was direct observation. Direct observation means, that the people who are being observed, are not aware of being observed, and this style can also be used when studying different kind of phenomena (Anttila s.a.). I observed the social media accounts for this thesis, and the accounts can be found in appendix 2. Observation is an essential method when studying this kind of data, such as the comments and reactions that the post has generated.

3.3 Previous studies

There are many theses about storytelling, but most of those studies do not relate to fashion. From the number of theses found concerning storytelling, it can be determined that storytelling is a popular tool to be utilized on many industries. I was able to find a couple of studies which resemble my thesis.

Irina Guseva has produced a thesis “Storytelling as a marketing tool: Case Study Chanel” in 2021 (<https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2021053112660>). The thesis examines how Chanel uses storytelling as a brand, and how storytelling affects to its customers.

Thuy Vu and Siiri Medina have written a thesis “Storytelling marketing and its impact on developing company brand identity, case company Zara” (<https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2014111215530>) in 2014. The purpose of the study was to examine, how storytelling can enhance the brand value. It is mainly about the building and strengthening the brand. The thesis was conducted quite a “long time ago”, considering the industry, so there have been huge changes in the use of social media for example since the publication of the thesis.

Iuliia Kaseva studied digital marketing in the thesis “Instagram as a digital marketing tool for fashion brands: Case Company: Adidas Originals” (<https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2018112919082>). This thesis was conducted in 2018, and a lot has changed since that too.

Alena Maksimova and Anna Savolainen have produced a similarly named thesis as Kaseva, “Instagram as a Digital Marketing tool for fashion brands” (<https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2021060915352>) in 2021. On the basis of the observations, they composed 10 marketing tips.

As can be seen from the titles, the two first theses deal with storytelling, but they have been targeted for a certain brand, so they are more indicative in their nature. The last two theses focus mainly on the usage of Instagram as a marketing tool for fashion, so the storytelling aspect is not the aspect that these theses concentrate on.

4 Empirical part: analyzing the content and creating the mockup

The empirical part concentrates on the content analysis and the creation of the mockup with the help of AI. The content analysis inspects the content on Instagram created by several Nordic fashion brands while taking into account the theoretical framework of the thesis. The content analysis aims to collect data about the important themes and details of storytelling aspects in Nordic fashion narratives. The methods used in this process were observation and semiotic picture analysis. In the second sub-chapter the mockup I created with the use of AI is examined, and the ways it reflects the findings and framework are being examined.

4.1 Content analysis

I chose to analyze content from several Nordic fashion brands, which were different in their design style and in the number of followers. Some of the brands I knew beforehand but not all of them. It was important that some of the brands chosen were well-known, while I had not heard from the others, to maintain the balance of the information gained from the content. The brands chosen for the study were Marimekko, H&M, By Malene Birger, byTiMo and Ganni. Marimekko was chosen, because it is probably the most well-known Finnish fashion brand, and it is popular especially in Asian countries, so it is interesting to see, if that has an effect on the content. It is also an interesting choice because of its design aesthetics. The Swedish H&M is the second biggest fashion retailer in the world, so it would be bizarre to not to take it into account in this kind of research. Danish By Malene Birger represents typical Scandinavian minimalistic design. The Norwegian byTiMo has a different take to Nordic design with its floral, romantic designs. I tried to find a streetwear brand to complement this collection of brands, but I was not able to find a suitable brand. I also wanted the fifth post be from an Icelandic brand, but I could not to find a brand which would have fit into this category. So, as the fifth brand I chose Ganni, which is a Danish fashion company. The hashtag "gannigirl" is a concept on Instagram, which affected the decision to choose it as the last brand. It is important to note that the follower numbers et cetera can change very rapidly, so they are not most likely to hold true even few days after writing about them. For example, I analyzed Marimekko for the first time on 5 April, and then it had 819 000 followers. When I was inspecting the account for the second time on 21 April, it had 827 000 followers, so Marimekko had gained almost 10 000 new followers within two weeks.

4.1.1 Content 1: Marimekko

Marimekko is a Finnish design and lifestyle brand known for bold prints and colors. The company designs and manufactures clothes, accessories and home décor items. It was established in 1951. In 2023, Marimekko's net sales were 174 million euros. Their target market is in the Asia-Pacific

region, North America and Northern Europe. (Marimekko 2024a.) Marimekko's core values are "Living, not pretending", "Fairness to everyone and everything", "Common sense", "Getting things done – together", "Courage, even at the risk of failure" and "Joy" (Marimekko 2024b).

Marimekko had 819 000 followers on Instagram on 5 April 2024. It had approximately 3800 posts on its account. The overall appearance of Marimekko's Instagram account is colorful, bold and graphic, like the brand itself. The content of the posts varies, there are editorial posts, product posts, posts depicting prints of the company, informatic posts et cetera. It has quite many story highlights, and most of them have the "Unikko" print as the profile picture, which is the most famous print of Marimekko. Its use creates sense of familiarity for many. People who have tagged Marimekko on their posts are from all over the world. These tagged posts, even though they are content created by many different people, convey a curated feeling of the feed and it looks cohesive with the brand. The newest reels are celebrating Unikko's "birthday" and the reels before those have various content. The colors that Marimekko uses in its content really brighten your day. Marimekko also uses colors in a very clever way, so that they are not clashing with each other. Use of colors is also a way to convey messages and tell stories. It seems that the posts which depict the brand's history create a lot of discussion.

The post chosen for the analysis was the newest post of Marimekko at the time of researching the account. The post had been published 20 hours before, on 5 April 2024, and the post had already over 7000 likes and 83 comments. The post was chosen, because it depicts both Marimekko's core values and also, the prevailing values of the modern world. The caption is: "Welcome to the Marimekko beach club. Our new swimwear edition celebrates the iconic Unikko design and vibrant hues bringing you variety of mix-and-match pieces. Featuring ECONYL regenerated nylon (78%). Can you find a favorite right now? Explore all swimwear styles at marimekko.com. #marimekko". The comments the post has got mostly compliment the photo, swimsuits and the diversity of the models but there is also a comment about a wish that Marimekko would show more different sized people. There were also multiple comments from different people, who were asking, if the products are available in Australia. (Marimekko 5 April 2024.) The post is targeted to people interested in Marimekko lifestyle, who, based on my observations, are a versatile group.

The post has two photos, which depict five different looking young women in various "Unikko" print swimsuits. The photos can be seen in figures 1 and 2. Like mentioned previously, "Unikko" is the most famous print of Marimekko, and it had its anniversary coming when the post was published. The background is a grassy beach. The photos have a filter, which creates more retro vibe to the photos, even though the composition is modern. The filter tones down the bright hues of the photos, and this makes the colors differentiate from the ones the brand usually uses. Usually, the

colors the brand uses are pure and bright. Of course, the real colors in the photos are like that, bright and pure, but filter changes them. When thinking about the reason for this, it might have something to do with conveying a message about the brand being a company with long traditions and love for its design and lifestyle, which is represented in using the retro and modern aspects in this post. The protagonist of this story is not one specific person, but a diverse group of women. The post is not a mighty epic in the narrative sense, but a beautiful portrayal of various women enjoying the summery day together. Diversity, joy and empowerment of women are all values the post succeeds conveying.

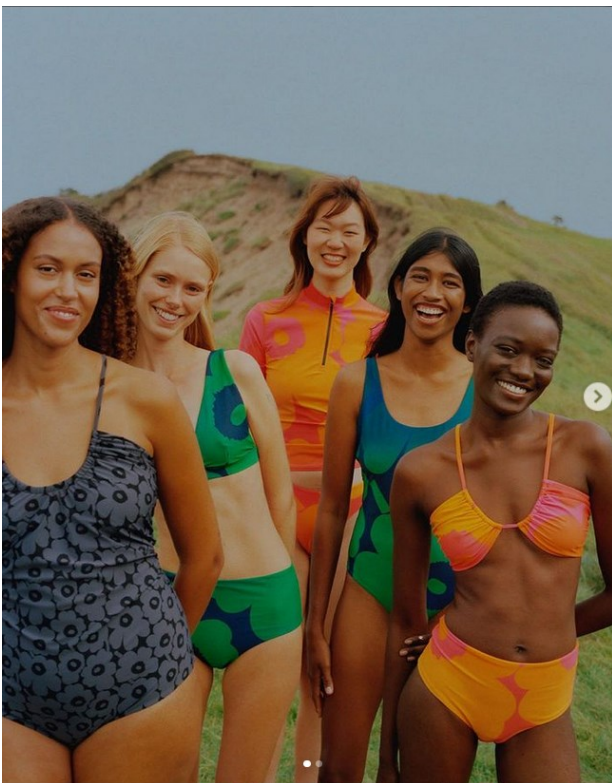


Figure 2 Welcome to the Marimekko beach club. Instagram post (Marimekko 5 April 2024)



Figure 1 Welcome to the Marimekko beach club. Instagram post (Marimekko 5 April 2024)

4.1.2 Content 2: H&M

H&M is a Swedish fast-fashion retailer, a part of H&M Group, and it is the second largest fashion retailer, behind only Inditex. It was founded in 1947. H&M products include clothing and accessories for every gender and age, beauty products, home decoration and sport clothing and accessories. Because H&M is a huge retailer, its designs vary, so its visuality cannot be described in a specific way. H&M's net sales in 2023 were SEK 236 billion (approximately EUR 20 billion). H&M operates in every continent, except Antarctica. (H&M Group s.a.a.) The values of H&M are: "We are one team", "We believe in people", "We are entrepreneurs", "We make constant improvement",

“We are cost-conscious”, “We are straightforward and open-minded” and “We keep it simple” (H&M Group s.a.b.).

I inspected the general H&M Instagram account. There are other accounts of H&M too; for men, kids, career, beauty, home and sports. The general H&M account had at the time when I researched the account (on 6 April 2024) over 8000 posts and 38.3 million followers. It has the most followers of the researched accounts. There are few story highlights, which create a curated feeling of the account. The user-generated content is not so eye-catching as Marimekko’s, but the reason for this is clear. H&M does not have a distinct style aesthetics like Marimekko has, so it is harder to have content which is depicting company’s visual identity. Most of the posts are editorial photos, but the photos aren’t really narrative, but that is understandable considering H&M’s nature as a fast-fashion company. Mass-market industry, which H&M belongs to, is much more voluminous compared to haute couture -brands, which have to put time and effort into their marketing materials, because they can’t post so often as the mass-market brands. The other posts are product photos, so most of the content is for inspirational or advertising purposes. H&M’s feed compared to Marimekko’s is not so bright and colorful, but more neutral. It is also neutral in many other aspects too besides the color choices, the feed can be described as classic. But as said, H&M does not have a signature design, so the feeling of the feed varies too.

The post chosen for the inspection was posted on 8 December 2023, and this post was analyzed 17 weeks after the posting. The five photos the post includes can be seen in figures 3-7. The caption for the post is: “Tube Girl @sabrinhahsoon caught the tram in The H&M Studio Holiday Capsule #HMStudio #HM”. The post has over 12 000 likes and 359 comments. The comments are mainly political, concerning Israel-Hamas War. (H&M 8 December 2023.) The lights and shadows in the photos create interesting atmosphere. Lights are an essential element in photography. With shadows, depth can be created to the photos, and with lights, various objects or aspects can be highlighted among other things. The colors are also important in these photos. The colors (brown and blue combined with either pink, gold or red) are elegant together and express well the general atmosphere of the photos, which mixes vintage and modern. The clothes the model is wearing are modern, but the setting is vintage.

The questions the photos raise, are the general questions used in the storytelling. Who is the person? Where are they going? What is the aim of this journey? The viewer does not get a lot of hints that answer to these questions. What I have inspected about fashion photos from the storytelling perspective, I have noticed, that many fashion photos in general are the kind, which raise questions, and do not answer the questions. But is this good or bad? Fashion deals with creative and

imaginative things, like the traditional arts, so is it bad if it raises questions but does not answer them, and leaves the space for the viewer to create their own interpretations?



Figure 3 Tube Girl
@sabinabahsoon caught the tram in The H&M Studio Holiday Capsule #HMStudio #HM. Instagram post (H&M 8 December 2023)



Figure 4 Tube Girl @sabinabahsoon caught the tram in The H&M Studio Holiday Capsule #HMStudio #HM. Instagram post (H&M 8 December 2023)



Figure 5 Tube Girl
@sabinabahsoon caught the tram in The H&M Studio Holiday Capsule #HMStudio #HM. Instagram post (H&M 8 December 2023)

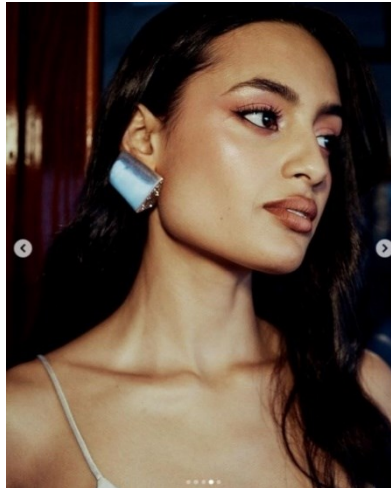


Figure 3 Tube Girl
@sabinabahsoon caught the tram in The H&M Studio Holiday Capsule #HMStudio #HM. Instagram post (H&M 8 December 2023)

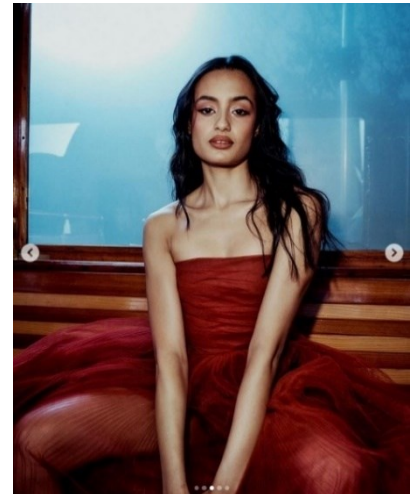


Figure 7 Tube Girl
@sabinabahsoon caught the tram in The H&M Studio Holiday Capsule #HMStudio #HM. Instagram post (H&M 8 December 2023)

4.1.3 Content 3: By Malene Birger

By Malene Birger is a Danish women's fashion brand founded in 2003. It is known for adding a bohemian touch to designs which are defined as Scandinavian minimalism. (By Malene Birger 2024a.) Scandinavian minimalism is about clothes that are timeless, functional and of course, minimalist. The collection of By Malene Birger includes womenswear and accessories. The values the brand has are responsibility, beauty and longevity (By Malene Birger 2024b).

By Malene Birger has 537 posts and 352 000 followers on Instagram. The user-generated content succeeds in conveying the message of brand's aesthetics, the posts on "tagged" show the lifestyle and visuality of the Scandinavian people. The story highlights are from different "fashion capitals" or the newest collection. The colors used in all kinds of posts are mainly neutral, earthy and light, and the photos deliver an effortless but chic feeling. By Malene Birger has a different take on its account layout than brands have in general, it usually seems to post every photo from one set as a separate post every few days. That is why I decided to analyze nine posts which can be seen at the same time on the feed.

The screenshot taken on 9 April 2024 from the brand's feed shows nine different posts. The screenshot is depicted in figure 8. The photo of a room has least likes (354) and the first "painted" photo has the most likes (1521). The third painted picture has the most comments (38), and the still life photo has the least comments (3). The posts were published within time span of 19.2.2024-1.3.2024. The painted pictures are made by Tom Powell, and the pictures tease about the Spring-Summer 2024 campaign. The posts which depict clothes and the bag are advertising a specific clothing available on stores. The posts of the room and the magazines are purely for mood board purposes. It is interesting to note that By Malene Birgers followers have mainly used emojis when they have commented on the posts. Other comments are mainly compliments about the posts. (By Malene Birger 9 April 2024.)

Even though I think that the middle and the last row complement each other well, the first row brings us a smooth transition to a different take on the mood of the feed and creates excitement to otherwise neutral view. Breaking the pattern is essential in fashion design, and this can be applied to fashion marketing too. The screenshot depicts multiple stories and types of posts. The first row combines fine art with fashion marketing. On the second and third row the viewer can see product and detail photos, mood board photos and editorial photos. Especially interesting are the paintings, which have a retro feeling in them because of the art style, the brush strokes can be seen, and they bring a lively vibe to the feed. But, because By Malene Birger is a minimalistic brand, the colors are neutral and the clothing depicted in the paintings is simple, so there is still a balance. The last post in the screenshot might intrigue some viewers because it shows a little of the outfit but

leaves questions how the whole thing is. Like in written and oral stories, leaving something untold works most of the times. But in general, I think that the feed succeeds in conveying the story of the essence of the brand: the viewer can determine the design policy from the posts.

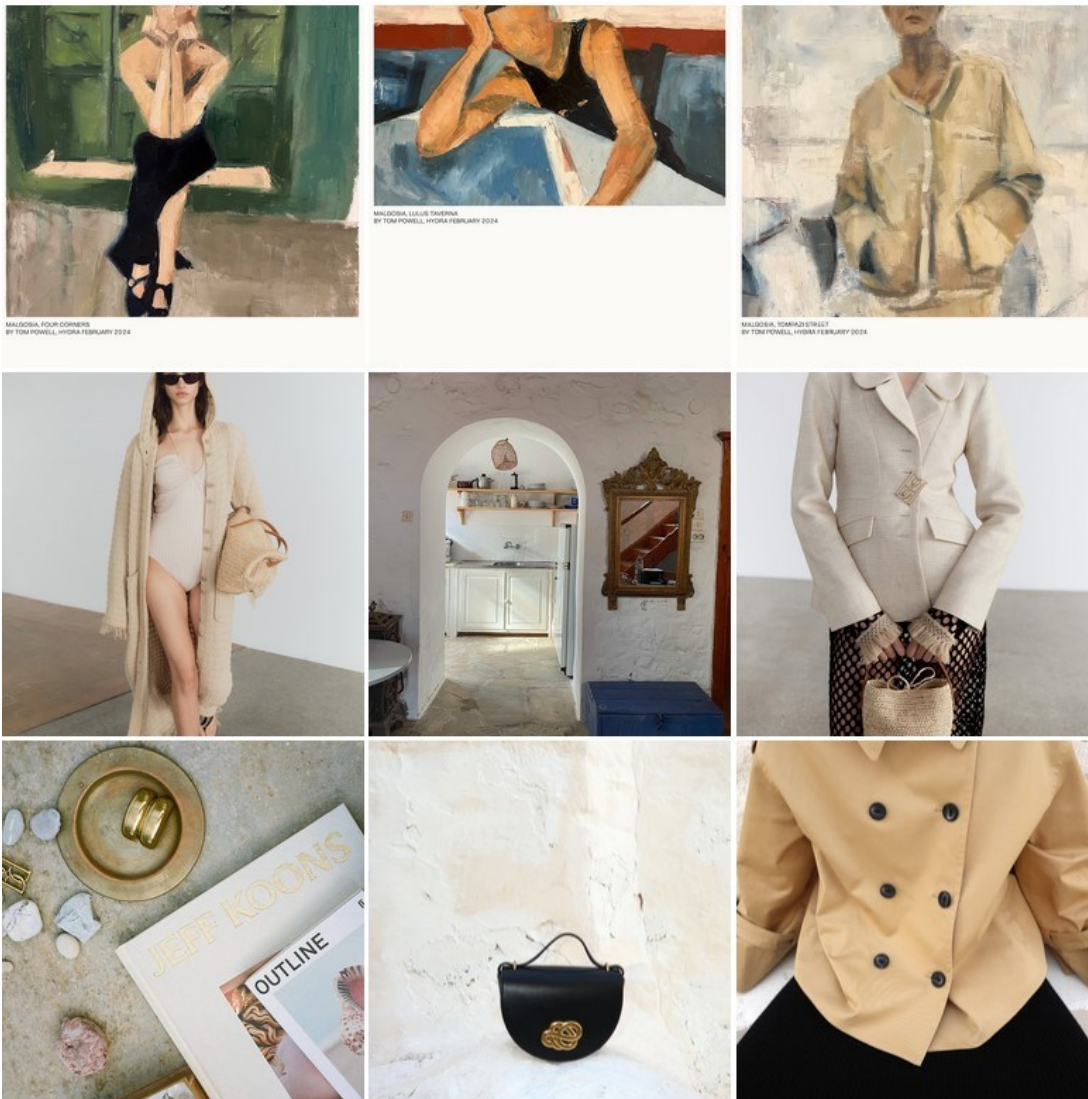


Figure 4 By Malene Birger 9 April 2024. Screenshot from Instagram (9.4.2024)

4.1.4 Content 4: byTiMo

byTiMo was founded in 2004 by Norwegian Tine Mollatt. The values of byTiMo are high quality, truthfulness and consciousness. The design policy can be defined as “Modern romance meets timeless craftsmanship”. (byTiMo s.a.) Vintage inspires the designs of the brand a lot. The brand designs clothes for women and kids and homeware and it also has bridal collections.

byTiMo has over 4300 posts and 122 000 followers on its Instagram account (10 April 2024). There are multiple story highlights with different themes. The user-generated content is edgier than the brand’s own feed. byTiMo has both videos, carousels and simple posts on its feed. The general

look of the feed is romantic, floral, vintage, but there are also posts which depict a more generic Nordic/Scandinavian lifestyle. byTiMo has hidden the number of likes its posts get. byTiMo does not have a lot of carousel posts on its account, so that is why I decided to take a look at the feed in this analysis too. The brand also has a lot of videos, which are not easy to analyze in a thesis.

As can be seen in the screenshot, presented in figure 9, the brand posts a lot of videos: six of the posts on the screenshot are videos, one is a carousel post and two are simple photos. The posts were published within the time span of 23.2.-28.2.2024. This brand has a not-so-typical take on visual marketing and design as a Nordic brand, which is why I chose it to be analyzed, so I can see what the common elements in storytelling between these chosen brands are. All the other pictures in the screenshot are romantic with neutral color palette, but the first post is more Scandinavian with its design, colors and minimalistic take. There are not many comments on the posts, and they are mainly complimenting the posts. The videos of the screenshot include various content. The first post is about staying hydrated, and is the one mentioned to depict a typical Scandinavian setting. It is the pattern breaker of the feed. The post also reminds of an important thing, and it's refreshing to see content that differs from plain fashion photos, but the post doesn't forget, that it is content of a fashion brand. It still features fashion and interesting setting. The second post is about wedding gowns and does not include anything special in terms of storytelling or content creation. The fourth post is a long video about hosting a breakfast at the brand's headquarters and the SS24 and the upcoming collections can be seen in it. This is a clever way to market the products, because the video feels authentic and humane, but it still advertises. The seventh post is a sneak-a-peak-video about a photoshoot of a wedding gown. Sneak-a-peak content is also a way to create an authentic feeling about the brand. The eighth video shows us the overall look of the dress, details of it, and lastly, it features the face of the model. The ninth post shows the model go under the covers, and the clothing and textiles in video are covered in prints. The prints are the main thing in this, and they overwhelm the video, but could that be the purpose? The third and the sixth posts are simple photos. They feature the same model in expensive looking clothes in a garden of a mansion. The posts do not include an epic narrative, but it creates a feeling about luxury with its details: the clothes, setting, and the model. The fifth post features the dress from the front and back. These posts show, that there are multiple kind of content, that a brand can publish. (byTiMo 10 April 2024.)

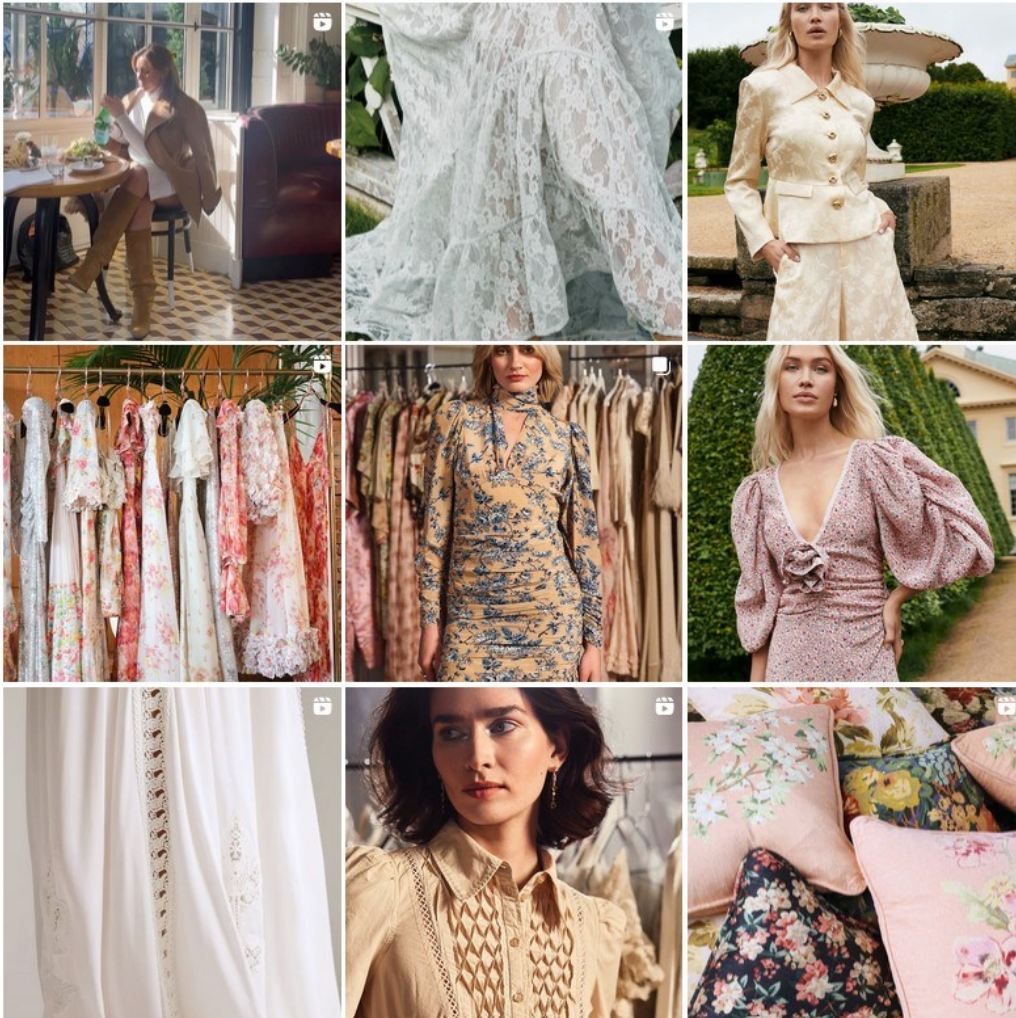


Figure 5 byTiMo 10 April 2024. Screenshot from Instagram feed (10.4.2024)

4.1.5 Content 5: Ganni

Ganni is a Danish women's fashion brand, which is said to define the Scandinavian style. The brand was founded in 2000, but it evolved in its current form in 2009. The style can be defined to be laid-back but playful, and the kind of style which "cool girls" like to wear. In 2015, Helena Christensen shared a post with Kate Bosworth and captioned the photo "#GanniGirls", referencing to their Ganni outfits. (Sutton 2023.) The hashtag has become some kind of a concept in certain circles.

Ganni's Instagram account has about 7400 posts and 1.4 million followers. It has quite many story highlights, but they are curated. The overall feeling of the feed is different from the previous ones; it is difficult to categorize the brand's visuality as some specific one. Ganni publishes various

content. When using the hashtag “gannigirl”, 110 000 posts can be found at the moment when writing this chapter (15.4.2024).

While conducting the previous analyses, I noticed that it is more efficient to study multiple posts than a simple post. That is why I am inspecting a part of Ganni’s feed. In the screenshot, which is figure 10, nine posts are depicted. The posts were published within the time span of 2.12.2023-9.12.2023. Out of these, the second post has the most likes, 34 800, and comments, 91. The third post has the fewest likes, 1083, and the fewest comments, 5. The first post includes two photos which have the same background. I think that this post depicts Scandinavian city landscape perfectly, and the colors complement each other in an interesting way. The second post is a video about how the brand’s social media manager styled herself to work during that week. The third post is a video which shows how one “GanniGirl” is preparing to go to a party. The fourth post has five photos, in which model(s) pose against a blank wall and the filter used in photos has the vibe of the 90’s. The fifth post has three photos, which is a “panorama” of models posing and wearing the arrivals of that time span. The sixth post is a video, in which brands creative director is preparing and going to a gala. This video is much more playful than the third one, which was also about attending to a party. It manages to evoke more emotions than the first one. The third post is “cleaner” and more serious from its tone. The seventh post is also a video, it is the same series as the third post, in these series Ganni asks their #GANNIGirls to show, how they “do party seasoning”. The caption of the post is: “@susiebubble shows us how she throws a dinner party, From multiple outfit changes to her do’s and don’ts when hosting - party season is activated”. The video is interesting and engaging with its various content. The eighth post has four photos, which advertise the visual marketing of a new store. The ninth post, figure 11, is an interesting video visually, because in the video the shot is cut in half so, that it is not symmetrical. The post is about GANNI x @drmartensofficial collaboration.

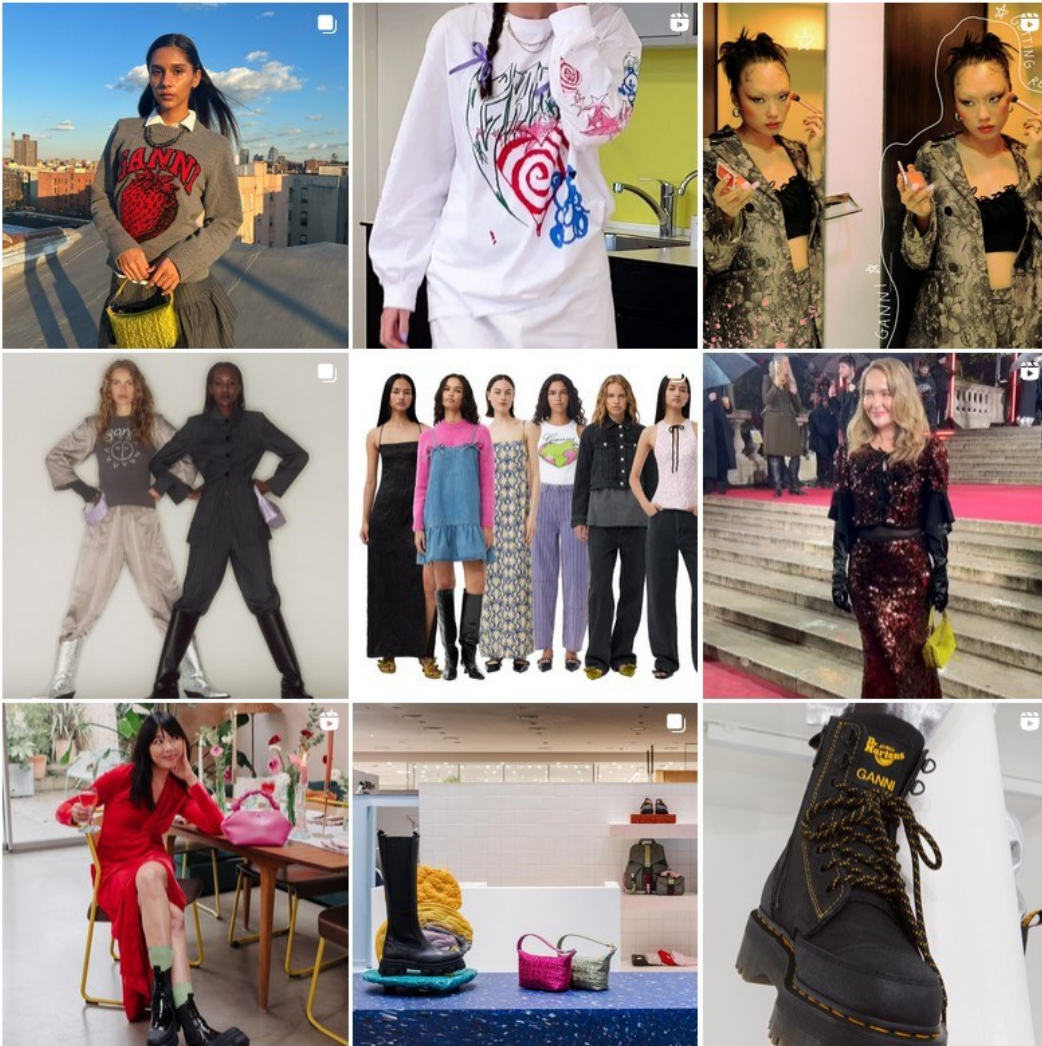


Figure 7 Ganni 15 April 2024a. Screenshot from Instagram feed (15.4.2024)



Figure 6 Ganni 15 April 2024b. Screenshot from Instagram post (15.4.2024)

4.1.6 Results and conclusions

The Nordic fashion brands studied had and did not have things in common concerning Instagram marketing. There were not many clear, epic narratives used; most of the posts were simply depicting the product or the models were posing to represent the clothing and/or accessories. Some of these brands had a more humane and authentic take on their social media account, and I think that those brands succeeded in their way to communicate with the audience. Some brands focused on being visually stunning. The identity of the brands could be seen in the contents.

When thinking about the trending and important values in the current world, diversity is a value, which can be seen in Nordic fashion marketing. More unisex fashion and different bodies could be present. However, the representation of women is powerful in general. Sustainability could be more expressed in a more visible way. It is often found on the background of the content, but it could stand out more from the content in general. Fashion brands are in a way opinion leaders, and they have a power to change and affect things. It would be important, that everyone would be able to feel themselves comfortable as themselves.

There can be seen different kinds of content, such as panorama photos, different kinds of videos or just simple photos. It is important that the company creates versatile content to keep their audience excited about the brand. I think that I represent many with my opinion, that if the fashion brand, and actually, any brand in any industry, only posts plain photos of their products, the viewers will lose their interest in following the brand on social media soon, even though they like the brand's aesthetics. So, they just scroll past the post or swipe to the next one immediately. In today's fast-paced world, the content creator has to grab the attention of the audience within seconds.

A personal favorite of mine from the analyzed content was byTiMo, a brand from which I had never heard of before writing the thesis. It had an interesting take both on designs and content, which differs from traditional Nordic one. For example, the fourth post on the screenshot, which was a video about hosting a breakfast at the brand's headquarters while showing the upcoming collection, was a clever choice to advertise the new products while creating a narrative. On terms of successfulness in general sense, I think that Marimekko has captivated the essence of both storytelling and visual content well. The colors Marimekko uses and combines are really eye catching, and the way these colors are presented on their feed is ingenious. The content it creates is also variable, which keeps the followers engaged and interested in the brand.

From the analyzed content, various tools and details which affect the storytelling in addition to the script/plot can be found. The colors, lightning and shadows are an important aspect of creating the atmosphere. The background is really vital in storytelling too, because it creates the frames for the

story, or if it is missing, that can convey a story too. The protagonist used in Nordic storytelling can be anyone, not just a stereotypical Scandinavian blonde, tall and skinny young girl. The inspirational content can be seen in every brand's feed (of course), but they should think about adding more educational and entertaining content on their feed. Personally, and based on my observations too, Marimekko's content which involved information or nods to their history, was interesting and created a lot of reactions too. Mixing modern and retro or vintage can be an effective way in a narrative. Raising questions, breaking the patterns and questioning and challenging existing perceptions of our world are important principles to consider when working with fashion, and the design industry in general.

4.2 Pictures and the mockup created with AI

The point of creating the mockup of a brand's Instagram feed was to express visually, what I had learned from storytelling in Nordic fashion marketing in this thesis process, and to learn more. And to clarify, I only created the pictures for the mockup with AI, I designed the content of every "post" and planned the prompts myself. So, AI was only a tool used in visualizing the results. The brand used in this example of creating the mockup was Jalo Living, a clothing, accessory and home textile brand valuing sustainable lifestyle and using natural materials. I have been following the association of fashion and accessory brands which manufacture their products in Finland, Suomikki, on social media, and I thought that some of the brands which belong to it, could be an interesting choice for this project. Smaller brands tend to have more to be utilized in terms of storytelling for multiple reasons. For example, the narratives can be shown more efficiently, when there is not content posted every day. Eventually, I chose Jalo Living as an example company, because I think that it already has used some storytelling elements in its brand and content, and I found it interesting to be studied and developed. The founder mentioned about her love for stories while we had a phone call, where I asked a permission to use the brand as an example in this thesis, and that was also a nice addition concerning the choice of the brand. Also, the brand has values, which are great to have in current world situation. The design aesthetics of Jalo Living are the kind, which can convey messages, and in a way, the aesthetics are kind of Nordic, but in a way, they are not. The brand's content reflects Finnish rural lifestyle with a modern twist. From a personal point of view, this brand is suitable for this project, because as content creator, I see similarities between myself and the brand, but we have different design aesthetics, so there is something familiar in the brand but something which is not, so that creates a bit of a challenge.

4.2.1 Jalo Living

Jalo Living is a Finnish clothing brand, which has an atelier and a brick-and-mortar store in the border of Finnish municipalities of Hyvinkää, Riihimäki and Hausjärvi, a showroom in Helsinki in the

U26 store and a webstore (Jalo Living 2024a). Jalo Living also takes part in pop-ups, which are organized by Suomikki, and the products of the brand can be found at Ivalo, the website which is described as the marketplace of sustainable fashion.

The values of Jalo Living are customizability and repairability, using high quality natural materials which are responsibly sourced, and domestic handcraft. The brand designs and manufactures timeless pieces which can be customized and are durable and beautiful. The collection includes clothing, accessories and home textiles, and there are not large numbers of finished products in the stock, but the products are made mainly when ordered and according to the customer's wishes and measurements. The materials used in products are sustainably chosen, for example, the wool used in products is 100% woven from the wool of Finnish lambs. The other materials used in products are linen, linen wool and hemp denim. The main material used is linen. In the production, generating waste is avoided by using the leftover textiles in accessories by example. Every product is made in Finland with skillful craftsmanship favoring domestic materials. It is good to mention, that it is not possible for everything to be domestic in the fashion industry in Finland, because some materials cannot be produced in Finland, and there are fewer material providing companies than there used to be. Jalo Living also provides services to repair or modify the clothing in case of need. The products have earned the right to use the "Design from Finland" and "Avainlippu" labels, which tell about the domesticity and sustainability of the brand. (Jalo Living 2024b.)

The story of Jalo began, when the founder, Jonna Lehtonen, searched for an answer to the question: why it is so difficult to find sustainable, high-quality clothes, that fit well. The quest to find the answer gave eventually birth to Jalo. The mission is to provide beautiful clothing in a sustainable, easy and pleasant way. The founder describes that she has always had passion for clothing, but at the same time, a need to change things to be better. Hearing about the Rana Plaza (clothing factory) collapse, in which over thousand people working in the industry died and over thousand got injured, made Lehtonen think about more ethical and sustainable choices concerning clothing. This resulted in Lehtonen starting to put effort in making better choices when choosing clothes. But it turned out to be difficult to find sustainable and transparent clothing brands which also pleased aesthetically. A question aroused, that what would enable to love, use and mend the clothes bought longer and more. Lehtonen decided to study sewing and patternmaking. During her studies, she gained versatile experience from internships in various places. Jalo was founded in spring 2020. The name is composed of the initial letters of Lehtonen's family members. The products are named after the plants and flowers found on the yard of Lehtonen's house. Jalo's essence is found in sustainable lifestyle, which combines craftsmanship, domesticity, high quality materials, durable design, taking the customer into consideration and adaptability. Every product has a story to tell. (Jalo Living 2024c.)

I studied the website of the brand first, so I could get a wider idea concerning the brand's essence. The website of Jalo Living provides all the necessary information needed and even more: in addition of presenting just photos of the products, it shares its story and stories of the customers, tips about caring instructions for different materials and tells about the qualities of materials used in products, and also, provides information of its various services.

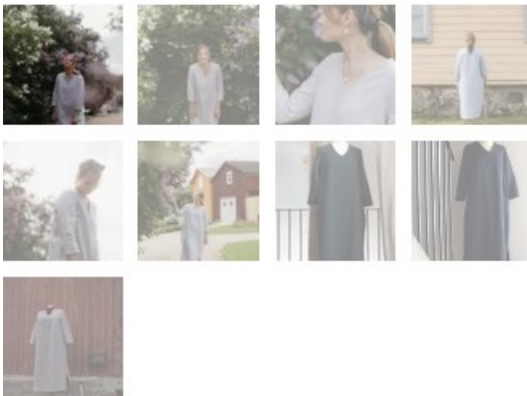
The products are the following (at the moment of writing this chapter, 24.4.2024);

- Clothes: dresses, blouses and jackets, trousers and skirts
- Accessories: hair scrunchies, linen bows
- Home textiles: bedding, towels, tablecloths, napkins
- Fabrics: fabric samples
- Others/services: Courses (dress making, making of a flower headband), gift cards, extra length for clothing (the width of clothing does not affect to the price), custom clothing (such as wedding and evening gowns made from linen), mending and modifying of the clothing, second hand -selling change for the products, private visit with friends to the atelier

The brand also has a clothing rental service, but it is on a break because of development of the service. So, it can be said, that even though the product collection is not voluminous (which is understandable though, considering the brand's nature as a sustainable, responsible, domestic and craftsmanship respecting company), it offers a lot to its customers.

The graphic design of the website is modern and elegant, mixed with photography, that radiates rustic and timeless feeling. The photos and the graphic design of the website mix pure neutral colors and muted ones. This is a not so traditional choice, and usually these pattern breaking choices work, because they are more intriguing and thought provoking than safe choices. The colors in the products are also mainly neutral or muted colors, which is common for fabrics that are made from natural materials. It seems that the products have been described thoroughly on the website. There might also be multiple photos of one product, and they might be from different settings which creates an interesting impression of the brand. It can be said that the brand utilizes storytelling already in its content. The website is currently available only in Finnish.

In figure 12 an example of a product can be seen. There are multiple photos of the product (Ailakki dress), and the text includes a lot of information. First the style and details of the product are described. The customer can choose the color of the dress and whether it has pockets or not. Then there is information about the sizes, manufacturing, price and delivery.



Etusivu Kauppa Kaikki tuotteet Tilaustuotteet Ailakki mekko

AILAKKI MEKKO

Ailakki on kaunis, hieman alaspäin levenevä pitkä ja ihastuttava ajaton luottomekko. Mekossa on v-pääntie, minimalistisena yksityiskohtana sauma keskellä edessä ja helmassa molemmilla sivuilla halkiot. Mekko sopii hieman a-linjaisen mallinsa ansiosta erinomaisesti kaiken tyyppisille vartalolle. Valitse itse, haluatko mekkoosi taskut vai et.

Valitse vaatteesi värin laajasta, Masters of Linen -sertifioitujen vastuullisten ja laadukkaiden 100% pellavakankaiden valikoimasta. Ailakki on tilattavissa myös ihanasta villa-pellavakankaasta. Värivalikoiman löydät **taalista**.

Tuote valmistetaan tilauksesta käsityönä Hyvinkäällä juuri sinulle.

Alla oleva kokotaulukko ja mittausohjeet auttavat sinua oikean koon valinnassa. Autamme mielellämme, sekä voimme ottaa myös henkilökohtaiset mittasi ja toiveesi huomioon tuotteesi valmistuksessa. Mikäli olet epävarma sinulle sopivasta koosta, valitse ostoskoriin "mittailauskoko". Saat meiltä tilauksen tehtyäsi tarkat mittausohjeet ja valmistamme sinulle sopivan tai tarvittaessa mittojesi mukaan muokatun koon. Koon räätälöinti ei vaikuta tuotteen hintaan, mutta pituuden lisääminen vaikuttaa. Halutessasi tuotteeseen enemmän pituutta, lisää ostoskoriin haluamasi lisäpituus **tästä**.

Saat aina tilauksesi yhteydessä ohjeet tuotteiden pesuun ja hoitoon. Oikeilla ohjeilla pellavan hoitaminen on helppoa, tuote säilyy hyvänä mahdollisimman pitkään ja säästät huomattavasti aikaa ja energiaa muun muassa silityksessä. Pellavan ekologisuudesta, ominaisuuksista ja hoidosta voit lukea **taalla**.

Tilauksena valmistettavien tuotteiden toimitusaika on noin 2-3 viikkoa tilauksesta. Saat tarkemman arvion tilauksesi valmistumisesta tilausvahvistuksen yhteydessä.

Tuotteen hintaan vaikuttaa haluttu materiaali. Ailakki mekon hinta 100% pellavasta on 259€ ja villa-pellavasta 305€

259,00 € – 305,00 € (sis. alv 24%)

Väri

Koko

Taskut

[OHJEET](#)

Figure 12 Jalo Living 25 April 2024b. Ailakki mekko (25.4.2024)

On Instagram, Jalo Living has about 400 posts and over 2000 followers. The story highlights cover almost the same categories as the website, which is a smart solution in multiple ways. The visitor can search information about these topics easily and this solution makes the content cohesive. For example, behind the scenes -content is not always so visual, so it would look confusing in the middle of editorial photos. The story highlights are courses, customers, behind the scenes, collection, tailoring, home, events, wool, linen, collaborations, accessories and rental services. The stories

reveal the quality of the customer service: Lehtonen picks up her customers from the train station to visit the store in case of need. The tagged posts concern mainly about collaborations, such as previously mentioned Suomikki, also editorial and wedding photos can be found. There is also a video from the account “creatorakatemia”, in which that account’s moderator discusses the importance of high-quality social media content for a small business owner with Lehtonen. (Jalo Living 25 April 2024a.)

There are six reels. The least viewed reel has 744 views, and the most viewed reel has 3001 views. The first reel had been published two days before writing this chapter. It is a video about the fashion show and popup organized in Suomikki’s event. The models are joyful and different sized and it is a pleasure to see that they feel comfortable in the clothes. The reel also shows photos and videoclips about the popup and clothes. The second reel shows the week of the entrepreneur, and it has versatile content, from inspirational still-lives to videoclips showing the entrepreneur making the clothes. The third reel shows the selection of the store at that time. The fourth reel is about a collaboration event of Jalo Living and TyyliPuhetta. The fifth reel is year review of the brand, and it shows photos and video clips of various topics. The sixth reel has been cleverly structured, because the setting is a traditional bleak Finnish spring landscape, but the dress the model is wearing is bright but muted blue, so it pops up from the video. The reels which have visible likes have under 100 likes. The sixth reel has 9 comments, but they are not really beneficial in terms of this study. The brand uses a lot of hashtags. (Jalo Living 25 April 2024a.)

The feed includes various kind of posts. Likes are hidden, but that is understandable for a small brand. There are inspirational editorial photos of the products, mostly carousels, still-lives, landscapes, and sometimes information about events or the opening hours. The clothes (main product) can be seen on models, mannequins and racks. The founder, Lehtonen, can be seen in the posts regularly, which makes the brand and its content feel more authentic, because there is real person behind the brand. The settings of the posts are rural and natural, and these elements create the essence of the brands visuals. The feed conveys a warm and authentic feeling. Posts have long captions most of the time. The evolution of the development in content creation can be seen in the use of simple posts and carousels. In the beginning, the brand used mostly simple posts. (Jalo Living 25 April 2024a.)



Figure 13 Collage of Jalo Living's content (Hartikka 2024)

In figure 13 a collage of Jalo Living's content can be seen. For the collage, I chose material, which depicts the style of Jalo Living well. The colors in collage are typical for the brand. Nature and rural elements are visible in the posts.

4.2.2 Planning the content

When planning the mockup for narrative content, I thought about the main categories of the contents which can be published by a fashion brand. These were inspirational, educational and entertaining content. Like mentioned in sub-chapter 4.1.6, the analyzed brands focused on inspirational content, which is understandable of course, but the entertaining and educational content could be more present. The same finding can be applied to the example brand.

The following things I aimed to take into consideration while planning the content:

- Diversity of the protagonists
- Protagonist(s), that were interesting in an unusual way
- Cohesive use of colors, which are typical for the brand
- Creating atmosphere with lights and shadows
- Background leading to the source of the story
- Breaking the pattern

In these things I found that the brands succeeded well, and should be considered in content creation:

- Marimekko: diversity, cohesion of the colors and how they draw attention, using history
- H&M: concentrating on visuality and the cohesion of it, even though the composition and modality varies
- By Malene Birger: Using different art styles while still maintaining the essence of the brand
- byTiMo: Using various kind of content and the aesthetics, which differ from generic Nordic ones. The video about the breakfast at the headquarters, which depicted new and upcoming products in a clever way. Sneak-a-peaks.
- Ganni: Including joy and playfulness to the content, using retro filters and interesting effects on videos and photos, panorama posts.

While planning the posts, I pondered about the findings concerning the theory and the analyses. Also, the brand's image and essence were to be taken into account. I wanted the content to be versatile, narrative but coherent. Defining the key audience is also important. It can be said that the target group of Jalo Living are adult women interested in sustainable lifestyle.

When creating any kind of stories, if it has a protagonist, it should be imagined, what they are like as a person? What is their personality? What do they look like? What are their dreams, ambitions and goals in life? When you create the persona of the protagonist, you can answer to a lot of questions. Evoking emotions in the audience can win the audience's hearts to beat for the brand. It should be also decided how the background and/or the place relates to the protagonist? Purpose of the narrative is to be pondered upon and it also is the aim of expressing the story of the plot.

Graphic choices in social media content include the font, color scheme, the form of the post, balance, optimization for mobile phones, text, size. Graphic choices in photography include lights, texture (of the materials in clothing for example), focus, perspective, composition, motion and positioning, colors, filters, quality. All graphic choices should be connected to the brand.

The brand's story and mission should be found on the content. For example, if the brand values sustainability and it is a part of their story, it should be found in every action they take. This kind of brand would not collaborate, at least in a direct way, with a fast-fashion brand. There may be exceptions because the grey area can always be seen in every matter. This exception might be that some fast-fashion brand wanted to be more sustainable and take a direction to a greener way as a business, and sustainable brand could help in that. I found that both the brand Jalo Living and the analyzed Nordic brands all value authenticity, humanity and sustainability. These are the main values of the content created.

The content created should be balanced. I planned to include simple posts, carousel posts, panorama and “videos” on the feed. “Video” is expressed in quotation marks, because I planned the plot of it, but decided only to show a “snapshot of a scene”, because it is the most efficient way in this kind of thesis. When planning the posts, I tried to answer to the questions “who, what, when, where, why, how”, which create the frames of the story. During my studies I have encountered lot of people, who represent the twenty-year-old people of today. Most of them say, that they want to see videos, not photos and texts, and you can also find comments on social media which say the same thing too, so it is necessary to post videos regularly.

The elements in stories which should be taken into account when thinking about the brand and creating posts, are:

- Flowers, these are necessary, because the products are named after these, it is a recurring motif in the content of the brand, and they connect to the themes of nature and rurality.
- Nature is a really important theme, which connects to the values of the brand, because the use of nature conveys messages about ecological and natural material choices
- Rurality is also an important theme in the brand’s content
- Water, fields, forests, berries, bogs, cliffs, rain, rapids
- Color scheme has been considered in detail: brick red, light grey, natural white, muted blues and greens and beige are perhaps the most visible colors.
- Wooden rustic buildings
- Fairytales, especially Nordic ones involving forests et cetera, and mythology, would be an interesting addition to the themes.
- Authentic stories about customers
- Empowerment
- Nostalgia

I created an indicative color palette to guide me in the color choices. This can be seen in Figure 14.



Figure 14 Color palette (Hartikka 2024)

4.2.3 The pictures of the feed

I have to say that I had not used AI tools before this project, so I had no previous knowledge about how it would work and what kind of pictures it would generate. But I think that while writing the thesis, new things should be tried in addition to expressing already existing knowledge about things. To generate the images, I used the AI tool called Runway. The end results were really varying, some pictures were much better than others. With generating one specific picture I had multiple problems. What I found sad about the AI tool was how it depicted most of the women as blonde, white, skinny and young women, and it was not able to create diverse group of women even when the prompt was very detailed. But as these kinds of apps are quite new, there is hope that this will change. The words used in prompts were to be considered carefully, and sometimes, even really thorough wording did not result in the wanted outcome. I chose the number of outputs to be four, so that there would be different image choices. I have mentioned suggested hashtags and captions for each photo. I am not mentioning words “linen”, “fashion” and “jalo living” in the hashtag suggestions, because those words should be used in every one of the pictures.

While generating the ideas for the mockup, my main emphasis was on the protagonist(s), joy, and the cohesion with the visuality of the brand. I planned that the first post should include the theme of rain in a spruce forest, combined with playfulness of the protagonist. This kind of setting symbolizes the Finnish mind setting in a way: rain represents the melancholy that is often connected to Finnish people, but the way the woman embraces the rain with joy, tells about the Finnish “sisu”, which can be described as “strong determination”. I think that water is also a very important motif in every culture, and especially in Nordic culture. People in Nordic countries often prefer to live near some kind of source of water based on my observations. Forests are an obvious choice concerning both the brand’s visuals as well as the Nordic landscape and culture. Many Finnish people like to retreat to forests to ponder about life.

The prompts used in creating the post was: “Nordic looking woman is smiling with her eyes closed and she is looking at the camera. Woman is wearing a brick red linen dress in a road to a spruce forest during rain. Sun is shining from behind the trees.” Because this was the first post, I set the prompt “Nordic looking” on purpose, to see, what kind of woman does the AI depicts as “Nordic looking”. In figure 15 the image created by the AI tool can be seen. This image was probably the most successful in terms of what the AI created based on description. But an important motif, rain, is not so visible. The post could be a carousel post depicting the same setting but different poses and compositions. The hashtags used could include these: “spruce forest”, “rain”, “Finnish”, “path”. The caption could describe the dress and how the photoshoot in the rain went.



Figure 15 Woman in the forest during rain (generated by the AI tool Runway)

The second post is a video about the brand's customers, sharing their stories about how they found the brand and felt connection with it. Content like this makes the brand feel more humane. The stories have to be authentic, and they can't seem like scripted. There should be several different looking women depicted in the first photo of the post, so that the person who looks at the feed, notices that this post is different from the editorial ones.

Generating this picture was difficult, and I did not get the results I wanted. I tried multiple prompts, the first was: "A diverse group of three women wearing linen clothing are discussing around a table in a rustic environment and drinking tea. The women are smiling and laughing. The colors depicted in the picture are muted and neutral, but light". The women looked all the same and the setting and the clothes were not modern. I tried other prompts too, but the picture used in the mockup was created with the prompts: "Three different looking women are discussing around a table in a rustic environment located in an old Finnish manor on present day. The women are wearing different kinds of modern linen clothing. The women are drinking tea and are smiling and laughing." As can be seen in figure 16, the group of women are not different looking, but as I could not get the AI to depict different women in the same picture, I gave up and decided to use this picture. There could be a calm piano music on the background of the video. The hashtags used could include these at

least: “teatime”, “customer experience” and “brand story”. Caption could briefly describe the highlights of the video or tease about the content of it.



Figure 16 Women drinking tea (Generated by AI tool Runway)

The third post is a simple post, showing a model in a rustic interior setting. Simple posts are also needed to calm the feed. If there is always happening something spectacular, the posts do not affect the viewer so much anymore. The prompt used was: “The interior and the furniture in the picture are antique and rustic, the setting is in an old Finnish manor. A woman is sitting in front of a white dressing table, she is depicted from the side, but her body is towards the viewer of the image. Woman has a dreamy expression on her face, and she is looking at the mirror of the dressing table. The walls have petrol blue wallpaper with vintage pattern. There is also a faded emerald green colored cupboard and two oak brown chairs set around a round table. The sun peaks from the window, creating shadows and highlight to the environment”. This prompt produced so different images that I had in mind, that I had to try again with the different prompt. I also noticed some problems with the first prompt, for example I had not described the woman’s clothes. The next prompt used was: “Image is taken on present day, but the setting is in a room of a rustic Finnish manor. A happy woman wearing plum violet linen pants and light lavender colored linen shirt is leaning against the powder-colored wall, the wallpaper is not in a good condition. There is some rustic furniture, for example a teal cupboard and white table set. The sun peaks out from the window, creating shadows and highlights to the environment.” The results can be seen in figure 17. This was not what I had in my mind, but close enough to show the idea. I liked that the AI depicted

the woman as not-so-young as it usually did. The hashtags can describe the colors and the setting. The caption could be something which describes upcoming happenings and the mood that the entrepreneur currently has. This would be okay, because the post is a simple post, and it is not narrative.



Figure 17 Woman in rustic manor (generated by AI tool Runway)

The products of the brand have stories, and these should be expressed in the social media content. To do this, the fourth post, a carousel, tells the story and the process of creating a certain product. It depicts the sketches and notes of a dress. The post could also include a video of Lehtonen talking about the process behind the designing and manufacturing of the dress. This kind of content creates authenticity and confirms to the viewer, that the products are sustainably designed and manufactured and also, understand the pricing. One of the biggest issues in the clothing industry is, that people don't buy domestically and sustainably manufactured products, because most people consider them as expensive. If they became aware of the process behind the process, they would probably understand the pricing more, and could favor domestic choices.

The prompt used was: "Beautifully drawn sketch on paper depicting a straight-lined dress with puff sleeves, containing notes written with cursive handwriting. There are also dried Finnish flowers like carnation on top of the papers, and the papers are lying on a rustic brown board table made of wood." The AI tool created too nostalgic image, seen in figure 18, which it did multiple times when generating images. The hashtags should include words like "process", "sketch", "fashion design". Caption can briefly describe the content of the photos.



Figure 18 Sketch of a dress (generated by AI tool Runway)

I wanted to continue with the water theme in the fifth post, which I tried to use in the first image with not-so-good success. Water is the essence of life and an important motif in the art created by people from Nordic countries. That's why the fifth post includes a pier and a lake. It is quite a stereotypical Finnish landscape, but I thought that with the use fog, it can seem like an interesting landscape.

The prompt used was: "A woman wearing a forest green linen bell skirt and an off-white linen t-shirt is walking on a pier which is located on a Finnish lake, holding a straw hat on her other hand. It is dusk and foggy, the sky has different colors such as blue, pink and yellow, covered in fog". The result generated by the AI tool, seen in figure 19 was okay, but there are problems, such as how the pier is not depicted the right way. This post could also be a carousel post, and the other photo could depict the woman sitting on the pier. The hashtags could include: "evening", "lake", "calmness" et cetera. The caption could describe how important it is sometimes just to stop to think about things and going to nature can help in that.



Figure 19 A woman walking on a pier (generated by AI tool Runway)

The sixth post is an educational post including information about the qualities of linen as a clothing and home textile material, and how to take care of that kind of fabrics. The photo seen first on the feed depicts a woman wearing a beige linen shirt and petrol blue linen skirt, and she is holding a bouquet of blue linen flowers. The other photos in the posts would be concrete examples of the care instructions for linen.

The prompt used was: “A joyful woman on present day wearing a beige linen shirt and petrol blue linen skirt, is holding a bouquet of blue linen flowers. The image is cropped so, that it is cropped from the woman’s mid-thigh. The background is Finnish rushes, and the reeds are quite tall, but the blue summer sky can be seen still.” The results of this prompt can be seen in figure 20. It depicts a field instead rushes. But the AI surprised me with this photo, it had created an interesting crop for this image I ended up using. Hashtags should include “rushes” at least. The caption can briefly describe the content of the whole post.



Figure 20 Woman in the rushes (generated by AI tool Runway)

The seventh post is dedicated to love. Love is a feeling that everybody wants to feel so it evokes a lot of emotions in the audience. Jalo Living also designs and makes wedding gowns. I really liked the idea that By Malene Birger had used in its feed, when it published fashion pictures which seemed like they were painted. In this post, because it is an example made with AI, I tried to use the art style of Helene Schjerfbeck as reference for the art style. I thought that her art style would be fitting for Jalo Living's visuality. Before trying to generate pictures with the prompt, I thought that it would need a reference artist, but that was not the case at least for the program I used.

The prompt for this picture was: "Woman wearing a vintage inspired linen wedding gown looks at the flower bouquet on her hands. Picture is set on present day. There is a silver framed mirror on the background, and the reflection of the woman can be seen in that. The cropping is made so, that the whole body of the woman cannot be seen. The floor is off white, and the walls are brown. Both are made of wooden boards. The picture is made with the art style resembling the art style of Finnish artist Helene Schjerfbeck." The images generated first were normal styled, so I had to choose impressionism as style of the photo. In figure 21, the results of the prompt can be seen. The result is not what I had prompted, but it is suitable enough for this purpose. Hashtags should include "wedding", "bride", "bridal", "flowers" and "reflection". In the caption, the wedding and the emotions around it could be discussed.



Figure 21 Impressionist illustration of a bride (generated by AI tool Runway)

The eighth post is about the headbands made of linen “flowers”. The brand organizes courses, where the customer can make this kind of headband. The prompt was: “A woman is on the old attic on present day. She is sitting on a chair with a dreamy expression on her face and eyes closed. She is wearing modern clothes, green linen trousers, a plum violet linen shirt and has a headband made of flowers, the flowers on the headband are different shades of violet, green, beige and yellow. Sun is shining through the window on the wall, and it also shines through the roof.” In figure 22 we can see that the AI took free rein in the generation of the image once again, but I think that this picture depicts colors, shadows, and highlights well, which create the atmosphere I was aiming for. Also, the facial expression on woman’s face is good, because some of the faces the AI produced were kind of horrifying. Hashtags should include “workshop”, “floral”, “flower headband”. In the caption the workshop can be described.



Figure 22 Woman on the attic (generated by AI tool Runway)

The ninth post was going to have a retro vibe and grain filter. The main target of the post is to evoke emotions in viewers and create a feeling of nostalgia. I noticed that the brand offers bows for toddlers and kids, but kids are not visible in the content yet, so I wanted to suggest with this post that they could be seen in few posts. This post includes a mother and a son wearing linen clothes (the brand does not offer other products than bows for kids currently) and dancing in the field.

The prompt used in creating the post was: “A woman wearing a burnt orange linen dress is dancing with her 4-year-old son, who is wearing a light grey collar shirt with a dark grey bow and copper-colored trousers with suspenders. They are dancing in front of a Finnish field, and it is dusk. The picture has a grain filter which creates nostalgic effect.” Figure 23 shows the mother and son in the field. The photo is quite okay (despite the mother having three legs and the son not having a bow). These kinds of photos connect with people having kids, and it creates a more emotional connection with the brand. The hashtags could be “mother”, “son”, “family” and “love”. The caption could tell about life with kids.



Figure 23 Mother and son on a field (generated by the AI tool Runway)

4.2.4 The mockup

I found the Instagram template for the mockup from website called “freepik”. I used screenshot of Jalo Living’s real Instagram account for the information and the profile picture and included the collage of the feed including the pictures I created with the AI tool Runway. I think that I managed well in the cohesion of the pictures seen on the feed. Even though there are no epic stories, there can still be seen few pattern breakers. I thought that I should not include too dramatic stories to the mockup, because being too dramatic is not a part of either Nordic storytelling or the brand’s essence. I also used emotions in the creation of the content. Like mentioned previously, the usage of AI tools is still somewhat problematic from multiple aspects, but I think that in the end, the mockup managed to depict my ideas.

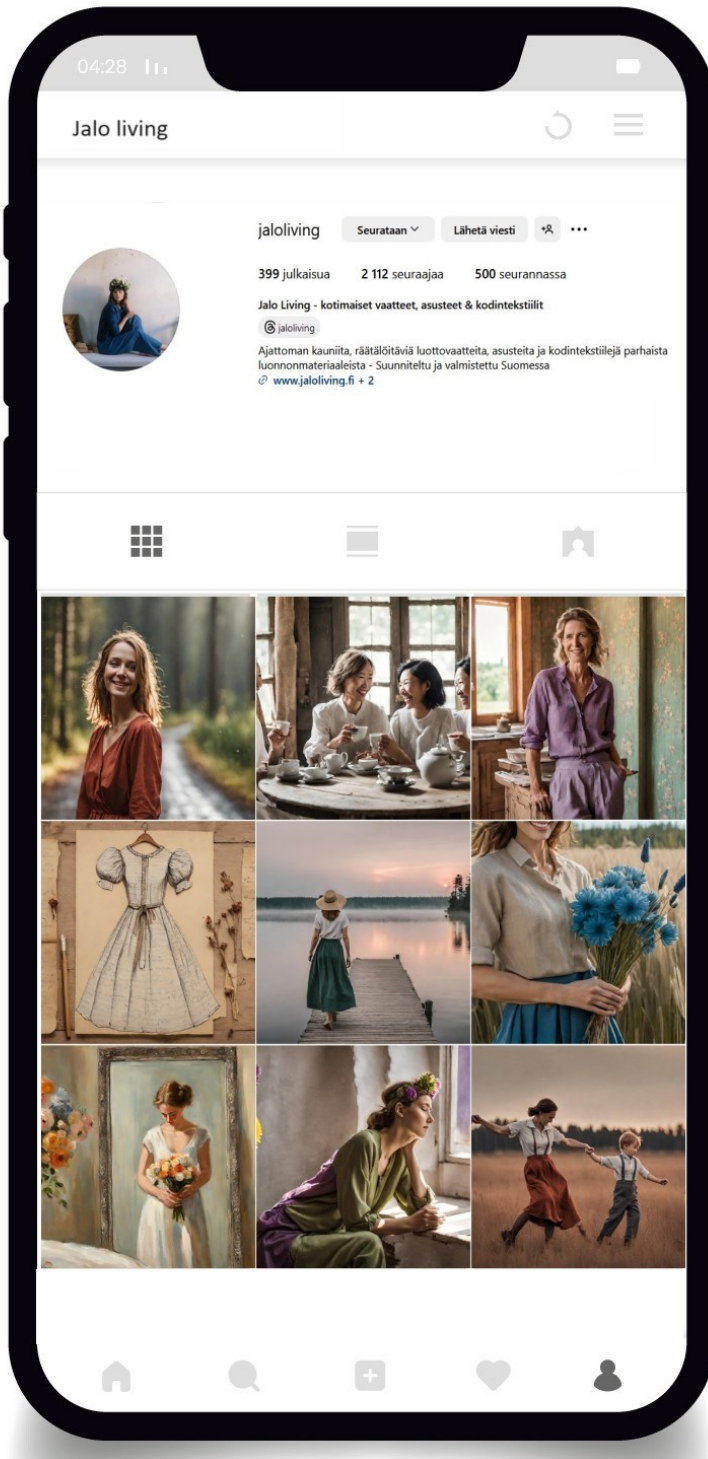


Figure 24 Mockup, Jalo Living's Instagram feed (Hartikka 2024)

5 Discussion

The storytelling and narratives in fashion marketing on Instagram is different from oral or written stories. The story can tell about a brand's history or its values for example. The story can also tell the story of the product(s), or the people represented in the post. The posts can be non-narrative or narrative, but there should be a balance between the amount of them. However, using narratives in the brand's content makes the message that the brand wants to convey, more memorable. Important values to show in the posts are humanity, authenticity and diversity. And let's not forget about emotions either.

While inspecting the feeds of the chosen brands, I came into conclusion, that Nordic storytelling in fashion marketing is quite subtle. The stories and narratives used were not striking in general. The people working in the industry should try to approach the subject with a more dramatic way, but of course, being dramatic is not very common in Nordic culture. So, there should be a balance in this too. The brands mainly focus on cohesion between the content and the brand's essence, and there is nothing wrong with that, but sometimes, boundaries can and should be broken. The target group of the brand affects the content and the reactions to the posts and the activity they react to them.

The mockup I created on the basis of content analyses and theoretical framework was not perfect, but I think that some main ideas can be found there. Among other things, the content is versatile, the colors used in the content are cohesive, and there can be seen protagonists, which evoke emotions in the viewers. I would have wanted to create content, which I had produced myself in reality, but this was not possible for multiple reasons, one important reason being that I wrote the thesis during winter and spring, when it is difficult to organize fashion shoots outside, especially when thinking about the chosen brand.

Clothing is not only an essential product to protect us from the weather et cetera, but it is also a way to communicate. Fashion can be used to express political opinions for example. This is huge trend today, when people express their support for political movements, such as Black Lives Matter and Me Too. The messages conveyed through clothing and fashion in general are not always very apparent or literal though. Clothes can send messages with their shape, colors, how different pieces are combined, style "genre" and use of visible brand logos for example. These messages sent can be about references to history, popular culture, politics, identification to a certain group, status or role, moods, wealth, music you listen to and your culture. In content creation, conveying messages can happen, in addition to the clothing and model choices obviously, with multiple things. It begins with the choice of the channel and the form (video or photo) of the story and the overall plot and purpose of the story. The portrayal of the protagonist is what the audience concentrates on. The set supports the story. What is the form of the post; whether the photos are in

separate posts or in a carousel post, whether it is a panorama et cetera, and how it looks like in the feed. It should be also considered, how the story resonates with the brand.

The research problem was: “How is storytelling utilized in Nordic fashion marketing on Instagram?”. This has been speculated in previous chapters, but to conclude, Nordic fashion brands use some narratives and storytelling in their content creation, but it is kind of subtle, and not expressed very literally.

The sub-problems were: “What are the typical themes in Nordic storytelling?”, “What makes storytelling an effective tool in marketing” and “What should be taken into account from the perspective of storytelling when creating fashion marketing material?”. These have been discussed also on different parts of the thesis. Because the analyzed brands were quite different from their aesthetics, there were no clear themes to be seen, even though the brands emphasized some shared aspects, such as the importance of the use of colors. I was surprised that nature was not in so big a role in the content as I assumed. Storytelling is an effective tool in fashion marketing, and this could be seen from the reactions the narrative content had caused in the audience compared to the non-narrative ones for example. The values of the target group are important to take into account when creating content for a brand. It is also important to note, that you can affect how and what people think about your content, so the content and its effects on the audience should be considered through before publication of the post.

For further research, the interviews should be a part of the study. Also, a quantitative approach could be considered, in which the hashtags used can be gathered and tables and figures showing what kind of narratives the contents included for example.

The reliability of a qualitative research is determined by the reliability of the analysis and how the data has been processed (Anttila s.a.). The reliability of the analysis and the data processing are achieved because I remained neutral in my analysis and did not consider my own opinions about the brands, unless otherwise mentioned. A wider range of information, the ones which would have been gained from the interviews, would have increased the reliability of the research. The ethics of the study were achieved with concentrating on the positive qualities of the content while remaining unbiased. The AI was used only in creating the images for the mockup and the use of it was brought up several times. I asked permission from the brands to use their content in the analysis, even though it is not necessary, because the information used is public and available to everyone. Only two of the five brands answered my message.

The idea of the thesis experienced twists and turns during this journey. At first, I had a client, and the thesis was product based. I would have produced real life fashion photos from the start to

beginning by myself on the basis of theory, study of the client's brand and the results of the interviews. But then I realized that it would have been too huge a project. Also, it would have probably ended up being a not-so-businesslike thesis, and on the top of these things, it was winter, so nature and outdoors could not be utilized in the photo shoots, which I found really restrictive, because nature is a really beneficial element to be used in this kind of project. I think that this idea was really great, but I did not have the resources to execute it. I was upset about not getting any interviewees for the project, but this could have been avoided, if I had started to contact the fashion storytellers earlier, and a larger group of them. Also, I was thinking of including the quantitative information, which I mentioned in previously when discussing about development ideas, but then the study might have been too extensive, as it is usually more efficient to concentrate on one aspect at a time. As a researcher, I also prefer to concentrate on the qualitative sides of the studies, so I am more experienced and better in conducting this kind of study.

The objective of the study was to discover new information of the subject and/or bring the information together. I do not think that I discovered anything spectacular while conducting the study, but information concerning the topic was brought together. Personal objective, to develop as a storyteller, was achieved when I learned a lot from the topic, both when I studied theory, analyzed the content and created the mockup.

When doing fashion marketing, breaking the pattern, which can be done in multiple ways in storytelling too, can really evoke different kinds of emotions in the viewer. Raising questions and challenging the existing perceptions of the surrounding world are also important values in design and art, and these three things, in addition to entertaining and inspirational purposes, shape the reasons why art, design and culture is important to have in this world. Marketing is not only a cold-hearted business, but you can, and you should, also use it to convey emotions and stories through it and show the great values your business has.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions meant for the storytelling experts eng/fin

- How do you want to be introduced, for example, what kind of title(s) do you want to be used about you? / Miten haluat sinut esiteltävän, esimerkiksi tittelit?
- How can storytelling / narratives be utilized in fashion marketing? / Miten tarinallistamista/tarinan kerrontaa voi hyödyntää muodin markkinoinnissa?
- Can you think of some specific narrative fashion photo or video, in which storytelling is utilized especially well? Who is the best storyteller in the industry? / Tuleeko sinulle mieleen joku tarinallinen muotokuva tai -video, jossa tarinallisuutta hyödynnettäisiin erityisen hyvin? Kuka osaa mielestäsi tarinankerronnan hyvin?
- How do you yourself utilize storytelling in your works? / Miten itse hyödynnät tarinallisuutta työssäsi?
- In which of your own works have you succeeded to express narratives and storytelling especially well? / Entä missä itse olet onnistunut ilmentämään tarinallisuutta mielestäsi hyvin?
- What things have had an effect to your storytelling? / Mitkä asiat ovat vaikuttaneet sinun tarinankerrontaasi?
- What are the globally trendy themes in storytelling currently? And in your country/Nordics? / Mitkä ovat mielestäsi globaalisti pinnalla olevia teemoja tai trendejä tarinankerronnassa? Entä Suomessa ja Pohjoismaissa yleensä?
- Are there any challenges or disadvantages concerning the usage of storytelling (in marketing) in your opinion? / Voiko tarinallistamisesta olla jotain haittaa (markkinoinnissa), tai liitykö siihen mielestäsi jotain haasteita?

Appendix 2. Observations

For the research, the following Instagram accounts were examined:

- Marimekko: @marimekko
- H&M: @hm
- By Malene Birger: @bymalenebirger
- byTiMo: @bytimo
- Ganni: @ganni
- Jalo Living: @jaloliving