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IKEA's use of Instagram in Finland and Italy

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ABSTRACT:

Social media has become a very important tool for companies of all sizes to communicate and market their products and services. Through social media, any company can easily reach an enormous number of consumers, potentially all over the world. Instagram is one of the social media platforms that companies use every day to spread their messages, raise their reputation and do advertising. While other social media platforms have a feature that lets multinational companies communicate in different countries in a coherent way, Instagram does not provide this feature at the moment of writing. This makes it an interesting tool to analyze differences between communication styles in different countries.

Finland and Italy present very diverse consumption cultures, as well as a different perception of the spaces inside a home, from the furnishing to the way of living the everyday life. This thesis aims to find out whether the communication styles of the multinational company IKEA on the Instagram accounts of IKEA Italia and IKEA Suomi show these differences. The analysis takes into consideration six posts, three from each of the accounts, and brings up the diversity of contents and styles, which is an indicator of the fact that IKEA may present different communication styles depending on the culture of the population. Therefore, the brand is perceived in different ways in the two countries.

The differences between Finland and Italy affect the posts and the messages that the images and descriptions convey to the respective consumers. In the Italian feed, the colors are stronger, brighter and the call to action is to change and try new and different things. In the Finnish posts, the colors are soothing and relaxing. The description has a positive vibe and it reminds the consumers of how nice it is to be and feel at home.

KEYWORDS: Intercultural communication; Instagram; social media; Ikea.

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1 Introduction

Social media is a powerful tool for organizations to market their products and their values to a very large public which incorporates consumers, shareholders, employees and potentially anyone who has access to a social media platform. With the advent of social media marketing, more and more companies understood and started making use of the many benefits of social media; these advantages are given by the possibility of reaching a broad audience with a comparatively low effort and more immediately than by using traditional means of advertising and marketing.

On the other side, the possibility of reaching a very broad audience brings up different types of challenges, one of these being the cultural differences within the pool of the public that is supposed to receive the message. In a more globalized world where a message goes from the sender to the receiver in an instant, it is important to keep being aware of these differences in order to communicate as efficiently as possible and consequently reaching the goal that the organization has set for itself.

As a matter of fact, the ability to create and spread a message adapted to the cultural elements of the consumer has always been important, and many studies have focused their attention to this issue. More specifically, however, there have not been many studies on how cultural differences shape the use that companies make of social media and the consequent diversification of their messages. It is significant to analyze the specific case of a multinational organization which has previously dealt with such issue, and which has strong brand image and values, thus the decision of focusing on Ikea as the main case.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze how Ikea uses social media to communicate with its consumers who represent different national cultures. The communication of an organization affects the way consumers perceive it and its products: for this reason, it is important to optimize the communication by taking into consideration the differences between cultures when planning the communication strategy. Culture affects perception, and cultural differences play an important role in consumer's perception of a brand (Solomon, 2014). This information can be used by a company to its advantage, but it can also bring a negative impact to the company's image if not dealt with properly.

In this thesis, I analyze the communication style and the messages that Ikea delivers in Italy and Finland, to find out whether there are differences between the two, and how these differences are related to the cultural differences between the two countries. The questions that I aim to answer are the following: what are the values communicated and what kinds of messages are promoted through colors, ambience and feelings in the pictures? How do these differ in the two cases? Are the differences connected to the culture, and are they small or very evident? I approach these questions with the help of Kress and Van Leeuwen's theory on how to read images and Barthes's theory on the rhetoric of images.

The keywords of the Ikea concept are design, functionality, practicality, and ecology. The company has opened stores all over the world, which sum up to 313 Ikea stores in 38 countries. The countries with most stores are Germany and USA, with respectively 53 and 50 stores. The target group of this company is stated on their official website: Ikea aims to sell to the majority of people, and not a specific elite group. The consumers to whom Ikea sells its products are common people, families of all kinds, students and business people. The identity of the company is very strong and tied to the Swedish culture: the colors of the logo and the stores are the ones of the Swedish flag, and if you walk through each store, you will find the exact same internal structure and product positioning. All of this makes the experience of the consumer unique, while at the same time each consumer in the world gets the exact same experience, given by the coherence of the brand in all its different aspects.

Shoulberg (2015) describes clearly how the company has changed the way people buy furniture to their houses: if before the advent of Ikea a consumer would have to choose between expensive, high quality items that would last for possibly more than one generation, with Ikea the consumer can purchase a product of lower value for a cheaper price, and will probably change it in a matter of years to make space for something new. This strategy attracts consumers and makes the company very competitive on international markets of the whole world.

1.1 Previous studies

A number of studies about Ikea has been done in the past years, specifically about its enormous success, its strategies, how it established the enormous success in such a short time, and how to use it as an example to apply to other emergent companies. Some examples of this are the researches of Tarnovskaya and De Chernatony (2011), which are about the internalization of a brand that transcends national borders, with a particular focus on the experience of Ikea, and the work of Jonsson and Foss (2011), about the replication of the internationalization of a brand, in which the authors discuss how to create a format which would be valid to adapt to local cultures, taking Ikea as the main example.

The internationalization processes that a company engages in when moving its business to a new country require different strategies, which depend on the country, its population's needs, motives and values. Ikea, as many other companies and organizations, in this process had to adapt its communication in order to make it more efficient, an example of this being described in openmultimedia.ie.edu, in which at the time of writing you could find an analysis of Ikea advertisements with an intercultural communication point of view. The particular cases that were presented are two ads from the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Switzerland. In the first two cases, the ad encouraged the consumers not to be emotionally attached to pieces of furniture or home decor, using an ironic, dramatic tone which made fun of the habits of the target group, the population of UK for example, known by marketers as a group of consumers who have a strong attachment to anything they own, even at the cost of being surrounded by old, not so valuable objects.

In the case of Italy and Switzerland, the attributes that are highlighted are the extensive amount of products available and their versatility: people are concerned about showing their personality through their furniture and home decor pieces, and the existence of the same products worldwide gives them the feeling that such thing would not be possible, which is the reason Ikea has been trying to market the exact opposite, through the broad amount of different products and the fact that they can be assembled in possibly infinite ways, giving the consumer the possibility to express themselves in their own

home, following their own style and creativity. In USA the Ikea strategy highlights the improvement of everyday life thanks to the practical solutions given by its products.

1.2 Method

To analyze the material I will use the theoretical framework provided by Barthes (1977) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). The concepts that are significant for the research are denotation, connotation, anchorage and relay. As the author describes, meaning can be characterized by a factual, descriptive aspect, which is the denotation, and an emotional aspect, which he calls connotation. These two aspects can both be identified by the consumer in an advertisement and the interpretation of the signs is bounded to culture (Barthes, 1977). Later in his essay, he defines anchorage as the text, which helps the individual to identify the denotation and the connotation of a message; the anchorage both directs the reader towards the descriptive meaning, eliminating other possible interpretations that might be different from the one that the author of the message means. Lastly, the relay is described as the text that completes the image, adding meanings that the image itself doesn't provide, in a complementary way, which Barthes describes as less common. The concepts from Kress and Van Leeuwen are mainly focused on the images and how to read them. They provide theories to analyse the angle, colors, frame, elements of an image and draw conclusion on what they mean to communicate.

While the analysis will focus on the description of the denotation and connotation of each image, it will also use knowledge from communication and cultural studies, which will help to interpret the images and texts and show the culture related differences between the two accounts. Furthermore, theories from disciplines of marketing and consumer behavior will also be used to highlight the strategy and aim behind the images, captions and hashtags in the six examples.

1.3 Material

The material of the research will be Ikea Italia and Ikea Suomi's posts on Instagram. This decision comes from the fact that this social media platform is consistently used by the

brand in both countries. Both the accounts post pictures of settings where the products are placed. I will analyze six posts, three from each account, to show the differences between their communication strategies, and to find out whether the differences between the two accounts are culturally driven. I will also analyse the descriptions of the posts.

1.3.1 Instagram and Ikea

The ways in which businesses operate on social media has been changing during the past years, and part of it depends on the updates and different uses that one can make of social media. For a long time multinational businesses, such as Ikea, had different Facebook pages depending on the country. The marketing organisation of the enterprise in each country has a great deal of freedom to create their own contents and power over when to share this content.. Dijkmans, et al. (2015) asked if there is a positive correlation between the involvement level of a company in its activity on social media and its perceived reputation, and if there is a positive correlation between the intensity with which the company uses social media and the level of involvement of the stakeholders with its online activity. The results of their study were positive, which shows how essential it is for an organization to know and use the tools that are given by the social media.

Moth (2013) gave an overall explanation of how the company managed its social network sites. He explained how Ikea owned Facebook pages in each country where it operates, bringing on a communication strategy that held the coherence with the values of the brand and its products, but not totally coherent between the different countries: in some of these the tendency was to remain more “silent” than other brands, which posted each day more than once, filling the newsfeed with their presence and answering many of the questions and critiques that were made on the channel. Currently a new feature of Global Pages is being rolled out on Facebook, which gives the possibility for advertisers and brands to use a system of pages that is centralized and revolves around the company’s main page. Ikea has now only one main page and the single countries’ power over the contents is minimized.

Instagram, on the other side, does not have such a feature yet, which means the the pages are still divided by country, some examples being @ikeasuomi, @ikeaitalia, @ikeasverige, @ikeauk, @ikeausa. Each of these accounts is managed by a communication team that takes care of keeping them updated and constantly active by sharing pictures, adding captions and engaging with the users to promote the products and the brand's values. The fact that these pages are not connected to a root page might give more space to differentiation between the accounts, which is the reason why this study will take into consideration the two Instagram accounts as the material.

Neil Patel in his blog post describes how Ikea is extremely efficient on sending people from Instagram to the landing page. The example he refers to is the Instagram account of the United States, but the same idea is used on both the Italian and Finnish accounts, in Italy more than Finland. The point of the feature is to direct people from the Instagram post straight to the website where they can shop and buy the same products that are shown on the post. In the post and in the website, the products are positioned together with others in a setting, to make them look more appealing.

2 Theories of culture and visual communication

In this chapter the definition of culture and theories on visual communication will be discussed. The way communication is affected by culture and how diverse national cultures impact how a company communicates itself is the main subject of this chapter.

2.1 Definition of culture

The concept of culture is very complex, and it is strongly connected to society and its individuals. Dave Elder-Vass (2012:39) describes culture as a shared set of practices and understandings, while Project GLOBE defines it as “shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations.” (House et al., 1999; 13) These definitions are explanatory of what culture consists of, but they do not provide details on the collectivity that shares the above mentioned values and beliefs.

According to Byram (2008; 64), culture is “the shared beliefs, values and behaviours of a social group, where ‘social group’ can refer to any collectivity of people from those in a social institution such as a university, a golf club, a family, to those organized in large-scale groups such as a nation or even a ‘civilization’ such as ‘European’.” This definition is the most exhaustive for the purpose of this thesis, as it not only gives a reference to the types of collectives that share a culture, but it also defines culture as the behaviours of the social group, connecting the beliefs of individuals and groups of individuals to their actions. This detail is essential, as the connection between culture and action is of great importance when dealing with organizations and how individuals perceive them.

From Byram’s definition it can be inferred that there are as many different cultures as there are groups of people, and that there can also be cultures within other cultures, or cultures that share values between each other. This characterization of the concept of culture makes it possible to compare two groups of individuals while bearing in mind that there are possibilities of contact between the two, as much as there are differences. In this study, the levels of the social groups that are taken into consideration are the

national ones, with the Swedish culture which is represented and shared by Ikea, and the Italian and Finnish culture. The differences between these causes the consumers to perceive the values that Ikea shares in different ways, meaning that the communication and marketing strategies must be adapted in order to provide the right type of message for each group.

Within the conceptual framework of culture, an important aspect to highlight is the ritual, which Rook (1985) defines as follows:

The term ritual refers to a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviours that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behaviour is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity. (Rook 1985; 252)

Rook divides the ritual in the following types: religious, rite of passage, cultural, civic, small group, family, personal, animal. Some of these types of rituals are of interest for this study, because these behaviours are connected to culture and each individual or small group of people interact through rituals, and organization uses such information to their own advantage, to improve their sales. Ikea is an example of this connection: the company uses family reunion rituals, as well as personal rituals such as drinking coffee, in its visual material on Instagram, making its products closer to the viewer by associating them with their daily life.

2.2 Culture, communication and consumption

As Solomon (2013) states in Consumer Behavior, consumerism itself is a part of culture: all material things such as cars, foods, clothing, sports and art are deeply connected with culture, in a cycle in which culture affects consumption just as much as it is affected by it, which the author describes as follows:

The relationship between consumer behaviour and culture is a two-way street. On the one hand, products and services that resonate with the priorities of a culture at any given time have a much better chance of being

accepted by consumers. On the other hand, the study of new products and innovations in product design successfully produced by a culture at any point in time provides a window on the dominant cultural ideals of that period. (Solomon 2013; 531)

Solomon (2013) describes a few examples of how the cycle between culture and consumption, such as the rise and expansion of convenience foods, fast foods and ready-to-eat meals, which might be caused by the change in the family habits when mothers started to work full time. Another example he brings up is the growth in production of items based on natural materials and made with fairness towards the animals and the environment, which correlates with the increased interest and concern of the consumers towards environmental issues.

From the perspective of an organization, the connection between culture and communication directed to consumers is an important factor to address. The content of what an organization such as Ikea shares in its social media profile is affected by the values of the organization itself. The values of the cultures that the organization communicates to the consumers, as well as the approach that groups of individuals have towards advertising itself affect the communication of a company.

The differences in the contents of advertisements in different countries depend from both legal guidelines and cultural guidelines. An example of this is a study from Schroeder (1993) that compares French and German differences in advertising styles: the results show that French advertisements are less informative than the German ones, the way of communicating was less direct; it presents more non-verbal communication and shows women in a more sexualised way. Solomon adds that studies show how British people have a more positive attitude than the French and German, and they see advertising as humorous and entertaining; therefore, British advertisements tend to be funnier.

Our belonging to a culture, in this case a national culture, can affect our perception of an organization and its values, depending on how and what this communicates. Furthermore, it is important to keep considering that an individual can be and most probably is

part of more than one culture and subculture, sharing characteristics, values and practices with other individuals who are part of the same culture or subculture (Solomon 2013; 626). Mary Douglas, an anthropologist and Baron Isherwood, an economist, whom Solomon defines as pioneers in finding out how culture and consumption affect each other, stated that goods are often purchased to express relationships, times, moods, and feelings (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; 39, 144).

Sometimes very big companies must find out the best way to approach different cultures upon realising that their current communication and marketing strategies are not efficient enough, or even failing. It is the case reported by Solomon about Disney, which after opening the very famous theme parks in California and Florida, found it difficult to bring the same concept park to Europe. The now well-established Disneyland-Paris had a difficult start, as there were fewer visitors and fewer users of the hotel and facilities, a problem which was solved by the Disney Corporation reality engineers by making the theme park “less American and more European” (Solomon, 2013; 578)

The main example of this type of challenge has happened in 2012. After the catalogue for the year 2013 was printed and distributed all over the world, the Swedish free newspaper Metro published an article in which it compared two different versions of the catalogue, one of which was created and distributed in Saudi Arabia. The pictures of the products were exactly the same, but in the Saudi Arabian version there were no women. It is possible to notice their total absence for example in the image of a family getting ready to go to bed in a bathroom, which displays a small kid brushing his teeth but has his mother deleted from the page; a group of girl friends having dinner and a girl doing her homework were also wiped out.



Picture 1. Ikea removes women from the Saudi Arabian catalogue. (*Ikea 'regrets' removal of women from Saudi catalogue*, 1st October 2012, bbc.com)

The article, written by Peter Lindholm in October 2nd 2012 in Metro, caused an outrage among Swedish people and the news became viral on social media, so the information spread all over the world, with different news broadcasters reporting it. The Swedish Minister of Trade Ewa Björling commented on the fact that the edits were “a sad example of the oppression of women”, and an Ikea spokesperson Josefin Thorell talked to Metro apologizing for the event, the words being “We should have reacted and seen that this is in conflict with Ikea's values.” By that time, the damage was done, but this exact example shows how important it is to build a guideline on what a brand is supposed to communicate and how much of the message should be changed in order to be still effective but also not in conflict with the values of the brand.

Ritter, in 2012, wrote an article for Huffpost in which he mentioned the comments of Swedish equality minister Nyamko Sabuni: she noted that Ikea is indeed a private company and therefore free to make its own decisions, but also it is a projection of Sweden all over the world. This shows how Ikea as a brand has also the power of influencing not only the reputation of its own brand but also of its own country. As quoted by Ritter (2012), Sabuni stated that “For Ikea to remove an important part of Sweden's image and

an important part of its values in a country that more than any other needs to know about Ikea's principles and values, that's completely wrong".

Considering the outcome of the outrage, the following question arises: is Ikea supposed to spread the Swedish values – in this case equality between genders – or change its own values according to the expectations of the consumers? The history of the brand shows that there have been many cases in which Ikea has adjusted its communication strategies in order to better please the consumers in a specific culture. A similar example is Starbucks: the company decided to remove the long-haired woman from the logo, leaving only the crown, to be more in line with the culture of the Saudi market.

Unfortunately, the Ikea case caused an outcry when the news media highlighted the controversy about the issue, because, as the equality minister Sabuni specified, Ikea does project an image of Sweden in the world. Some people believe firmly that Ikea should bring forth Swedish values in the world, despite the fact that in Saudi Arabia advertisements do not show women, and when they do, they follow certain standards on covering body parts such as chest, legs and hair (Quinn, 2012).

This is caused by the way Ikea presents itself as a Swedish brand, which sells Swedish interior design and lifestyle through its products. Kress and Van Leuween (2006) bring up a very interesting point on the usage of colour as a distinctive way to denote a corporation's uniqueness, just as the colour of flags denote states. Putting these two concepts together and applying them to the Ikea case, it is possible to highlight how the use of the Swedish flag's colors means that there is a strong connection between Ikea as a corporation and Sweden, making the identity of Ikea deeply associated with the identity of Sweden as a country.

2.3 Reading Images and Rhetoric of the Image

Humankind has always used visual representation to communicate, and in the last decades, social media has emphasized the use of images and visual communication to the point where many of the most important social media networks and applications such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, build their foundations on the possibility of sharing images, videos and text. For this reason, in order to understand the images used by

social media marketers, it is essential to know how visual representation works, as well as how semiotic signs and modes relate to each other.

If images and text are the signs used to communicate, the modes that are used to spread the message are visual, verbal and written. Modes are the different modalities through which a sign is expressed, and they are dependent and related to the media that is being used. An example of modes that are related to a printed text media is language, image and typography, while an example of modes associated with an auditive media is language, music, noise. It is also possible to put different media together to deliver a message, for example audio-visual media (television, smartphone), which is called multimedia; it supports the modes of both audio and visual, which makes it multimodal (Kress and Van Leeuwen: 2006).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006; 114) state that there are two types of participants involved in an image (or in any other kind of visual representation): the represented participants, which are the people, places and things present in the image, and the active participants, which are the people that are using the image to communicate with each other, that is the ones that produced the image and the ones who are on the receiving side. Oftentimes, the producer is absent for the viewer, and vice versa, so each of the participants does not know the other participant and will probably never know them, just as in the case of the social media marketing of big, multinational companies such as Ikea.

Images can be classified depending on the many ways they represent the participants, and they interact with the active participants. The first way is through the gaze of the represented participant, which, if directed to the active participants, can constitute a "demand" or an "offer", a way to engage the participants. Another dimension is the size of the frame, which is connected to the social distance: a close frame is intimate, while a medium shot shows a social distance and a long shot makes the relation between active and represented participants impersonal (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 123-136). The angle of the shot provides information on the level of involvement: a frontal angle provides a more involved relation than an oblique angle. This distinction between involved/frontal and uninvolved/oblique is also a reflection of the values that are

transmitted to the viewer. Another type of angle, the vertical one, is related to power. If the vertical angle puts the participants face-to-face, the viewer will feel as if there is no power distance, while if the vertical angle is unbalanced, the viewers will seem to be on either the more powerful side, if they are looking down to the representation, or on the less powerful side, which is the case if a very large vertical angle is used. The interactive meanings of visual representations as well as their relation to each other can be seen in the image below (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 123-136).

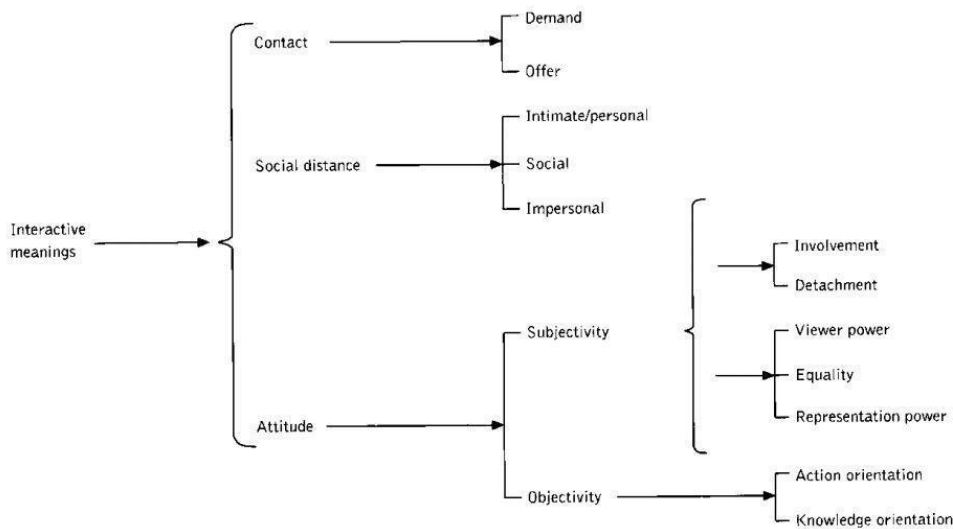


Figure 1. Interactive meaning of visual representations (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 123-136).

The interactive meanings relate to each other through three types of systems:

- Information value, which depends on the placement of each element in the image and which is different depending on the zones where these elements are positioned.
- Salience, which is the importance of each element. An element's salience can be enhanced using placement in the foreground, its size, the contrast and so forth. If an element is more salient, it will attract the viewer's attention more than the other elements of the image.

- Framing, made with or without framing devices, which divides or connect elements in the image, and therefore adds layers of meaning in the whole structure of the visual representation.

As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006; 194-204) proceed in explaining, these systems are applicable to single pictures as well as compositions of multimodal representations, such as images that are combined with texts. Lastly, the authors define colour as a semiotic mode, which brings meaning to the representation. Colour has always been a carrier of meaning. Already in the Middle Ages colors were used in association with concepts such as justice, hope, charity, life, unity and more, though colors can have different meanings depending on the context: contemporary colour codes might not be valid if transferred to the Middle Ages images and visual representations. What the authors mention is that colour is not only used as a mode to transfer and share meaning, but it is also used as an act towards others; the authors bring up examples such as the idea that blue is used to promote calm, bright red is energising and it is used in entertainment fields, while green is soothing and used to help against disharmony and discord. (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006; 229)

To analyse colour in visual representation, the need for specific scales arises. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006; 233) describe the following as the scales needed to define colour: value, saturation, purity, modulation, differentiation and hue. Value is a scale that goes from light to dark; saturation is the level at which a colour is shown in its most intense clarity or in its soft and pale version; purity is a scale that goes from pure to hybrid, and it concerns the type of pigment, going from a pure red, yellow, blue to colors that are the result of a mix, such as cyan, ruby and lilac; modulation is the scale that measures the texture of a colour, whether it is full of different shades or a completely flat, homogeneous colour; the differentiation scale goes from the use of one single colour (monochrome) to many, which brings to a more or less varied and diverse palette; the hue is a scale from blue to red, and these are associated to cold, calm and background in the case of a blue hue, and with warmth, energy and salience in the case of a red hue.

As well as the theories of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), the "Rethoric of the Image" by Barthes (1977) gives necessary tools to deeply analyze the meaning of images, especially

images that are used as advertisements, such as in the case of Ikea's Instagram posts. As Barthes (1977; 162) describes, meaning can be characterized by a factual, descriptive aspect, which is the denotation, and an emotional aspect, which he calls the connotation. Later in his essay, he defines anchorage as the text which helps and directs the viewer towards the right meaning that is intended by the image (the signified) to identify the denotation and connotation of the message. The anchorage directs the reader onto the right path towards the signified and eliminates other possible interpretations that might be different from the one that the author of the message wants the reader to perceive. The relay is described as the message in which text and image are completing and complementing one another.

Anchorage and relay are part of the linguistic message, which is as relevant an object of analysis as the images. The reason is clearly stated by Barthes (1977) as follows:

Today, at the level of mass communications, it appears that the linguistic message is indeed present in every image: as title, caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue, comic strip balloon. Which shows that it is not very accurate to talk of a civilization of the image - we are still, and more than ever, a civilization of writing, writing and speech continuing to be the full terms of the informational structure. (Barthes, 1977; 155)

This quote, despite the fact it was written more than forty years ago, is still relevant and applicable to social media marketing. In the Ikea Suomi and Ikea Italia accounts, the images always have a description or caption because in many cases the linguistic message remains a very important tool, for example to share important information, motivate the audience or do a call to action.

2.4 Instagram as a marketing tool

Before the advent of social media and social network sites, organisations and companies had a communication style that could be defined as one to many: the company communicates itself to the public and the conversation is mainly one-sided, so there was small to no possibility that the consumers could communicate with the company in the

same way that they do today. After the advent of social media sites, the communication between organizations and consumers became interactive and multi-directional.

Instagram, owned by Facebook, is an app created in 2012 which allows sharing pictures, videos, and nowadays also features “stories”. Through the stories, users can share a picture or video that will be visible to their followers for 24 hours before disappearing. These features are of strong importance for the companies that use social media, as they can enter people’s lives with much more accessibility, creating and adapting their content according to the target group. At the time of writing, Instagram has one billion of monthly active users, of which 500 million use the app daily (Statista 2018), 71% of the active users are under 35 (Statista, 2019), 71% of US businesses are estimated to use the app (Mention, 2018), one out of three most viewed Instagram stories are from businesses (Instagram, 2018), and half of the app users follow at least one business.

When a company communicates itself to the public and the conversation is mainly one sided, there is little to no possibility for the consumers to communicate with the company, which has changed in the past decades. Dijkmans et al. (2015) asked two questions in their study: first, if there is a positive correlation between the involvement level of a company in its activity on social media and its perceived reputation and second, if there is a positive correlation between the intensity with which the company uses social media and the level of involvement of the stakeholders with its online activity. Both the questions got a positive answer.

This is where the subject becomes complex, because if before the advent of social media, a company could only try to get the attention of potential or loyal consumers through expensive billboards, television ads, newspapers space and so forth, right now it is possible to purchase ad spaces inside the social networks sites. It is not only possible to do that and reach consumers wherever in the world, but also the information available in the social media about people is used to target the ads in a way that they efficiently reach the consumers who are most interested in certain services. It is a substantial advantage that organizations all over the world now have the possibility to exploit in order to improve their sales, and it does not only make it easy for multinational companies such as Ikea, but also for small local companies and even start-ups.

The enormous amount of users of the app makes it a very important tool for businesses and marketers all over the world, though it is still not easy to know very specifically the benefits of the economic efforts made by the company's use of social media as a marketing tool. Hoffman and Fodor (2010) made a list of central points that describe the social media marketing objectives of a business as follows:

- Brand awareness, which is traditionally measured through surveys and tracking studies, but is nowadays measured through the amount of mentions on a social media network. A greater number of mentions gives the brand exposure and ultimately strengthens the awareness of the consumers, as well as how they associate the brand to positive feelings.
- Brand engagement, which can be enhanced by creating social media campaigns, and consequently generates commitment and loyalty.
- Word of mouth, which can be traditionally estimated through surveys, by asking the participants whether they are likely to recommend a brand, and which can be measured directly on social media by tracking the performance of the brand on each social media platform.

3 Ikea Suomi and Ikea Italia

In this chapter there will be an analysis of posts taken from the Instagram accounts of Ikea in Finland and Italy. The analysis takes into consideration both the images and the text of six posts, three from each account.

3.1 Ikea's Instagram accounts

The accounts of Ikea in Italy and in Finland are managed by social media marketing specialists in the two countries. This means that both the accounts have more freedom on what they post. Each account follows the directives and values on communication that are given from Ikea, but a cultural difference can be seen by looking at how the accounts act towards certain themes. Taking into consideration the amount of time of one year on both accounts, it is possible to highlight the differences depending on the presence of people, foods and products, both on a qualitative and quantitative levels. The modes used in both the feeds are visual, verbal and written.

Consumers in the world do not have the same perception of a company; while Ikea means to sell a certain idea, this is sometimes perceived differently depending on the places. A Finnish consumer or someone who knows the brand would state that Ikea sells Sweden, its lifestyle, its values, its food and so forth. An Italian consumer would probably say that Ikea sells the Nordic lifestyle, Nordic food and Scandinavian design, while still being cheap, flexible and fairly adaptable to the needs of each consumer. Sweden might lose its importance and relevance as people from non-Nordic cultures easily confuse the Nordic countries and perceive them as one.

The description of Ikea Italia says "Il canale Instagram di IKEA Italia." which translates into "The Instagram channel of Ikea Italia."; the description of the account of Ikea Suomi says "Sisustusinspiraatiota ja ratkaisuja parempaan arkeen kotonasi. Asiakaspalvelu Facebookissa (IKEA) ja IKEA.fi/otayhteyttä. #ihanaaollakotona #IKEAsuomi", which translates into "Interior design inspiration and solutions for a better everyday life in your home". The main Finnish hashtag is #ihanaaollakotona, which means "lovely to be home", and holds the same importance that the hashtag #siamofattipercambiare, "we are made to change", holds in the Italian feed. The contents and ideas related to both the hashtags

are very different, as the Finnish one focuses on how nice it is to be home, inside, surrounded by cosy objects, while the Italian one is urging people to do something, in fact it specifically tells them that changing their routine is positive.

In the Finnish account, 40% of the posts featured plants in them, compared to the 28% of the Italian one. It is quite a strong percentage on its own, and there is a high percentage of difference between the two accounts. Ikea sells plants for home decor, but the presence of plants in both the accounts and especially in almost half the pictures of the Finnish account shows a very high regard given to plants in the communication of the two accounts. This high regard is one of the typical characteristics of the Finnish population. The strong presence of plants and nature in the pictures of the Ikea Suomi account represents the strong attachment of Finnish consumers to the natural world, or that while nothing grows outdoors in the winter, Finnish people still want to have nature and green indoors.

The complete absence of animals in the Finnish account and the presence of twelve animals (mainly cats, and a few dogs) shown in the Italian feed, which amounts to a 3,5% on the totality of the posts, shows a different way of seeing and living the home environment. The feed of the Italian account looks more like an average home space where people live, presenting more clutter and more colors. It shows a stronger presence of various people and of animals, which leads the consumer to connect the products to their everyday life.

The pictures shown in the Finnish feed follow a certain colour and content scheme and are quite similar to each other overall. The main colors throughout the feed are white, green and blue, which are cold colors, and the ambiance of most of the pictures is very bright. Many of the pictures show a white environment, white walls, or white sheets and textiles, and the atmosphere is well lighted. The feed on its own is colourful, but not if it is compared to the Italian one, which especially during the Christmas time, presents much darker colors, such as dark blue, green and red. The feed, together with many of the images in it, looks cluttered unlike the Finnish one.

The posts that I will analyse were posted to the Instagram accounts Ikea Italia and Ikea Suomi between March and October 2018. I chose some of the most peculiar or

characteristic posts to highlight the differences between the use the two accounts make of the visual material. I will also analyse the captions of each post, to further examine the strategy and values shared by each account. These posts illustrate the cultural differences I aim to discuss in the Thesis, and each post is chosen because it is exemplar of the types of posts that appear in the feeds.

The pictures I chose from the Italian account include people, animals and food, as there are many more of these elements in the Italian feed than in the Finnish one.

- 1) The first picture (August 16th, 2018) shows a dog smelling some slippers that are closed inside a coffee table/bin. The main colors are pink, white and brown, with the pink of the room being the main colour of the photographic composition.
- 2) The second picture (April 4th, 2018) shows two men setting up a table with plates and platters of home made food, looking at each other from the two sides of the table smiling.
- 3) The third picture (June 20th, 2018) shows a rooftop with people having fun and colourful pillows, carpets, lights in contrast with the evening sky.

The photos of the Finnish account were much more homogeneous, the subjects are very similar to each other, there is no animals, fewer people, and it is almost impossible to see the eyes of any of the people who are shown in the images, which is an interesting choice.

- 4) This image (April 20th, 2018) shows a well lit bedroom, the main colors are pink, grey and white, they are very faint. The bed is unmade and the setting looks slightly messy.
- 5) In this post (May 8th, 2018) it's possible to see part of a table and the hand, knee and face of a woman who is having breakfast. On the table there is cheese, coffee, milk, egg, fruits
- 6) The last image (October 23rd, 2018) shows a wooden table with five lit candles on it, and many more unlit ones. There are five different types of candle holders on a wooden table.

3.2 Ikea Italia

In this subchapter three posts from the Ikea Italia feed will be analysed. The subjects of the analysis will be both the pictures and the texts that accompany them.

3.2.1 World dog day



Picture 2. World dog day (Ikea Italia, 26th August 2018)

This post from August 2018 shows a dog sniffing some slippers that are held in a coffee table/container. The main colors are pink, white and brown, with pink being the main colour of the room and of the photographic composition. The caption is “È vero, ogni tanto ci rubano le pantofole, ma come possiamo non amarli? Oggi è la giornata mondiale del cane. Tanti auguri ai nostri amici a 4 zampe! #Siamofattipercambiare #dogworlday #lovemydog #ilovemypet #happy #fun #bestfriends #cutedoq #doqfriend #petaccessories #dog #doglover #petsgram #livesimple #positivevibes #pinkvibes #wonderfulday”; in English, it is: “It is true, sometimes they steal our slippers, but how can we not love them? Today is the world dog’s day. Best wishes to our four-legged friends! #Wearemadetochange #worldddogsday #dogworlday #lovemydog #ilovemypet #happy #fun

#bestfriends #cutedoq #doqfriend #petaccessories #dog #doglover #petsgram #livesimple #positivevibes #pinkvibes #wonderfulday". The words on the picture are "KVISTBRO Tavolino/contenitore bianco €24,95", or "KVISTBRO, white small table/ storage".

The ambient is warm and even though it is possible to see the borders of the room, the product takes the spotlight and the dog with it. Nothing else is visible, because nothing else is as important. This picture does not show a very strong feeling of home, as the setting is very empty and it does not present any other furniture than the one that is advertised. The positive feeling is given by the presence of the dog, which is unable to reach the slippers closed in the storage table. The viewer can see the desire in the dog's posture and can understand its frustration, while realising how convenient the product is, especially as a dog owner. The result is a positive and warm feeling towards the dog which is adorable, and towards the efficiency of the product as well.

In this first case, the represented participants are the dog and the storage table. At first there seems to be not a strong interaction between the represented participants and the viewer, but with a closer analysis it is possible to note how the gaze of the dog is directed at the table, or more precisely at what is stored inside the table, describing its wish to get it. Though the gaze is not directed toward the viewer, it does nonetheless show a demand. Another detail that shows the power distance between the two represented participants is the angle, discussed in the previous chapter: the dog is looking up at the slippers, making the small table the actor with the most power in the representation. The active participant (the person who is scrolling through the Instagram feed and finds this picture) is witnessing the relation between the represented participants. What is represented in the image does not know about the viewer, who is a third party and is observing the action and the subjects of the image.

The angle of the shot which provides information on the involvement, is frontal. This type of angle shows a higher level of involvement, which means that the picture was taken with the purpose of making the viewers feel like they are part of what is going on in the image, and that they are directly involved in the action. The vertical angle is wider than zero, but not extremely wide. On one side, the viewer does have more power than

the represented participants, but the point of view is not the most usual one. In a normal, daily setting, a person who looks at a dog has a very wide vertical angle, while in this picture the person is almost on the same level as the dog and the product. This emphasizes the involvement of the viewer, who therefore shares the feelings of the dog in a stronger way.

The placement of the two represented participants has an information value: both the dog and the table are positioned in the center, but the dog is slightly moved to the right side of the frame, which makes the table be closer to the center of the image. This placement gives the information on what is the most important subject of the representations, which is not the dog, but the product. Regarding the salience, or importance of each element, both the elements are very salient. The background does not present any detail, which makes the dog and table, the only subjects, stand out in the composition of elements. The two elements are very close to each other, which highlights their relation and make them more salient as a group of elements; this is given by the framing efforts, which connect the elements rather than dividing them, adding a layer of meaning to the representation. The sizes show the importance of each element: the dog is much smaller compared to the storage table.

Lastly, the colors help both the elements emerge from the pink background. The value is quite in between light and dark, the saturation is quite strong, as the pink colour shows also on the dog's skin. The colors are hybrid and the modulation is almost completely flat, with very homogeneous colors throughout the picture. The composition is also close to monochrome, with the dog and table standing out and making it polychrome, but the palette is not very varied. The hue is inclined towards red, making the image warm, which is more typical of the Italian feed.

Moving forward to the analysis of the verbal mode that is connected to this image, it is possible to identify two texts, one in the image and one in the caption of the image. As in many other Ikea visual materials, next to the product it is possible to find the name and price, so that it is easier for the consumer to find the product again. The text in the picture is a very good example of anchorage, which shows the meaning of the image, in this case by pointing out the name, a short description and the price of the product,

which is ultimately the focal point of the image. On the description side, the phrase “It is true, sometimes they steal our slippers, but how can we not love them? Today is the world dogs day. Best wishes to our four legged friends!” is also an anchorage, as it is meant to give an insight and add a layer of meaning to the image.

The words used in the post description are surrounding the themes of love, friendship, and positivity; a few examples are the words “love”, “friends”, “cute”, “happy”, “positive” and “wonderful”, between the others. These words are not meant to sell a product or promise anything, they are simply meant to give a positive feeling to the viewer, in a very fast way. The goal of these good vibes that the picture and the description transmit is to make the viewer associate positive feelings with the brand, while also recognising the functionality of one of its products.

This picture is very interesting and different. It is not used in the Finnish account in the time selected for this study, and it is an example of the difference between the two accounts regarding the use of pets in the feed. The Italian feed presents a few pets while the Finnish account never shows any. This picture is also an exemplification of the types of colour palette used in the Italian account, which is full of colour, though not bright, sometimes not saturated at all, but still warm and energetic, such as pink in this particular case.

Both the picture and the description that comes with it have a positive impact on the viewer, who scrolling through the feed gets an instant reaction towards the presence of a pet and the empathy that the image provokes. This picture got more than seven thousand likes, which is a high number considering the other images in the feed. Surely the presence of the dog and the very well delivered representation of the slippers-stealing-dog idea are an important part of the success of this picture and the product it wants to portray.

3.2.2 Gnambox



Picture 3. Gnambox (Ikea Italia, 4th April 2018)

This picture, dated 4th of April 2018, shows two men setting up a table with plates and platters of homemade food, looking at each other from the two sides of the table smiling. The caption says “From the forest to the table, for a natural dinner. Together with @gnambox we prepared a risotto with turnips, blue cheese and blueberry jam. Curious about the recipe? Check our Highlights! #siamofattipercambiare #IKEAfood #biofood #healthyfood #bowl #gusto #chefmode”.

The post features @gnambox, a food channel owned by Riccardo Casiraghi and Stefano Paleari, a homosexual couple. They are public figures whose followers pool on Instagram is as high as 176k, and as the caption describes, they have been creating a recipe for a risotto, a typical and well known Italian dish, which has very uncommon ingredients. However, not only the ingredients are very uncommon, especially for a risotto, but also the dish has a bright pink colour, given by the beetroot. The first hashtag in the caption, #siamofattipercambiare, literally translates to “we are made to change”.

This picture does not show the names and prices of the Ikea products, and as stated by Ikea in the comments, only a few of the products shown in the picture can actually be found in Italian Ikea stores. The table set is available in the stores and online, but the table itself and the kitchen are available only in international stores. Why would the account show a picture that contains unavailable products? It seems that the focus of this picture is not to showcase the products as much as to show the partnership with @gnambox, which is simply a food channel whose main visual themes are food, traveling and the owners' relationship. As previously stated, openness to all kinds of families is one of Ikea's values. The brand has been stating their values and openness through their commercials for many years, and it now shares its values on platforms such as Instagram, which provide an easy and convenient possibility to partner with another channel.

The picture is much closer to the daily life of a potential consumer than the previous one. The ambient is lighted, the main colors are white and green, with a few light brown details. The colors of the plates are very bright, and the green colors of the plants on the plates, the table and the counter show the appreciation of nature. This connection with nature is also brought up in the description, where "from the forest to the table" and "based on nature" recall the presence of the green details, and the hashtags #biofood #healthyfood also links to a more natural way of eating.

The represented participants in this image are the two men, the dishes in their hands, the table and tableware. As in the previous case, none of the represented participants is engaging the active participant through a gaze, because the two men are looking at each other. The picture is portraying a moment in the life of these two people, so once again the active participant is simply witnessing the actions represented in the picture. This is a private moment, and the shot is capturing a moment of connection between the men, as they are smiling at each other, while setting the table together with homemade servings. The viewers in this case become part of the lives of the two men and empathize with the scene that they observe. The convivial moment of preparing food together and setting up a table is an intimate moment that people can easily relate to, making this scene engaging.

The tableware is prepared and positioned with great care, and there are fresh plants in the house to show the attention to the details that would make the guests feel welcome to the beautiful and friendly environment. This representation is an example of what Barthes (1977) referred to with the word "Italianicity": the scene of a family making food and setting a table for a few guests and the food being fresh and homemade are very close to the Italian culture and way of living a meal. He defined the term Italianicity as "the condensed essence of everything that could be Italian" (Barthes, 1977; 161). While the picture in this post makes use of many features that are associated with the Italian lifestyle and culture, it also subverts expectations by presenting a gay couple as an example of family and as the center of this post. This twist is typical of Ikea's communication style all around the world, as it challenges expectations and presents something that is usually considered odd (such as a gay couple, which in Italy is still seen by people as not completely normal) as something completely ordinary.

The angle of the shot is almost completely frontal, as the set table is the closest item to the photographer who is on one side of it, and the two men are on the other side of it. The picture is very symmetrical, as the elements come together forming an equilibrated composition, capturing a moment of dynamicity with the duo which ends up looking like a posed, static moment. The slight tilt of the angle, which looks at the scene from the right side, provides a somewhat dynamic feeling and makes the viewer feel engaged. The viewer, being in a frontal position, is at the maximum level of involvement, and the slight dynamicity makes it easier to feel part of the representation, as if also the viewer were moving around the table and helping the couple or simply watching. The vertical angle shows an interesting choice: as one would expect the angle to be frontal as well, it is unexpected to see that the viewer is on a slightly lower level than the couple, closer to the table. The difference is not strong, which might make this detail insignificant, but on the other side it can be regarded as significant by keeping in mind that though the @gnambox couple are a very important part of this representation, it is always the Ikea products that are showcased and that are the top priority in each shot. In this case, the slight tilt of the vertical angle might not relate to the relationship of power between the

people represented and the viewer, as much as the power of the tableware that requires the focal point to be closer to the table than to the men.

The information value created by the placement of the represented participants is the following: the table is the closest to the viewer, while the couple is on both sides at the end of the table, which means that the table is the most important element together with all that is placed on it. The table is also central in the picture's composition, while the two men are on the sides of the image, closer to the frame, to the point where both have the sides of their bodies outside of the frame. Nevertheless, the most salient elements in the picture are the people: as shown in a study from Bakhshi et al. (2014), the presence of faces in a picture brings 38% more likes and 32% more comments in an Instagram post. We are attracted to faces, and we are more likely to like a post only because it features a face. The importance of faces makes for a greater salience of the two men in this particular post.

Moving forward to the colour of this composition, its value is light, there is plenty of white and light colors in the picture, as well as a few other colors, light green and light brown for example. The colors of the background and of the table help the products and the people emerge and stand out more; the saturation is low, the colors are pale, hybrid, but there is much more modulation, which provides a dynamic feeling, and heterogeneous colors come with it. The composition is polychrome and the palette is quite varied, while the hue is towards blue, making the representation slightly cooler together with the cold colors that are present in the representation.

The description in this case is the only verbal mode related to the picture, and it works as an anchorage. It provides meaning and adds information on what happens in the shot; the description brings up words related to nature, to something that is homemade, and to something different, such as the ingredients of the dishes that the two are bringing to the table. The meaning most of the choices of this shot communicate, as well as the verbal choices of the description are that it is good to change, and that something that is different is not automatically bad. It is shown through the recipes, but it is also addressed through the @gnambox couple. This is a very interesting example of the work that Ikea does in bringing out its values and sharing them with the world, in this case

with its Italian consumers. It is very clear that the purpose of this post is to show that change is positive and share such value, because none of the products are mentioned either in the picture, or in the description.

3.2.3 A summer full of colors



Picture 4. A summer full of colors (Ikea Italia, 20th June 2018)

This picture, dated 20th of June 2018, is one example of what can be found in the Italian account, and one very good example of the colour palettes that you mostly find in the Italian feed. This picture's theme is summer, and there are three people sitting on a roof outside, laughing and playing music. The whole area is furnished with Ikea products, and there are many colorful carpets and pillows on the roof and some colourful lights hanging above it. The description states "Vivi un'estate piena di colori! SOMMAR 2018, Fodera per cuscino, € 4,99. #siamofattipercambiare #IKEAstaycation #IKEAcollection #SOMMAR2018 #outdoor #summer #lifestyle #outdoorliving #party #light", which translates into "Live a summer full of colors! SOMMAR 2018, pillow case, €4,99. #wearemadetochange #IKEAstaycation #IKEAcollection #SOMMAR2018 #outdoor #summer #lifestyle #outdoorliving #party #light".

In this case, the sunset is approaching and the clouds cover the sky completely, so it is not a stereotypical Italian summer, and the colors of the scene, in contrast with the colors

of the products, are quite dark. There are different shades of grey, such as the grey of the sky, the grey of the city buildings and the rooftop. The only bright colors in the picture are introduced by the pillows, carpets and lights, which as a consequence stand out from the rest of the elements. Another detail is that the people in the picture seem to have very different ethnical backgrounds, which makes the scene even more “colorful”.

The description is strongly linked to the visual characteristics of the picture, telling the viewer to live a summer “full of colors”, which can be associated both with the colors of the furniture elements, as well as the colour of the different people. Diversity is once again brought up in a subtle manner, but it is nevertheless present in this picture. The image serves the purpose of spreading the company values of diversity, showing that what makes life colourful is not, in this case, the sky or the buildings that surround the people, but it is the people themselves, together with the company’s products.

The represented participants in this picture are the people, the products (pillows, carpets, a chair, the lights), the city, the rooftop. In this image, the represented participants interact with each other and there is no interaction with the active participant. The people in the picture are having an evening party and their gaze is directed to the other represented participants. They are smiling to each other, playing music, having fun, while the viewer is at a remote distance, far from any of the elements, as a simple witness of the scene.

The shot is taken from a not frontal position, the camera is on the left side and there is an angle that makes the active participant less involved in the representation and with its subjects. The lower level of involvement that is shown by the not frontal angle of the shot is one of the elements that make this picture peculiar, as in the previous cases the viewer was involved quite strongly, while in this case all the elements seem quite distant and almost unreachable. The vertical angle of this shot is not wide, it is almost close to zero, with a slight tilt that puts the represented participants on the rooftop to a lower level than the active participant. The horizon is perfectly centered, and it is formed by the union of the sky and the city buildings.

There are three levels in the composition, the rooftop with the lights is the first and closest one, the city buildings form the second layer and the sky is the third level, forming

the background. The placement of the elements in the shot provides plenty of information and balance in the composition: firstly, the positioning of the very colourful products on the rooftop makes them the closest element to the viewer and gives them more salience. On top of this group of elements, the city buildings give a darker tone to the composition, balancing the very strong colors. The sunset that is right over the dark grey buildings provides a bright and colourful level, which is also balanced by the clouds on the upper side of this image. The lights that are hanging also serve their purpose of balancing the shadows and light in this composition, which is in the end full of contrasts. Colour, as suggested in the previous paragraph, has a very important role in this image. This image is polychromatic, it has high modulation and heterogeneous, saturated and hybrid colors. The presence of such different levels is caused by the different colors and their use. The levels of the rooftop and the sunset have a brighter, light value and saturated colors, while the cloudy sky and city landscape have a dark value and are characterized by monochrome, not saturated homogeneous colors with low modulation. The use of colors in this composition is meant to highlight the products and showing their positive attributes as much as possible, in this case the colour that they can bring to the everyday life of the consumers.

As well as the colors of the products provide vibrant and stimulating vibes to the surroundings, it is also important to note that the people, being close to the center, also play a very important role in the composition. It is also interesting to note how the three friends seem to have different ethnicity and skin colors: this image suggests that colors, differences and contrasts are good and fun, which is a common message in the Italian Instagram feed.

Moving forward to the verbal mode, there is only a very short description that is a call to action and asks the viewer to "Live a summer full of colors!". As an anchorage, this caption provides the viewer with a direction towards the meaning of the picture; as the analysis showed, the goal of this post is to make the viewer interested in the possibility of daring and use colors during the summer time. Colors, as stated by Kress and Van Leeuwen (206; 194-204), convey meaning. The meaning that is associated to colors in this post is vitality, happiness, summer, energy and dynamism. The hashtags following in

the description are about “outdoors” and “summer”, “party” and “light”, which are strongly related to the image, its vibes, and the purpose of the post. The first hashtag is very commonly used in the Instagram feed of the Italian account, being one of the main hashtags used by the brand. It states that “we are made to change”, which once again reminds people that it is good to try new things and change. This can be interpreted in different ways, as seen in the previous case of the partnership with @gnambox, as it can refer to personal life choices and the possibility of being open minded, as well as purchasing different goods, such as Ikea’s products.

3.3 Ikea Suomi

3.3.1 Weekend



Picture 4. Weekend (Ikea Suomi, 20th April 2018)

In this picture from April 20th, 2018 the main setting is a well-lit bedroom, the main colors are pink, grey and white, and they are very faint. The bed is unmade, and the setting looks slightly messy. The caption reads “Ahhh, viikonloppu on ihan nurkan takana.

Ihanaa nukkua pitkään ja nauttia aamiaista hiitasti. #IKEAsuomi #ihanaaollakotona #makuuhuone #sisustus #petaus #sisustusinspiraatio #livethemma . . . Kuvan GRANBODAsarjapöytä 59,-/kpl” which translates into: “Ahhh, the weekend is just around the corner. Wonderful to sleep late and enjoy breakfast slowly. #IKEAsuomi #lovelytobehome #bedroom #interior #bedding #interiorinspiration #lifeathome . . . In the picture GRANBODAsarjapöytä 59,-/kpl”

The reason why this picture is included in the research material is that it is an example of the type of pictures that can be found in the Finnish feed. The characteristics of the Finnish feed are the very bright lighting, the light colors, such as the white and grey scales of this picture, with a few hints of darker colors such as black which provides an effect of contrast. The tones are very mild, there are almost no pictures with dark red, green, blue, while there instead are many pictures with a white background or pastel colors, which improves the sensation of cleanness, open spaces and calm.

Another aspect is the minimalism of the posts in the Finnish feed, of which this post is an example. Scandinavian and Nordic design are known for verging towards minimalistic but functional structures, examples of which can be found in the Finnish account in the form of Nordic design pieces of furniture and decor. Another detail that is easy to note is the absence of any animals in the Finnish feed compared to the presence of animals in the Italian one, with this picture being an example of it. This picture is also an example of the type of picture that do not feature any human face or body. The presence of people is as common in the Italian feed as it is uncommon in the Finnish one. The lower amount of faces in the Finnish feed shows how different the communication model is in the two cultures.

The description presents words such as “lovely”, “enjoy” and “slowly”, referring to the weekend that is approaching and to the positive feeling of how nice it is to finally stay in bed late and relax during the weekend. The feeling of relaxation and comfort that is depicted in the description matches very well the sensation provided by the image itself. While it shows the unmade bed as a sign of carelessness and relaxation typical of a weekend, and a cozy, simple and enjoyable environment, in this case the bedroom, both the

image and caption provide positive feelings to the viewer who ultimately associates these positive feelings with the brand.

In this case, the represented participants are the pieces of furniture in a bedroom. There are a bed with blankets, sheets and pillows, a bed table with a coffee cup, a plant, a few books on the floor, a lamp and a chair. The viewer who, in the examples previously analyzed, was interacting or witnessing people as represented participants, finds himself alone in front of a room in this case. If in the other cases the active participant either empathized with the represented participants, or had some kind of relation with them, in this case the only involvement that is created is caused by the viewer being the only witness of the space that is portrayed. It is as if the viewer were in the room.

The level of involvement is also provided by the frontal angle that provides the highest involvement. The vertical angle is balanced, and it does not provide any power to either the viewer or the represented participants. This choice increases the involvement of the active participant: it almost looks like the viewer might be sitting on a chair, as the height of the camera that took this picture is lower than a normal human height. It is as if the viewer, scrolling through the feed, were invited to sit for a moment and have a look at this bedroom, feeling free to imagine it as his/her own. This reminds us of the concept of the Ikea stores, where people can go around and touch, sit, and experience the rooms that are showcased in the megastores before purchasing them.

The placement, as well as the framing, are very particular in this case. By dividing the composition into four sections, it is possible to see the different levels of placement of the elements. In the top right section, only the background is visible. It is a simple wall painted pink. Moving on to the top left section, there is a frame on the wall, and lamp. On the bottom left side there are the table, the books and the chair. These elements make this section more crowded than the others. The bottom right section is composed by the bed, pillows and blankets. These elements produce a messy and crowded section. The framing is noteworthy, as many of the elements in the composition are shown completely: the bed, the frame and the chair are only partly in the picture. This shows how the picture's aim is not to show one item, but to show the totality of the items and the final result in a balanced way.

The colors of this picture are very interesting and exemplary of the colors in the Finnish feed. The value of this composition is a great deal lighter than in the three previous cases. The saturation is low, the colors are pale and hybrid. Comparing this type of pink with the pink of the case in the section 3.2.1. (World dog day), it is possible to note how the saturation level and the value change between the two pictures. They are lighter in the Finnish image. Lastly, the colour palette is polychrome and not homogeneous as there are white, grey, pink and black colors.

Regarding the verbal mode, the description has an anchoring function as it gives information on the weekend being close and shares positive feelings about sleeping late and enjoying breakfast without the rush of a typical work day. The description is connected to what the picture shows, which is the unmade bed, the coffee next to the bed table, the books on the floor, and it serves a purpose of reinforcing its message and spreading the same feeling of rest and enjoyment. The hashtags are meant for a Finnish audience, as almost all of them are in Finnish, and only one is in Swedish, and they relate to bedroom, interior design, decor and inspiration. It is interesting to see how, following the example of the main hashtag #ihanaaollakotona, "lovely to be home", the whole description and some of the hashtags are indeed about staying at home and enjoying life in a place where someone feels good.

3.3.2 Morning coffee



Picture 5. Morning coffee (Ikea Suomi, 8th May 2018)

In this post from May 8th, 2018 it is possible to see a table and a woman who is having breakfast. On the table there are cheese, coffee, milk, egg, fruits, and the only visible parts of the woman are the hand, the knee and part of her head. The caption reads “Huomenta! Tänään olemme joka-aamuiseen tapaan innostuneita aamukahvista, mutta myös siitä, että tästä eteenpäin kuvaa napauttamalla pääsee myös ostoksille. Naps tästä ihania SOMMAR 2018 – astioita. #IKEAsuomi #ihanaaollakotona #aamiainen #aamukahvi #kesäaamiainen #kattausinspiraatio”, which means “Good morning! Today we are, as every day, excited about our morning coffee, but also about the fact that from this day forward you can shop by clicking on the photo. Click here for more wonderful SOMMAR 2018 – dishes. #IKEAsuomi #lovelytobehome #breakfast #morningcoffee #summerbreakfast #tablesetinspiration”.

Two people are actually sitting at the table eating. The woman is reaching for a cup of coffee on the table, on the plates there are blueberries, cheese, egg, milk and more fresh and dry fruits, which make the picture full of many different elements. The background

colors are white and grey, with a few hints of black, and the main colors of the image are provided by the food and the people. Though the people are eating, the image is quite static, and it provides a sense of calm and tranquillity. This picture presents more details than the previous one, as the table is slightly cluttered, but the light colors counterbalance and help the space look clean and ordered.

The represented participants in this picture are the people, the table and all the elements placed on it. The shot is taken in the way that the active participant is standing behind the girl who is having breakfast, barely able to see her face, but able to see what the table has to offer. The gaze of the represented participant is barely visible and it is pointing towards the front of the girl, possibly looking at someone sitting on the other side of the table that the active participant cannot see. The girl is blurry ; only her hand which is holding the coffee cup is clearly visible in the shot. At the same time the elements on the table have a strong structure. The picture is one of the few examples of people shown in the Finnish feed, and it is interesting because though people are part of this picture, they are not the center of it, and the framing as well as the blur make them a secondary element in the composition.

The angle of this shot is not at all frontal as it has been taken from the side of the table and the back side of the woman. This type of angle shows how the interaction that the active participant has with the elements of the picture is not directed towards the people, but it is directed at the table and what is on it. This shot is completely different from the shot that was posted in the Ikea Italia feed, which was analysed previously (section 3.2.2., Gnambox). Regarding the angle, if the Gnambox post had a frontal shot, this very wide angle shows how the attention of the viewer should not be directed at anything else than what is positioned on the table. The vertical angle is very evident, and it puts the active participant in a position of power over the people and especially over the table. In this case, the viewer is less of a witness and more of an active participant.

Regarding the placement of the elements, it is important to note how the many elements on the table create a very ordinary sight for the viewer: the products are not showcased in their clean, straight-out-of-the-store way, but used to hold berries, fruits, milk, to the point of being dirty, such as the plate holding the egg and passion fruit, and the spoon

on top of it. The placement of the elements shows a fairly usual daily routine that does not hide the mess created by the usage of the products. The elements are all very close to each other, and they refer to one another. As an example, the hand is connected to the coffee cup, there is more coffee on the table, the spoon is upside down right after being used. This creates a connection with the open egg and the fruit on the plate. These elements refer to the other fruits on the table, each in a different bowl or container. This makes it more difficult to indicate one of the elements as more salient than the others as all of the elements have a similar degree of salience.

The colors are bright and quite saturated, especially the blueberries, the egg and fruits have very strong colors, though all the products from Ikea are white and black, light brown or grey. The overall value of the image is bright, with hybrid and heterogeneous colors, high modulation and a blue hue. The presence of such different colors makes the picture more dynamic as much as the wide angles do, making this an interesting and different picture to look at when scrolling through the Finnish feed.

This description is very different from the previous one. Whereas the "Weekend" post was about quiet and stillness, this post description presents descriptive words as "Morning!", "excited" and "coffee", as well as a call to action given by the "Click here for more (...)". This is a much more dynamic caption and it is closely related to the level of dynamicity of the image itself. The hashtags mostly refer to morning activities, with the words "breakfast" and "morning" being the main tags used. A detail that can be noted in the Finnish posts is the presence of emojis in the post description. These emojis are useful to make the material more engaging for the people who already follow the account. The Italian account does not make use of emojis, but it makes greater use of the hashtags. These evoke interest and engagement in people who might not be following the brand yet.

3.3.3 Candles



Picture 3. Candles (Ikea Italia, 23rd October 2018)

The last image (October 23, 2018) shows a wooden table with five lit candles on it, and many more unlit ones. The description is “Tänään on juuri oikea päivä jäädä sisälle ja sytyttää kynttilät. Mikä uutuuksista on ihanin: GRADVIS-ruukku (6,99,-), GLITTRIG-tuikkukuppi (3,99,-) vai BLÄNDADE-maljakkokynttilänjalka (18,99,-/3kpl)? #ihanaaollakotona #joulufiilistelyä #olensisustaja #IKEAsuomi, which translates to “Today is just the right day to stay inside and light candles. Which of these new items do you prefer: GRADVIS-jar (6,99,-), GLITTRIG-cup for small candles (3,99,-), or BLÄNDADE-candlestick (18,99,-/3pcs)? #lovelytobehome #christmasfeels #lamadecorator #IKEAsuomi”.

There are five different types of candle holders, and the description highlights three of them. The scene is once again empty of people, there is a white brick wall behind a wooden table, which is topped with many different types of candles and candle holders. Some of them are lit and some are not. The main colors of the image are white, light brown and a hint of black and dark green for contrast, and there are only a few elements in the picture, candles and candle holders being the most salient ones. The end of

October is approaching, which means that it is starting to get colder and darker in Finland and winter days are approaching. That is the reason why the description brings up the idea of staying home and lighting candles in order to create a cozy space, which is later addressed in the hashtags with the tag “olensisustaja”, translated into “I am a decorator”. This hashtag tells the viewer that anyone can be good at interior decorating with the help of Ikea’s products.

The represented participants are the candles, the candle holders, the table and a wreath in the upper left corner. A white brick wall constitutes the background. The angle is frontal for maximum involvement of the active participant, and the vertical angle is also frontal towards the candles on the table: the viewer does not have power over the table and the elements on it. The vertical angle is not very natural, as a person who stands next to a table would see everything from a higher vertical angle. This type of angle brings salience to the candle holders and highlights all the details of the products that are shown, which would not be possible if the vertical angle were wider. The information value carried by this choice is that the products are the most important element in this picture, and that they should be regarded as such.

The placement of each element carries information value as well: all the elements are positioned so that each of them is highlighted and shows its characteristics. The lit candles positioned on top of the candle holders bring more meaning and show how the products look in everyday life. The background does not present details, which gives space to the elements on the table to acquire more salience. The wreath on the wall brings a touch of green to the composition, and it also is a product that can be purchased in the stores. It is the only element of nature in the picture, and it is an example of how elements related to nature very often find their way into the Finnish feed. The closeness of the products on the table makes them a group of elements, and the framing also helps to highlight that the main subject of the shot is what stands on the table, and not the wreath, which is half cut out of the frame.

This composition has light and bright colors, the saturation is not very strong and the colors are hybrid, as there are different shades of white, grey and brown. The image is also polychromatic, but the palette is not very varied. The modulation is not flat, but it

is very low as there are not many different colors in the composition. The hue is inclined towards red, which provides a feeling of warmth that can also be associated with the content of the image and the represented participants, which are also meant to convey a feeling of light and warmth to the viewer.

The verbal mode constitutes of the description of the post and works as an anchorage by being the only verbal mode connected to the image. The description says that it is the right day to stay inside: this is a common theme of the Ikea Finland communication, and it follows the main hashtag “Ihanaa olla kotona”, which is also present in this post. The description then asks a question from the viewer: it asks which of the products shown in the image is the best looking, or most lovely, and then lists three of the items present in the picture with their names and prices. This description is meant to engage the consumer by asking him/her to make a choice regarding the products. In this case it is the simple choice of choosing which of the products looks best and gives an easy way to the consumer to look more carefully at the products and their details. The following tag “olensisustaja”, translated into “I am a decorator”, makes the viewer feel good about their own home décor skills.

4 Conclusion

Social media is an interesting tool to show that there are differences between the ways brands communicate with their consumers. This thesis studied how culture affects the communication styles of the same brand. The material was six posts coming from both the Finnish and the Italian Instagram feeds of Ikea. These posts consist of pictures of Ikea products placed in spaces such as rooms or outside, they include human and animal elements and they have diverse colors and styles. They also communicate very diverse ideas and feelings.

The Italian posts were more energetic, the compositions had stronger colors and the elements were various. The presence of people, animals and very strong and bright colors, together with the descriptions, defined a specific message and call to action. The message is that diversity is positive and fun, and that people are made to change. People should experience new and try different things. The Finnish posts were calm, the colors were faint and the elements did not indicate dynamicity. The messages provided by the images and the descriptions were about the relaxed feeling of being home, and the happiness associated with being surrounded by cozy objects and comforts.

The differences between the feeds reflect the cultural differences of the two countries and the communication style of Ikea. On one side, Ikea brings values of diversity and speaks to the Italian consumers providing them with more stimulation, with contrasts and new solutions. On the other side, the brand keeps the tone down and shares positive vibes with the Finnish audience, more inclined towards relaxation and comforts. The feeds reflect the culture of the consumers, their customs and habits.

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