

# **Consumers Perception of Brands' Instagram Pages**

**South Korean and Finnish Young Adults Thoughts on Brands' Instagram Pages.**

## Abstract

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Title of the thesis <b>Consumers Perception of Brands' Instagram Pages</b> South Korean and Finnish Young Adults Thoughts on Brands' Instagram Pages.		
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Abstract <p>Digital marketing has overtaken traditional marketing with its higher exposure and cheaper marketing expenses, with social media as its frontline. Instagram is one of the biggest social media platforms used by South Korean and Finnish young adults. Although brands are actively marketing on Instagram, how the consumers perceive them is not highly researched. Therefore, this study looks into the perception of South Korean and Finnish 20 to 30-year-olds on brands' Instagram page marketing.</p> <p>This study was conducted using qualitative research methods and analysed using a deductive approach. The data used in this study incorporated both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were collected from academic literature, websites, industry articles, and webinars. The primary data was obtained by interviewing 20 to 30-year-old South Koreans and Finns.</p> <p>The Key finding from this research reveals that the target group looks to find information from brands' Instagram pages rather than entertainment value. Furthermore, their following of brands is highly based on their interest and preferences.</p>		
Keywords Social media marketing, Instagram, Consumer Perception, Content Marketing		

## Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Research Background.....	1
1.2	Thesis Objectives, Research Questions and Limitations.....	1
1.3	Theoretical Framework.....	2
1.4	Research Methodology and Data Collection.....	3
1.5	Thesis Structure.....	4
2	Social Media and Marketing.....	6
2.1	Definition of Social Media and Social Media Marketing.....	6
2.2	Effective Social Media Marketing Strategies.....	6
3	Content and Instagram-Specific Marketing.....	9
3.1	Content Marketing.....	9
3.2	Instagram.....	11
3.2.1	Instagram as a Marketing Tool.....	12
3.2.2	Brand Content Creating on Instagram.....	12
3.2.3	Instagram Algorithm and Reels.....	13
4	Empirical Research and Data Analysis.....	15
4.1	Data Collection.....	15
4.1.1	Interviews Implementation.....	15
4.1.2	Brands' Instagram Pages Included in the Interview.....	17
4.2	Data Analysis.....	21
4.2.1	Interview Results from Korean Interviewees.....	21
4.2.2	Interview Results from Finnish Interviewees.....	25
5	Conclusion.....	28
5.1	Answers to Research Questions.....	28
5.2	Validity and Reliability.....	30
5.3	Suggestions for Further Research.....	30
6	Summary.....	32
	References.....	33

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

In order to market effectively, a brand needs to know where consumers are and how to reach them, and a marketer needs to know where brands are marketing. Instagram is an excellent place to build brand awareness and has over 200 million active business accounts worldwide (Meta 2023; Decker 2017.)

That being said, from a marketer's perspective, social media marketing is convenient for big and small businesses because it can be effective regardless of the amount of money invested (Coles 2018, 7). However, brand marketing in social media does require money and time. It is still more cost-efficient than traditional marketing methods such as television and radio advertising (Kerpen 2015, 9-10). 4.88 billion users of social media globally indicates that the possibility of connecting with new and existing consumers is higher than in traditional marketing (We Are Social & Meltwater 2023a; Coles 2018, 7).

Social media platforms have not been around for long, but they have already exceeded traditional marketing in many ways as marketing tools. Instagram has evolved a lot in its short existence, and they are now part of people's everyday lives. Because of these fast changes, Instagram is still a new tool for marketers to navigate.

As such, this study aims to provide basic insights into social media marketing, specifically Instagram marketing, and consumer perception of brands' Instagram pages. Its specific target audience is Finnish and South Korean, 20 to 30-year-olds.

The core focus of this thesis revolves around how brands can effectively market themselves through their own Instagram pages, commonly referred to as content marketing on the platform, as opposed to relying solely on paid advertising and sponsorships. It will also explore Instagram advertising since content produced on brand Instagram pages can be used as paid advertisements. The reason for focusing on what brands can do free of charge on Instagram is because it is the most inclusive way of marketing on Instagram. All types of brands, regardless of their size or marketing budget, can use this type of marketing, and even if a brand is ready to invest a lot of money in its Instagram marketing strategy, it still needs to create an Instagram page for itself (Coles 2018, 7).

### 1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Questions and Limitations

A precisely defined research question indicates what the research is about and becomes the most central part of the research (Saunders et al. 2016, 60). Therefore, research

objectives must be examined when building research questions. Research objectives describe what the research tries to achieve and clarify why it is being pursued. They compress the project's approach and reason and assist in focusing the research (Ryan 2023).

For this thesis, the main objective is to explore how 20 to 30-year-old Finnish and South Korean consumers perceive companies' own Instagram pages. It aims to give marketers direction on a customer's perception. As a result, marketers are more aware of the effect their Instagram activity might have on their brand in the eyes of the consumers. The research questions following this paragraph have been made to reach the main objective, aim, and resulting benefit.

The main research question is:

- What should be considered when marketing to Finnish and South Korean young adults using a brand's Instagram page?

The sub-questions are:

- What marketing objectives can a brand aim for using an Instagram page?
- What factors affect whether the target group follows, unfollows, stays interested or dislikes a brand's Instagram page?

In research, having limitations helps to know what is being examined and what the study applies to. This research focuses on the selected target group. The target group chosen is South Korean and Finnish people in the age range of 20 to 30. It focuses exclusively on this chosen consumer group and does not review consumers outside of it. In addition, there are multiple ways to market on Instagram, but this research focuses only on company brands' Instagram page marketing. However, this study does not limit itself to customers' perception of one company's Instagram page but to finding connecting features in customers' perceptions of versatile brands.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

Two chapters of this thesis are dedicated to the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework provides context for the study and its concepts and definitions and reviews the existing theories and studies (William 2006). It examines the significance of the other studies on the current study. (Saunders et al. 2016, 70, 72-73.)

Academic literature has been unable to keep up with the broad changes of Instagram, and therefore, it has become outdated. This is why the theoretical framework for this thesis relies

on information written by companies and industry professionals specialising in social media marketing complemented by academic literature.

Chapters 2 and 3 cover the theoretical part. Chapter 2 provides a basic understanding of social media as a marketing tool. It answers questions such as what social media marketing is, how it differs from traditional marketing, and the differences in consumer behaviour and expectations.

Chapter 3 examines content marketing and Instagram-specific marketing. It covers the fundamentals of content marketing, such as what it is, why it is important, what to do before starting it, different content media types, and content strategies. Then, it moves on to Instagram-specific marketing, which provides a basic understanding of Instagram as a marketing tool and industry professionals' advice on navigating it effectively as a brand.

#### 1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

More than one definition will be needed to explain what research is in its reality because it is broad and includes almost all features of human life. On the other hand, if the matter of research is examined closely enough, it can be noticed that it is systematic. Therefore, it can be described as progress toward clear solutions to problems achieved through planning, organised collection of information, analysis, and understanding of data. There are inductive and deductive research methods or inductive and deductive reasoning. (Godwill 2015, 4.) Figure 1 shows the research methodology and data collection chosen for this thesis.

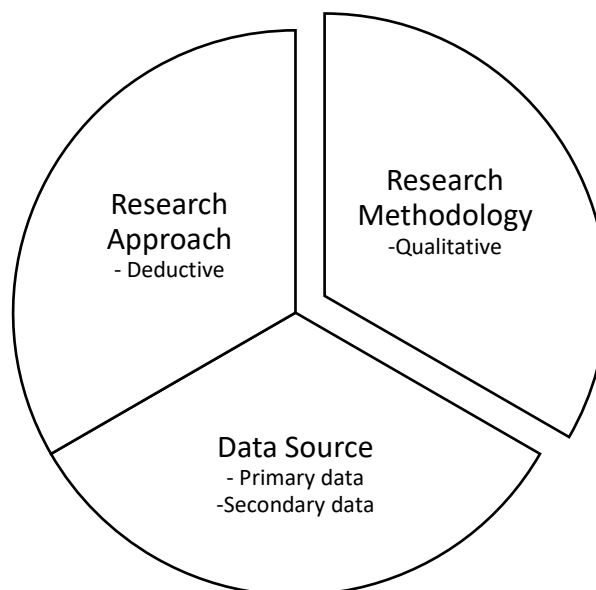


Figure 1 Research Approach, Research Methodology and Data Source

Deductive research proceeds from broad theories or ideas to more specific ones (Godwill 2015, 4). Inductive reasoning moves from a particular theory to a broad generalisation, trying to develop a hypothesis. Both methods are valid, often used, and can be used together in research. (Streefkerk 2023a.)

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are used to collect and analyse research data. Qualitative research develops a theory, uses fewer sample sizes, conveys with words, and recaps and labels the matter in hand. Conversely, quantitative research checks a theory, conveys with numbers, uses a large sample size, and analyses statistically. (Streefkerk 2023b.)

This thesis will use deductive reasoning, ranging from general theories to defined ones. The data will be collected and analysed using qualitative research. The qualitative research will be done by conducting one-on-one interviews with the target group. There were eight interviewees, five of them South Korean and three Finnish.

The study is developed by gathering information from two main sources: primary and secondary data. Secondary data is acquired by reviewing existing literature, while primary data is collected through qualitative methods in empirical research.

## 1.5 Thesis Structure

Figure 2 below showcases the structure of this thesis. The first chapter is the introduction, where the main objectives, aims, limitations and research questions for this thesis are

introduced along with the research methodology, data collection method, and theoretical framework used in this thesis.

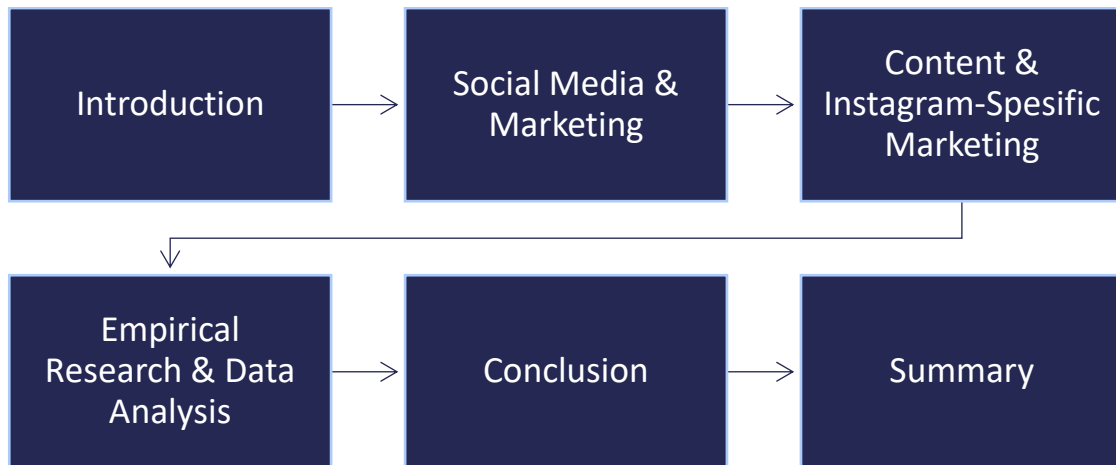


Figure 2 Structure of the thesis

Chapters 2 and 3 go through the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 focuses on Social media marketing, and Chapter 3 focuses on content marketing and Instagram-specific marketing.

Chapter 4 covers the empirical research done for this thesis. First, it discloses the data collection method and its implementation and moves to data analysis. For this thesis, the data collection method was one-on-one interviews with the target group, which was divided into the two nationalities being studied.

The conclusion in Chapter 5 will answer the research questions, tie together the secondary and primary data, discuss the validity and reality of this thesis, and give suggestions for further research. The last chapter, Chapter 6 is the summary which summarises the whole thesis. Lastly, references can be found on the last pages of the thesis.

## 2 Social Media and Marketing

### 2.1 Definition of Social Media and Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is one aspect of digital marketing. Unlike traditional marketing, digital marketing has made marketing a two-way street rather than one-way. An important factor when marketing in social media is that it differs from traditional marketing. (Scott 2020, 20.)

Firstly, social media can be defined in different ways. Hanlon (2020, 123) describes it as involving interactive marketing objectives across various levels in organisational, peer-to-peer and personal connections. Additionally, Obar and Wildman (2015) found common commodities in numerous social media definitions. According to those similarities, social media makes possible the development of social networks online, with user-created content being the base of social media and individuals and groups making self-made profiles that are maintained by the platforms. Therefore, when compressed, user-created content and communication ability between users are the cornerstone of social media, and definitions of social media lie somewhere around it. (Knight & Voster 2023, 257; Obar & Wildman 2015, 745.)

Moving from the definition of social media to the definition of social media marketing, the Digital Marketing Institute describes social media marketing as a type of digital marketing that leverages social networking platforms to promote products, foster connections with consumers, and enhance brand visibility. This means that social media marketing objectives are divided into building consumer relationships and highlighting products and brands to increase brand exposure (Knight & Voster 2023, 258). Additionally, Baker (2024) describes social media marketing quite similarly, adding that it is the process of creating content for social media to reach these marketing objectives of brand exposure and consumer connection.

### 2.2 Effective Social Media Marketing Strategies

David Meerman Scott (2020) describes social media as a cocktail party. Consumers are there to have fun, escape or be inspired. Therefore, marketers should act accordingly. To reach consumers in social media, a brand would need to offer the consumer something that will entertain, educate, or inspire. On social media, brands should present themselves as they are. Build their brand personality and show who they are and what they are about. (Walsh-Phillips 2021; Scott 2020, 20, 63.)

Walsh-Phillips (2021) introduced a formula called MOM, which stands for Magnetising, Opt-in, and Monetize. When marketing on social media, trying to make a sale immediately is shown not to be the best approach; instead, start with creating content that is magnetic to your target customer. Then, get the consumers to opt in, stop scrolling, focus on the brand's content, and move them to the brand's page. Only after this comes the final step, monetising. (Walsh-Phillips 2021.)

A study by Erdogmus and Cicek (2012) on the impacts of social media on brand loyalty also analysed the type of content shared by social media users. This study was done in Turkey with a sample size of 338 people. The users share funny, extraordinary content, music, or technological or instructive information. On the other hand, they abstain from sharing sad events, advertisements or horror. This study matches David Meerman Scott's statement that people use social media for entertainment purposes and that creating content that is either entertaining, educating, or inspiring can help increase visibility on the platform.

### **Platform Sizes, Consumer Behaviour and Preferences**

According to We Are Social and Meltwater statistics (2023a), 60.6% of the global population uses social media, which translates to 4.88 billion users. On average, a typical user uses social media for 2 hours and 26 minutes daily. (We Are Social & Meltwater 2023a.)

Facebook is the most used social media platform, with 2,989 billion active global users monthly. Instagram is fourth, with 2 billion active global users, after YouTube and WhatsApp, keeping in mind that the most prominent platform varies when looking at user activity, engagement, and location, among countless other factors. (We Are Social & Meltwater 2023a.)

For example, when looking at social media usage in South Korea and Finland, we can see that South Korea has 19.25 million advertisement-reachable Instagram users and 9.60 million Facebook users, separating it from the global norm that Facebook has more users than Instagram. On the contrary, in Finland, Facebook has 2.40 million users, and Instagram has 2.30 million users. However, this can result from Finland's older generation's higher social media usage compared to South Korea. Finland has over double the number of social media users over 35, considering that Instagram's audience globally consists of more than 50% of 18 to 34-year-olds. (We Are Social & Meltwater 2023a-d.)

Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and countless other platforms are all possible platforms to market a brand. It is possible and normal for brands to market on multiple social media platforms. To reach 18 to 34-year-olds, YouTube and Instagram are the places to be (We Are Social & Meltwater 2023a). Instagram was selected to be examined for this study

because it is more in favour of and designed for brands. The target group is more centralised on the platform than on other social media. (Gupta 2023.) A brand needs to know how consumers perceive different marketing strategies on social media to use the method that best serves its brand. Consumer perception is essential to brands because it affects consumer behaviour and eventually correlates to the brand's profitability, which is why many companies invest resources in it. (Thiruvengatraj & Vetrivel 2017.)

Not only do Gen Z and Millennials use social media platforms, but studies indicate that younger demographics such as Gen Z and Millennials are utilising social media platforms to explore unfamiliar brands, investigate products, and consider comments from social media platforms when making purchasing decisions (Knight & Voster 2023, 257-258; GWI 2022). Hence, brands that maintain a strong presence on these platforms can cultivate brand preference simply through their social media engagement.

### 3 Content and Instagram-Specific Marketing

#### 3.1 Content Marketing

Content marketing can be seen as the most important social media marketing method. To succeed in content marketing, the content created should be relevant, engaging, and interesting. (Knight & Vorster 2023, 273.) Starting Instagram page marketing not only has a low threshold but is also helpful for finding what works for the audience naturally before making the posts into ads.

For instance, Essi Bly, a content manager at Valio, shared tactics of Valio during an online seminar regarding their TikTok content creation process. Before investing in promoted content, they measured the natural performance of the content to optimise outcomes when transitioning to paid promotion. (Bly 2023.) On the contrary, Karjalainen (2023) said that brands should start experimenting with paid ad promotion on Instagram from the beginning.

Digital marketing content can be divided into three types of content or media: paid, earned, and owned. All these types are essential when content marketing and should be used simultaneously, but depending on the brand's goals, putting a heavier focus on one. (Han 2024.)

#### **Paid, Earned and Owned Media**

Paid media is when a brand pays for its content to be shown to customers in the form of ads or to elevate the brand's page or content in search engines (Han 2024). In Instagram, paid media can be a brand's Instagram post shown to consumers as sponsored content.

Earned media occurs when a brand gets public visibility from sources outside of the brand. An example of this happening on Instagram would be when a consumer gives a review of a brand's product on their Instagram page. Therefore, this type of media is often uncontrollable for the brand because the brand can not control what the consumer or other types of outside sources will say about the brand. As such, it is the most trustworthy type of media in consumers' eyes. However, some sponsorships fall into the category of earned media, and in these cases, the brand can have more control over what is being voiced about the brand. (Han 2024.)

Owned media is the content that brands produce themselves. Owned media are the brand's website, blog, emails and social media posts. On Instagram, it would be the brand's posts on their Instagram page. (Han 2024.) However, Hanlon (2022, 97-98) implemented these categorisations of media into four media. In her implementation, owned media turns to shared media when a brand posts on social media or third-party platforms. Therefore, the

media used and examined in the interviews of the empirical research part fall below owned or shared media.

### **What to Consider Before Content Marketing?**

Before a brand starts creating content, the Content Marketing Institute (2016) advises companies to figure out their aim in terms of purpose, goals, audience, story, process, and measurements. In detail, the brand should ask itself what it wants to create, to whom it wants to create it, and what purpose and value the content would provide for the audience and the brand. Based on the answers, they can choose the type of content and platforms best suited for their marketing purposes. (Rose 2016; Knight & Vorster 2023, 274-275.)

### **Social Listening**

Rowles (2014, 47) recommends that brands start listening and familiarising themselves with their consumers' interests and passions before starting social media marketing. He reasons that this approach allows brands to understand better how to create value for their consumers and overall digital marketing. This can be done with various listening and monitoring tools. These tools monitor conversations on social media about the products, services, and trends surrounding the brand in question.

Echoing Rowles' advice, Hootsuite (2024), a provider of social listening tools, claims it is an easy way to improve a brand's social media strategy for the same reasons Rowles mentioned. Hootsuite specifies that it helps brands make more informed decisions about their brand, product, and strategy and possibly even prevent cancellation and negative reviews.

### **4-1-1 Rule and 70-20-10 Rule**

The 4-1-1 Rule is the advice for spacing the social media content of a brand. Its purpose is to keep posted content information interesting and new and evade repetition. The rule is refraining the brand from keeping all attention on them. That, according to Harari, is a common mistake brands make when marketing on social media. (Pack 2017; Harari.)

According to the 4-1-1 Rule, the content created should be entertaining, engaging, or informative, and new four out of six times. The other two times should be soft promotion and hard promotion. (Pack 2017.)

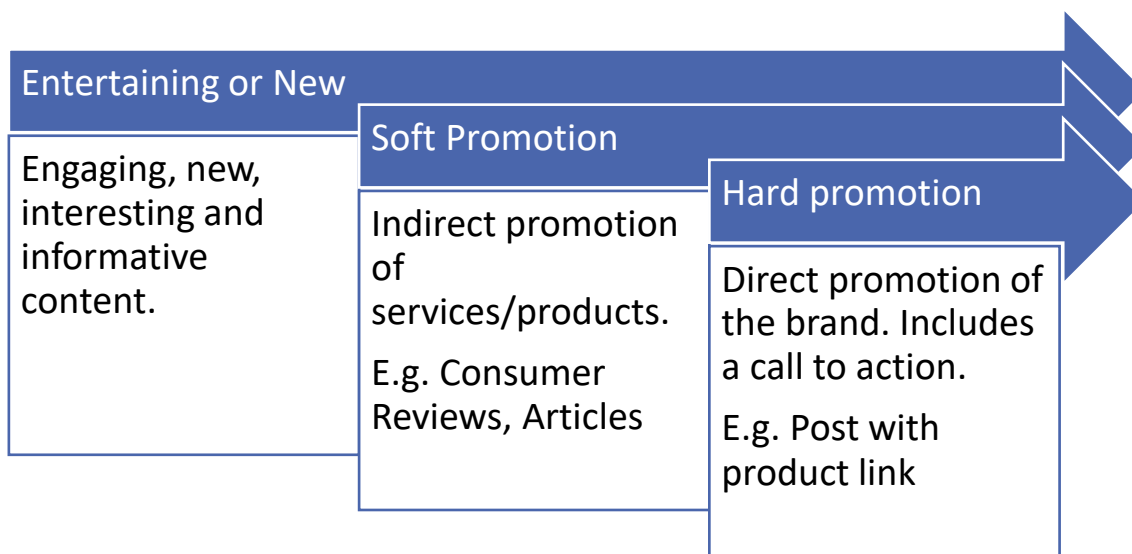


Figure 3. 4-1-1 rule (adapted from Pack 2017)

The figure above compresses the 4-1-1 Rule. The examples of soft promotion and hard promotion are tailored towards Instagram page marketing. Softly promoting content can include consumer reviews, articles, news, shared content, and relevant events. This type of content promotes the brand or its products and services indirectly. Hard promotion, on the other hand, promotes the brand or its products and services directly with content that has a call to action and is clearly more sales-oriented. (Pack 2017; Harari.)

Unlike the 4-1-1 Rule, the 70-20-10 Rule breaks down the spacing of the social media content of a brand using percentages. According to the rule, 10% of the uploaded content can be hard promotional, 20% soft promotional, and the remaining 70% should be content that creates value for the consumer base. However, Chaffey (2023) broke down the 70-20-10 Rule in content marketing to 70% working content that supports the brand or attracts audiences, 20% high-quality content with higher potential for engagement but also higher risk and potentially higher costs, and 10% experimental content. (Pack 2017; Chaffey 2023.)

### 3.2 Instagram

Instagram is a free photo and video-sharing mobile app. Users can upload pictures and videos on the platform and share them with other users. They can also view, comment on, and like posts shared by others on Instagram. (Meta 2023.)

### 3.2.1 Instagram as a Marketing Tool

Instagram is unique as a marketing tool since it emphasises visual content. For brands whose products rely on appealing designs or services that produce visually impressive results, Instagram stands out as the ideal platform to show such content. In 2017, Hootsuite predicted that by 2019, brands' Instagram pages would be just as important as their websites and that more and more people would turn to Instagram to search for brands instead of searching for them on Google. (Decker 2017.) This is not to say that websites are not crucial for brands anymore but to emphasise that the usage of social media sites such as Instagram is important since it may be the first place that a consumer looks before moving to the website.

### 3.2.2 Brand Content Creating on Instagram

Hollensen et al. (2017) stated that Instagram offers brands a new and different way to engage with their consumers. It provides a platform for sharing insights about the brand and its community, furthermore, it serves as a place to showcase products and services. However, only posting appealing images may not be enough to succeed on the platform. To thrive, a brand must develop a thoughtful strategy, establish a clear brand identity, and effectively manage relationships with stakeholders. By implementing these principles and blending storytelling with engaging visuals, a brand can harvest the full potential of Instagram marketing and enjoy its rewards. (Hollensen et al. 2017, 99; Johnston 2016.)

#### **Instagram strategies to aim different objectives**

Depending on the industry and key performance indicators, Instagram strategies may aim to achieve various objectives (Hollensen et al. 2017, 100).

These can include

- boosting brand awareness
- highlighting the teams of the brand and attracting new employees
- showing company culture visually
- fostering customer engagement and loyalty
- enhancing event experiences
- showcasing products and services
- forging connections with influencers
- encouraging consumer interaction with the brand
- sharing company updates
- expanding community reach

- bringing sales through Instagram (Hollensen et al. 2017, 100; Johnston 2016).

When it comes to creating content on Instagram, Hollensen et al. (2017) recommend choosing a content theme based on the objective the brand is cultivating via Instagram marketing. Mostly, business-to-business brands create content that showcases the company culture of the brand and recruitment of new talent, and business-to-customer brands showcase their products and services on their content on Instagram. (Hollensen et al. 2017, 100; Johnston 2016.)

### **Frequency of posting on Instagram**

An essential aspect of content creation strategy is timing and frequency. Consistency plays a vital role in achieving engagement and follower growth. According to Macready (2024), the average recommendation for brands is to post three to five times a week. However, Kuligowski (2024) suggests that experts recommend posting one to three times a week. Macready also notes that even if three to five posts seem too many, just one post per week can still generate sufficient visibility on the platform. In summary, while there may be varying recommendations on posting frequency, the consensus emphasises the importance of consistency, with only the quantity of posts differing.

### **3.2.3 Instagram Algorithm and Reels**

A big part of the functionality of Instagram and user experience is based on its algorithm. An algorithm is used in social media platforms to determine the type of posts shown to a user and in what order. It gathers information about the users and the content uploaded on the platform, then pushes users towards the content users like, such as a recommended page and post (Hirose 2023).

In contrast, the head of Instagram, Adam Mossier (2024), has stated that Instagram's new 2024 algorithm update is less in favour of reels and balances different types of content more equally. (Macready 2024; Mossier 2024.)

It is crucial to find the right balance between content types that align with the resources of the brand and those that resonate most with the audience. If Instagram Reels offers a platform for the brand to tell a compelling story about their product, it should be integrated more into the content balance. (Hollensen et al. 2017, 101.)

Reels are Meta's fastest-growing content format. Creativity is the key to creating high-performing content and success in reels. This also counts heavily for brands, not just creators

and regular users. Over half of the time spent on Meta's platforms is spent watching videos. (Karjalainen 2023.)

Since reels cultivate the most engagement on the platform, Bali (2023) suggests completely forgetting about posting other types of content. Reels are powerfully engaging content on the platform. Consequently, three out of four people have started following a brand through reels. Two out of three have bought something seen in reels (Karjalainen 2023.)

### **Creating reels**

When creating reels, some things need to be taken into account. Firstly, the picture size and the layout are to be considered. 9:16 is the current frame size on Instagram. Also, the composition needs to be considered because the platform functions will block some corners. A square in the upper middle of the screen is a safe zone. (Karjalainen 2023.)

Using automated subtitles has been a popular choice and is still recommended. It does no harm, but it is less necessary than thought. Shopify's creative strategist recommends that reels should work without sound (Bali 2023). However, these days, 80% of reels are watched with sound. Therefore, now it is emphasised to have a sound that works well with the reel rather than it working without sound. (Karjalainen 2023.)

Jaana Karjalainen introduced the idea of reel language, the language of reels. This means making reels entertaining, digestible and relatable for the audience. Entertainment can be provided by audio, visual effects and creative storytelling to provoke an emotional response. To make a reel digestible, she suggests combining pace, value and clear communication to captivate and communicate with the audience. Reels can be made relatable with recognisable stories, visual codes and shared behaviours, and a personal connection can be established. Karjalainen also mentioned that these are tips, and in the end, finding a brand's style and creativity is the way to go. (Karjalainen 2023.)

Structuring the story in reels like tabloids are formed is an excellent method. This means starting with the most exciting part of the story to capture the audience's attention and stop the movement of the thumb. It takes two seconds for a person to lose interest and keep scrolling. Therefore, capturing the attention at the start is detrimental (Bali 2023). Then, to keep the audience engaged, great reels deliver something relevant or valuable, and in the end, attention is rewarded with something equivalently interesting to that which the video started with. Great reels give a payoff and a clear call for action. (Karjalainen 2023.)

## 4 Empirical Research and Data Analysis

### 4.1 Data Collection

Primary data has been collected through interviews with the targeted consumer group and observation of brands' social media activities. The interviews were semi-structured one-on-one interviews. In this semi-structured interview, the interviewer used pre-planned questions if the topic did not come up naturally during dialogue. There were also pre-chosen brand Instagram pages that were shown to interviewees.

The interviews of South Korean participants were held between the 19<sup>th</sup> of October and the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, 2023, in Seoul, South Korea. The interviews of Finnish participants were held between the 27<sup>th</sup> of October and the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2023 in Helsinki, Finland. All interviews were in person and held in various coffee shops or the home of an interviewee.

Eight people in the age range of 20 to 30 were interviewed. Five of them were South Korean, and three were Finnish interviewees. The interviewees were contacted through the interviewers' personal contacts by text message using Instagram, KakaoTalk or WhatsApp. As such, all interviewees were female, and all South Korean participants were students of Konkuk University, but each from a different major. However, the Finnish participants were full-time workers.

The interviewees were either South Korean or Finnish and, in addition to their native language, were proficient in English. Consequently, when South Korean participants were presented with Finnish brand content, or vice versa, their feedback was primarily based on the visual elements and context provided by the interviewer, as language comprehension was limited to English.

#### 4.1.1 Interviews Implementation

Each interview was a semi-structured one-on-one interview. The interviews were voice recorded, and screenshots were taken from company accounts and their posts to help examine the information gained from the interview. Figure 4 below compresses the course of the interview into four stages of the interview.

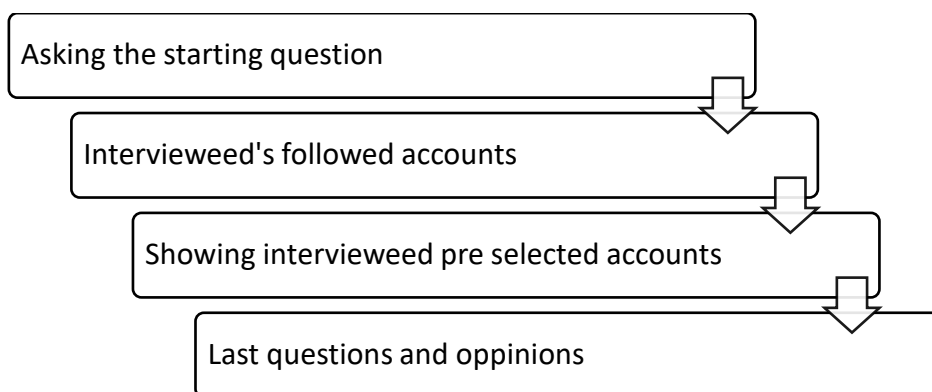


Figure 4. Conduction of the interview

The interview started by asking the interviewees whether they could remember any brand's Instagram posts or advertisements. This was done to see if the interviewees had an immediate brand in mind because they had made such an impression on them as consumers.

Then, the interviewer and interviewee began going through the interviewee's followed brand and company accounts. The interviewees could freely express why they follow certain accounts and what they like about these brands' Instagram pages. Additional questions were asked from the interviewees when seen as relevant.

Next, the pre-selected Instagram pages by real brands were shown. There was no specific order in which the pages were shown to interviewees because of their irrelevance to this study. However, similar types of companies or brands' pages were shown after one another to help the interviewees compare their views on different types of brands' Instagram pages when the sold product or service from brands stayed the same. Nine brands' Instagram pages were shown to all interviewees, and three more were shown to only Korean interviewees.

Pre-chosen questions	Can you name any brand/company or their post or advertisement that you have seen on Instagram that you really liked or disliked? (Asked in the start of the interview.)
	What do you do and don't want to see from a brand on Instagram?
	Do you care about comments, followers and bio on a brands Instagram? How about if comments are off?
	When searching for a brand, where do you go? Do you use Instagram more than a brand website?
	Have you ever unfollowed a brand on Instagram and if so why?

Figure 5. Pre-chosen questions

Lastly, the interview was concluded by asking pre-chosen questions that had yet to surface in the discussion. The figure 5 above lists all the pre-chosen questions.

#### 4.1.2 Brands' Instagram Pages Included in the Interview

For the interview, pre-chosen brand Instagram pages were selected to be shown to the interviewees for their input. To get a general understanding of what the target group wants to see from brands on Instagram and not industry or product-specific feedback, brands pre-chosen for showing had to be versatile, from different industries, and have different marketing approaches on Instagram. Otherwise, the brands were randomly selected from established brands that the target group would likely already know. There were also a bunch of other brands that circled into the conversations. However, the nine brands that were shown to all interviewees were

- @nordea\_fi
- @starbucks
- @mega.mgc.coffee\_official
- @espresso\_house\_finland
- @valiofi
- @nellycom
- @hm
- @nike

- @apple.

In addition, South Korean interviewees were also shown

- @shinhanbank\_official
- @seoulmilk\_official
- @starbucks\_korea.

Table 1 below showcases coffee house brands' different styles and approaches on Instagram that were shown to the interviewees. The difference in picture style and colours used in the pages can be seen with just a glance.

Starbucks was chosen as one of the brands to examine because it is a familiar coffee shop brand in both targeted countries, and its marketing style differs from the other chosen brands. Starbucks includes celebrities, popular trends, influencers, and product pictures on its Instagram page. On the other hand, Starbucks Korea's Instagram page focuses solely on product pictures and videos and sharing some customer experiences. There is no Starbucks Instagram page for Finland, so there is no Finnish one to compare. Instead, Espresso House was chosen. Espresso House is not operating in South Korea and is an entirely new brand for the South Korean interviewees to form perceptions. Similarly to Starbucks Korea's page, Espresso House uses its Instagram page to post mostly product pictures and videos. Additionally, they post coffee-related memes. South Korean coffee shop Mega Coffee was chosen because its Instagram marketing varies significantly from that of the other brands. Mega Coffee relies on celebrities, events, and giveaways on its page, and the brand colour

yellow is also strongly represented. The table below shows screenshots of the mentioned brands' Instagram pages from when the interviews were held.





@starbucks	@starbucks_korea	@espresso_house_finland	@mega.mgc.coffee_official
			

Table 1. Coffee house brands shown to interviewees @starbucks, @mega.mgc.coffee\_official, @espresso\_house\_finland & @starbucks\_korea

In the table below are screenshots placed side by side of milk and bank brands' Instagram pages. There is Finnish milk brand Valio and South Korean milk brand Seoulmilk. Valio uses Instagram to highlight what can be done with the brand's product by including pictures of ready-done recipes. Seoulmilk, on the other hand, posts product pictures of their new and old products. Simply, Seoulmilk concentrates on showcasing its products, and Valio focuses on showcasing what you can do with the products.

South Korean bank Shinhan Bank and Finnish bank Nordea can be found in the table below. Shinhan Bank uses more vibrant colours and fictional characters in their Instagram and Nordea people and more neutral natural colours. Banks were chosen to create more variety in the industries selected for the interview, being highly different as a product. Everyone also uses them, and they are a familiar service to all interviewees.

@valio	@Soulmilk_official	@shinhanbank_official	@nordea_fi
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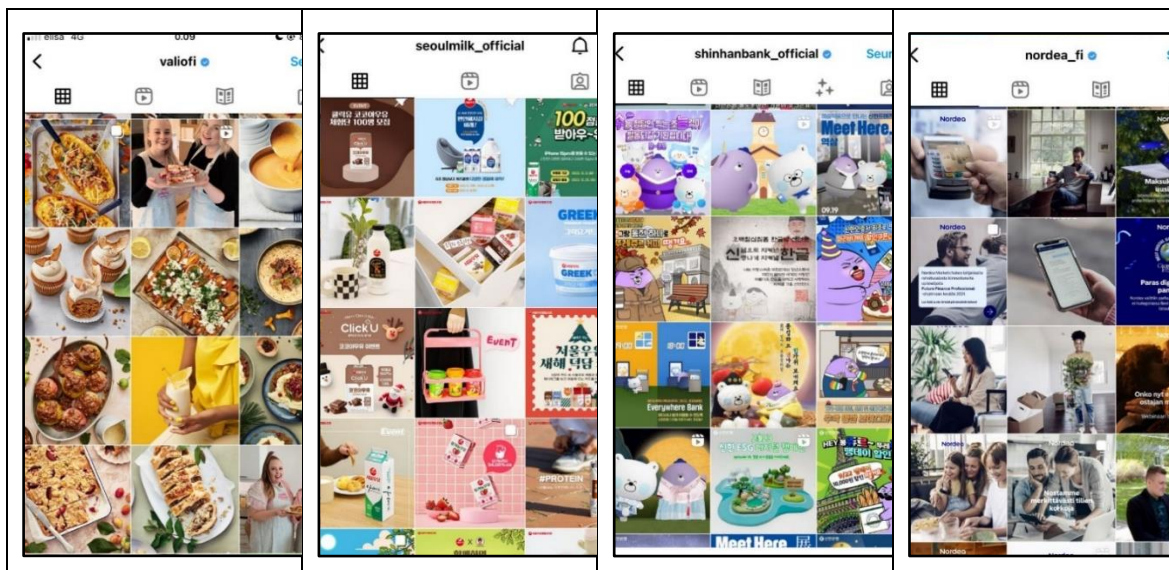


Table 2. South Korean and Finnish milk and bank brand Instagram pages side by side

Nelly.com, an online clothing shop, and H&M, a worldwide online and physical shops operating clothing shop, were chosen because of their popularity in the app, and Instagram catered to selling clothing straight from the app. H&M is present in both targeted countries, and Nelly.com is present in the Finnish market. Nelly.com markets on Instagram using influencers' and customer-modelled product pictures, and H&M posts professional model pictures where the clothing is on the main frame. H&M focuses on showcasing their special items, not everyday wear, unlike Nelly.com. Table 3 below shows H&M's and Nelly.com's Instagram pages side by side.

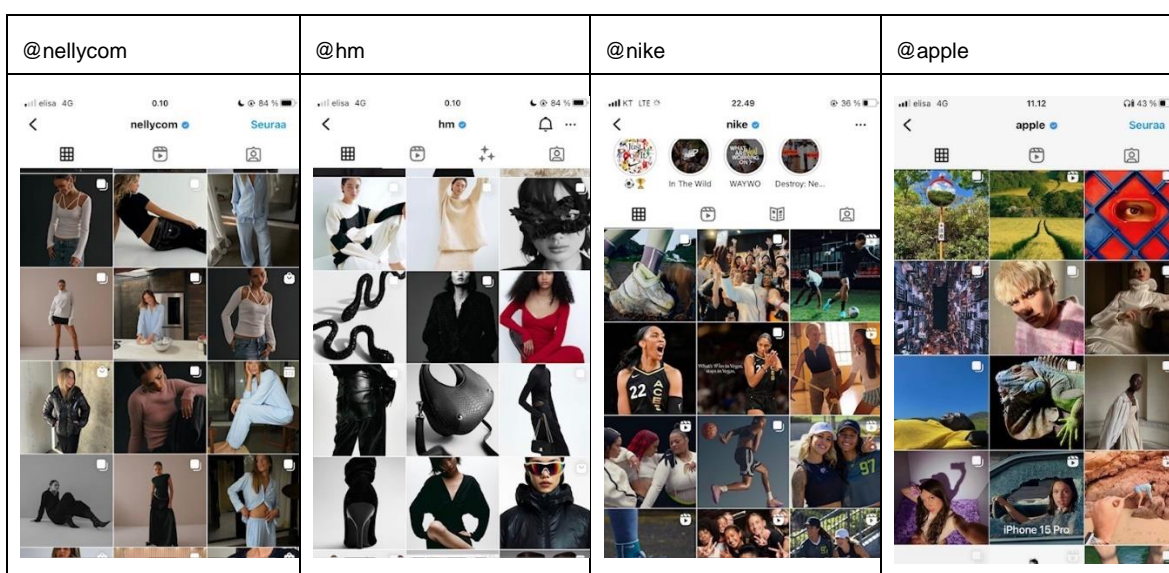


Table 3. Two fashion brands and two globally highly praised brands' Instagram pages side by side

Nike and Apple were chosen because of their high recognition as a brand and in brand marketing. They are globally recognised brands with a strong brand image and have developed strong brand loyalty and customer bases. Both brands are also present in both targeted countries. Apple showcases the picture quality on its Instagram page by posting pictures taken with the phone. Based solely on Apple's Instagram images, it could not be recognised as Apple's Instagram page. On the other hand, Nike showcases athletes on their Instagram, but you can also see the brand's products in professional photos.

## 4.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative data is by its nature non-standardised and often small in size (Saunders et al. 2016, 568). To make sense out of the data collected, the interview voice memos were transcribed, and then relevant information was organised thematically.

The interview results from the South Korean interviewees are in the next subchapter and following that there will be the interview results from the Finnish interviewees.

### 4.2.1 Interview Results from Korean Interviewees

#### **Can you name any brand/company or their post or advertisement you have seen on Instagram that you liked or disliked?**

Only one of the interviewees could name a brand they had seen that they either liked, followed, or disliked. The interviewee said she liked Aloe sports clothing brand because they use an influencer she likes as a model. She enjoyed how the models' bodies inspired her. She is planning on buying from the brand.

*I work out to make my body look more attractive. This page makes me feel more like wanting to buy from Aloe so I can look as they.*

This question was bypassed with two respondents since they could not name any brand content they would have liked or disliked on Instagram.

*I really don't know. As you can see from my feed it is just food or puppies.*

#### **What Brands/Companies do the interviewees follow and why?**

When looking through the brands followed by the interviewees, they were connected to the interviewee's personal interests. Brands followed by the South Korean interviewees were fashion, art, design, sport, music, travel, and work or school-related. Three of the five interviewees were following more personal brands, meaning influencers and celebrities. However, since this study researches company-based brands, these were not further

investigated. Most of the brands were followed because they gave the interviewees some information, whether it was letting them know what is trendy or hot, tips for getting a job or putting together an outfit, getting tips on a job application or information about current events of their school or workplace. In the following paragraphs are some specific examples of why and what was followed by the interviewees.

One of the interviewees majoring in design followed multiple interior design brands. She expressed that she likes to see other people's interior designs. She started using the mobile application of the brand and then switched to following them on Instagram for convenience.

*I started with the app, but since I'm not always in the app, you can see what's new on Instagram and other people's interiors and things like that, so that's why I follow.*

This interviewee also followed Universal Music, explaining the reasoning behind following the account as being able to see what is hot at the moment.

One of the interviewees interested in different sports was following multiple climbing- and surfing-related brands as well as the previously mentioned sportswear brand Alloe. She had started following them because of different types of giveaways. She didn't see the need to unfollow the accounts because they were posting useful information about the sport or because she was planning to use their shops/academies' services in the future. The interviewee was following Netflix to see some information about new and upcoming series and movies.

A couple of brand's accounts were followed purely based on a specific aesthetic reason. An interviewee followed a fashion brand Chanel because one celebrity that she liked modelled for them.

*She's so pretty, and I love this photo. I don't care whether I like this Brand or not, but this photo and the post is so perfect.*

Another interviewee followed another fashion brand because she liked the hair of their model. They had come across these accounts through Instagram's recommended page.

### **The Significance of Follower Amount**

The interviewees expressed that the number of followers of a brand account on Instagram mattered only to its reliability. They expressed that when it is an official brand account, it usually has a lot of followers, especially when talking about a nationally or globally-wide brand.

### **The Significance of Comments**

For one interviewee, seeing the comments was the most important thing when checking a brand account. Other interviewees paid a moderate amount of attention to the comment saying that they might look at the comments on a post. There was not a clear explanation of when the comments were looked at and when not.

When asked about the impact of disabled comments, one of the interviewees said they did not care, and another expressed not liking it, finding it suspicious, and then starting to wonder if the brand receives a lot of hate and if the brand might be trying to hide something. Two interviewees also expressed that it closes the communication between the customers and the ability to connect with others who use the same brand.

### **Where Do Target Group Prefer to Discover Brands**

The majority of the interviewees responded that they were more likely to search for a new brand on Instagram rather than trying to find their website. However, this seemed to depend on the type of brand. This seemed to go hand in hand with the type of brands they already follow and look at on Instagram. For example, interviewees who followed fashion brands or sports academies would primarily look for those brands on Instagram, and interviewees who did not follow or see any fashion brands on Instagram would primarily look for their websites first. This was even seen with one of the interviewees who was not following any brands on Instagram and therefore found searching for a brand on Instagram alienating. She expressed feeling like purchasing anything from Instagram would be unsafe. Therefore, she would not search for nearly any brand on Instagram.

The interviewees said that they would not search for milk products and bank service-offering brands on Instagram. The majority of the interviewees were not aware of the existence of these brands' Instagram accounts, even if they knew or used the brand.

One interviewee explained how she looks for a new fashion brand that she has heard of.

*I think I search on Instagram more, but I usually go to their website first, and they have an Instagram account there, so I think I look at the website first and then check their Instagram.*

Another interviewee said that she likes to use Instagram when making consumer choices because she can see the thoughts of other people from the comments, and if it's a café or a restaurant, she can see people's suggestions on the best menu item.

Another interviewee favoured brand discovery on Instagram due to its convenient follow feature, allowing for easy saving and later reference. Additionally, she noted that following

brands on Instagram reduces the chance of forgetting about them compared to searching the website.

Another interviewee mentioned that she has not seen people using websites lately.

*I haven't seen many people using the home pages these days. Like usually everybody starts on Instagram, and then when you want to buy it, you go into the home page.*

### **What the Target Group Does Not Want to See from a Brand on Instagram**

During the interviews, when asked about elements they absolutely do not want to encounter from a brand on Instagram, responses varied widely with no collective opinion. A couple of the interviewees could not think of any specific dislikes.

One interviewee voiced not liking to see low-quality pictures from brands.

*...pictures that looks very homemade for example skin care products. They start with the person with very horrible skin. That's really bad to see.*

Additionally, she expressed disliking aggressive marketing tactics, such as power links and posts with glaring, oversized red lettering intended to signal sales promotions.

Another interviewee said she dislikes the usage of unknown influencers because she finds Instagram a place where people can be easily bought to promote a product. She even added that it will make her perception of the Brand go down if she sees it.

Furthermore, one respondent strongly disliked Chinese short videos with strange background music and everything looking very unnatural. She also had seen a game advertisement where the voice did not match the person on the video and thought it was bad.

Lastly, another respondent expressed disliking scams involving diet supplements and skin-care.

### **The Reasons for Unfollowing a Brand**

The reasons why the target group unfollowed a brand were a loss of interest in the subject, the brand posting too much or too little, a controversy surrounding the brand, or following to participate in an event that is now over.

The interviewee, who unfollowed a brand due to its lack of posting, explained her reasoning:

*I get interested in a brand, so I follow them, but if they don't post things often or their posting is boring, then I unfollow them. If they post too much and the photos are not interesting, I would unfollow them, but if their postings are really entertaining and they post too much, then I would like that even more.*

## **Target Groups Thoughts on the Pre-chosen Brands Instagram Pages**

The perspectives shared by interviewees regarding their favourite and least favourite Instagram pages from the pre-selected brands varied significantly. However, this discrepancy was primarily centred on interviewees' personal preferences on style, visual presentation, and how focused a brand's page should be on its product or service.

There was a common thread of interviewees craving more information from the brand. All interviewees expressed that the primary reason for not following these brands was the perceived lack of benefits. Specifically, they felt that following these brands would not provide them with any new or valuable information about the brand or its offerings. The possibility of the brand providing entertainment value through their Instagram did not occur in the majority of interviews.

### **4.2.2 Interview Results from Finnish Interviewees**

This section will examine the responses of the three Finnish interviewees. Since all interviews were conducted in Finnish, the quotes from the interviewees have been translated into English.

#### **Can you name any brand/company or their post or advertisement that you have seen on Instagram that you have liked or disliked?**

Only one of the interviewees was able to mention a brand advertisement that they liked. She had seen it a couple of years ago, and it was an advertisement for a mental health campaign. The interviewee said she remembered it because it was so funny and relatable but was not able to remember the brand name.

#### **What Brands/Companies do the interviewees follow and why?**

Two of the interviewees were following only a handful of brands. These included their workplace and school, a brand associated with a celebrity they admired, and a second-hand store. They followed their school and workplace to stay updated on relevant events within the organisation. The celebrity brand was followed simply because it belonged to their favourite celebrity. As for the second-hand store, the interviewee followed it because the store would announce sales exclusively on Instagram.

The third interviewee followed significantly more brands than the other two. She followed multiple different bars, festivals, restaurants, makeup, and one convenient food brand. She followed them either to gain more information about their services or products or to participate in an event or competition. She did inform that she forgets to unfollow the brands after

the competitions or events have ended even though she is not interested in the content these brands post on Instagram.

### **The Significance Follower Amount**

The follower amount did not concern the interviewees other than whether it was an official account and whether it was trustworthy if they were thinking of purchasing.

### **The Significance of Comments**

Two of the interviewees said they would pay attention to the comments, and one said they might. All of their thoughts on disabled comments were in alignment. They all found it suspicious and thought that the brand must be receiving hate or trying to hide something.

One of the interviewees stated.

*If I see the comments disabled, I will start looking at the post and wondering why other people may have found it offensive.*

### **Where Do Target Group Prefer to Discover Brands**

One interviewee indicated that she primarily searches for brands, particularly restaurants and clothing, on Instagram. Another interviewee agreed, stating that she typically begins her search on Instagram, especially when it comes to beauty, fashion, and makeup. However, if she wants to know the prices, she prefers to visit the brand's website first, particularly for services like banking. In contrast, another interviewee mentioned that she does not turn to Instagram for clothing or makeup, but she does when searching for bars or restaurants.

### **What the Target Group Does Not Want to See from a Brand on Instagram**

One interviewee expressed a preference for reels over text-based posts and noted the importance of a balance between humour and professionalism, particularly cautioning against excessive humour from brands like banks but at the same time wishing for more entertaining posts from them.

Other interviewees said that small businesses were perceived as having a greater potential to make a negative impact. However, she saw that larger companies were less likely to produce content that would prompt unfollowing.

The third interviewee mentioned controversial posts, such as those from Zara regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, and she highlighted the potential for brands to evoke strong emotional responses when delving into sensitive topics without clear communication.

### **The Reason for Unfollowing a Brand**

One interviewee expressed unfollowing a fashion brand due to a lack of variety in content, specifically missing information regarding product availability and pricing. Another interviewee expressed a desire to avoid filling their feed with advertisements and preferred to see more engaging and enjoyable content. Additionally, this individual mentioned losing interest in the brand's posts over time. Lastly, another interviewee unfollowed a fashion brand after they failed to provide updates about a new collection launch, instead filling their feed with excessive posts.

### **Target Groups Thoughts on the Pre-chosen Brands Instagram Pages**

Regarding the style and aesthetic of the pre-chosen brand Instagram pages, the Finnish interviewees' preferences aligned with only a few discrepancies. Finnish interviewees wanted more information about the services and the brand and stated clearly that they would not follow these brands just for entertainment value. Other than that, their interview answers aligned with the Korean interviewees.

## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 Answers to Research Questions

The primary purpose of this thesis was to gain insights into South Korean and Finnish young adults' perceptions of brands' Instagram pages. This chapter will combine the knowledge gained from the theoretical and empirical parts of this thesis and answer the research questions. The sub-questions support the answer to the main question, therefore they are answered first.

#### **What marketing objectives can a brand aim for using an Instagram page?**

Through the theoretical framework, the answer to this question is that a brand can aim to promote products and services, foster connections with customers and businesses, and enhance brand visibility. Empirical research confirmed the answer while also adding information to influence consumer choices.

#### **What factors affect whether the target group follows, unfollows, stays interested or dislikes a brand's Instagram page?**

It seemed like the target group's main motivators for following brands were their own personal interests or a chance to win something. For example, if they were interested in sports, they would likely follow brands related to sports. However, even if the interests of the target group aligned with the content provided by a brand on Instagram, they were unlikely to follow the brand unless they were already accustomed to following similar brands. Additionally, following brands in general did not seem to be a big trend among the target group, and the incentive to follow a brand needed to be substantial. The target group unfollows a brand if they do not receive what they initially wanted from it, they have lost interest, or if a controversy surrounds the brand.

#### **The Main Research Question: What should be considered when marketing to Finnish and South Korean young adults using a brand's Instagram page?**

When marketing to Finnish and South Korean young adults on Instagram, brands should consider several key factors. Unlike traditional media, social media enables user interaction, making social media marketing a two-way street rather than one. Interacting with the brand and other users is essential for users, and limiting it can cause suspicion.

Professionals claim that since social media is a place of two-way communication and consumers are there to have fun, escape their everyday lives, and be inspired, brands should offer consumers something that entertains, educates, or inspires them. However, the target

group uses Instagram as a tool to research unfamiliar brands, investigate products, and consider comments that brands receive on their Instagram posts.

When researching a brand, the target group turns to Instagram before looking up brands' websites and craves more informative content to help them make informed customer decisions. Therefore, instead of trying to behave on social media like consumers and influencers, brands should focus on creating content that gives consumers relevant information while also incorporating entertainment and great visuals.

Naturally, credibility and trust play a role in the target group's perception of the brand. A higher follower number makes the brand seem legitimate official brand account. Also, comments on a brand's Instagram posts are important for two reasons. They enjoy connecting with other consumers and getting recommendations from them. If comments are disabled, it can raise suspicion and make the target group question why the brand felt the need to disable them.

Table 4. Key findings for research questions

Main Research question:	Key findings:
What should be considered when marketing to Finnish and South Korean young adults using a brand's Instagram page?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Blocking communication with other consumers creates distrust</li> <li>- The target group uses Instagram to research brands</li> <li>- Instagram marketing a two-way street rather than one</li> </ul>
Sub-Research questions:	Key findings:
What factors affect whether the target group follows, unfollows, stays interested or dislikes a brand's Instagram page?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personal interests</li> <li>- Personal following habits</li> <li>- Brand failing to provide wanted content</li> </ul>
What marketing objectives can a brand aim for using an Instagram page?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote products &amp; services</li> <li>- Foster connections</li> <li>- Enhance brand visibility</li> <li>- Giving consumers information to make consumer choices</li> </ul>

Table 4 above bullet points the key findings for the research questions.

## 5.2 Validity and Reliability

Next the validity and reliability of this research is assessed. Reliability in research connects to its trustworthiness and involves assessing whether a study, if repeated, produces similar or identical results. Validity also represents trustworthiness, focusing on the accuracy of the results, their generalization, and the suitability of the measurement used for the research. (Saunders et al. 2016, 202.)

The primary data was collected through qualitative interviews. In contrast, secondary data was sourced from credible outlets, including academic literature, reputable websites, industry articles, and webinars led by professionals in the field. The interviews were conducted as instructed and as explained in this thesis. However, the interviewees were selected through the personal connections of the interviewer, which introduces potential errors affecting reliability. As such, the interviewer's existing relationship with the interviewees might have created a higher level of trust, leading to more honest answers than otherwise.

Marketing relies on human perception, which varies from person to person. Because marketing is nuanced, an approach that succeeds for one brand may not work for another, even if the brands are similar. As a result, not every social media marketing suggestion suits every brand. The study used a small sample group, so the conclusions drawn may differ from the broader target group's views if a larger sample were taken. However, it succeeds in its purpose of providing direction for marketers, even though further research for each brand is needed to strengthen the results.

## 5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

This research provided a broad look at the target group's consumer perceptions and gave outlines of the consumer perceptions as a whole. A more detailed look at consumer perceptions within one industry could specify whether the target group has specific likes and dislikes. This could give a more industry-specific approach to Instagram page marketing.

Similarly to industry-based research, future studies could focus on how Instagram page marketing impacts the target group's perceptions based on the company's size, such as startups and small businesses, compared to big corporations. They could also examine influencer- and celebrity-based Instagram marketing impacts on customers' perceptions.

Since social media platforms such as Instagram change rapidly and users' usage of them evolves, updated research about the topic will be necessary. Because of the algorithm changes the platform has already changed a bit from the start of this research.

## 6 Summary

The primary objective of this thesis was to study how 20 to 30-year-old Finnish and South Korean consumers perceive companies' Instagram pages. The goal was to provide marketers with valuable insights into customer perceptions, enabling them to understand better the impact of their Instagram activities on brand image from the consumers' perspective. Therefore, the main research question was: **What should be considered when marketing to Finnish and South Korean young adults using a brand's Instagram page?** To support the main research question following sub-questions were made:

- What marketing objectives can a brand aim for using an Instagram page?
- What factors affect whether the target group follows, unfollows, stays interested or dislikes a brand's Instagram page?

The research questions were answered based on the primary and secondary data collected, following a deductive research approach. The secondary data used for this research were collected from academic literature, websites, industry articles, and webinars. The primary data was collected through qualitative research conducted in one-on-one interviews with members of the target group.

The first chapter introduced the thesis and outlined the main objectives, aims, and research questions. It also addressed the limitations of the research and provided an overview of the research methodology, data collection techniques, and theoretical framework.

The second chapter introduces social media and marketing. It defines social media and social media marketing, explores effective marketing strategies on the platforms, and compares Instagram to other social media.

The third chapter dove deep into content marketing and Instagram-specific marketing. It explores the concept of content marketing, including content curation, and examines how these strategies are specifically tailored for Instagram. It also discovers Instagram as a marketing tool and how it can be used, how the algorithm affects marketing on the platform, and lastly, how to create reels and what objectives could be achieved.

The fourth chapter included the data collection and analysis of the empirical research. It gives details of how the qualitative research interviews were conducted, what was asked and shown to the interviewees, and summarises the key answers from the interviewees.

The conclusion in chapter five summarises the research results, answers the research questions, examines the value and reliability of the research, and suggests further research. Lastly, the thesis ends with the chapter 6 summary, followed by a list of references.

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