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The Relationship between Visual Social Marketing and Customer Loyalty from the Perspective of Fast Fashion Consumers. Case Company: Gina Tricot.

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Social media is no longer an isolated concept for fashion companies. Almost all apparel retailers from big to small now occupy at least one social media account to endorse their brand and interact with consumers at the same time. A challenge now emerges among fashion brands which is how to successfully manage their social network channel to captivate customers and keep them coming back. With the gradually growing interest of users in visual content as well as the support of digital improvement, companies who become the pioneer in visual social marketing are likely to become the market leader as well.

This report will measure the importance of visual content in social media marketing and the influences it exerts on customer loyalty within the fast fashion industry. The study encloses the Swedish fast fashion chain Gina Tricot to understand its current performance on Instagram as well as to bring new suggestions for improvement.

The research method of this study was quantitative research. In order to identify the attitude and opinion of consumers towards visual social marketing, a survey was conducted as it best suited the capability of the researcher and served the convenience of the respondents. A total of 75 individuals participated in the questionnaire within four weeks from July to August 2019.

The results of the thesis reveal that visual content marketing effectiveness makes a positive impact on customer loyalty in fast fashion. Apparel consumers consider original and quality visual elements of social media as highly compelling content for their informational value. As the preferred visual content is shared on social media, it is highly likely for users to generate meaningful conversations with the brand that results in customer loyalty. The findings provide the case company with insights that can be assessed to construct an engaging social media marketing plan by optimizing visual content.

Keywords

Visual content, social media marketing, fast fashion, customer loyalty

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1 Introduction

This is a Bachelor's thesis for the Degree Program in International Business. The first chapter covers the background of this study, the research scope and limitations, anticipated benefits for stakeholders, key concepts, as well the introduction to the commissioned company. Overall, it demonstrates the general idea of the research and provides readers with fundamentals premises on what to expect further in the thesis.

1.1 Background

It has been commonly known that visual is the fundamental that shapes fashion. Traditional marketing methods such as printed magazines, billboards, and TV ads, used to make the most substantial contribution to the expansion of fashion. However, with the fast growth of the Internet and digital technology, content marketing is gradually dominating the former methods and generating superior opportunities for this creative industry. The concern at this point is how to integrate the visual aspect into content marketing for fashion purposes.

About 32 percent of merchandisers rank images as the number one form of content in their business, followed by blogging with 27 percent. It is noted that 11 percent more B2C marketers than B2B marketers regard visual content as the most essential content nowadays. In a study covering more than one million articles, BuzzSumo identifies that articles incorporating at least one image every 75 to 100 words receive double the social media shares than those with fewer illustrative elements. (HubSpot 2018.) These statistics indicate a fact that visual content is one of the leading elements in social media marketing.

With creative, dynamic and interactive characteristics, social media is considered the most suitable social platform for fashion marketing, including fast fashion where innovation and speed partake in almost all activities. Seizing this potential, Gina Tricot, like many fashion brands, has attempted to act as a media representative on social media beyond an ordinary clothing vendor. In a report conducted by Centiro (2018), The CFO of Gina Tricot – Per Johan Swartling states that the Swedish apparel chain has been put under intense pressure to meet new buying behavioral patterns of the young generation as they request for an excellence in service that drives the necessity for a speedy and frequent response to their shopping activity.

The current target consumer group of Gina Tricot is grounded in the highly demanding Nordic market as well as Germany, comprising of very smart and sophisticated consumers. A study conducted by Deloitte has reported that smartphone adoption in Scandinavian countries was increasing consistently and reached 88 percent by the middle of 2017

(Deloitte 2017, 15.) The great access to the Internet and digital advices has helped consumers in Scandinavia get involved in their purchasing journey within very short time and by incredibly convenient practices. In order to keep customers hooked, mastering the digital transformation and carrying new ideas to the market are one of the top priorities for brands targeting these areas. This report determines to evaluate whether an investment in visual content marketing will result in a competitive advantage for Gina Tricot to retain this challenging group of customers.

1.2 Research Question

In the past, fashion was kept exclusive through limited channels such as catwalk shows, billboards or magazines; however, with the birth of social media, there has been a significant change in the way fashion marketers deliver messages, reach out to the media and interact with consumers. People nowadays are able to search for fashion and style inspirations at their fingertips, share ideas with a giant community, and build up personal branding with a single social network account that takes less than 5 minutes to register. Users of social networking platforms are gaining comparatively high bargaining power, meaning the same is declining for marketers. It would be wise for brands to provide more guidance and support from inspiration to action throughout the whole shopping journey instead of trying to delight their customers.

In the 2016 Digital Trends report conducted by Econsultancy and Adobe, 22 percent executives had ranked customer experience as the number one opportunity for their business in the upcoming year, followed by creating compelling content for digital experiences (Econsultancy 2016). For a highly illustrative industry like fashion, optimizing social media visuals will help fashion retailers reinforce customer experience both online and in-store. The more satisfaction customers gain, the better chance they stay loyal to the brand. The primary objective of this thesis is, therefore, to assess the effectiveness of conducting visual content on social media marketing. The ultimate goal is to strengthen customers' trust and loyalty as well as to outperform competitors.

Moreover, the study will discover how visual content has been put into practice in today's fashion marketing, how brands have engaged consumers in these campaigns and how customers respond to them. Likewise, there will be an analysis of the current situation of the company's performance on social network. The findings may provide the company with a review of its current operation and suggest ideas for future improvement.

The main research question can indicated as: **How can the apparel retailer Gina Tricot optimize visual content in social media marketing to improve customer loyalty?** In order to refine the approach, four investigative questions are designed as following:

IQ1. What is the perception of customers towards visual content in social media marketing?
IQ2. What are the best practices of visual social marketing and how are they applied in fast fashion?
IQ3. Does visual content effectiveness drive customer loyalty?
IQ4. Which social media marketing strategy should Gina Tricot establish to enhance customer loyalty using visual content?

Table 1 below shows the relationships between the investigative questions, theoretical framework, research methods and results.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative Questions (IQs)	**Theoretical Framework**	**Method**	**Results**
IQ1. What is the perception of customers towards visual content in social media marketing?	Visual content in social media marketing	Desktop research, Survey	5.1.1
IQ2. What are the best practices of visual social marketing and how are they applied in fast fashion?	Visual content in social media marketing Fast Fashion	Desktop research, Survey	5.1.2
IQ3. Does visual content effectiveness drive customer loyalty?	Fast Fashion Customer Loyalty	Desktop research, Survey	5.1.3
IQ4. Which social media marketing strategy should Gina Tricot establish to enhance customer loyalty using visual content?	Visual content in social media marketing Fast Fashion Customer Loyalty	Content analysis, Data analysis	5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3

1.3 Demarcation

This is an individual research using published sources and personal evaluation, while materials from the internal company are provided only on request. The consequence of

report findings serves the improvement of Gina Tricot's operation regardless of any other company. However, it can be used as reference materials.

The study stresses a focus on the concept of visual content marketing and its most current applications on social media with minimal discussion on textual content or its relevant context to visual content only. The social network site chosen is Instagram due to its dominating visual features that best correspond with Gina Tricot's marketing activities.

This research covers different types of visual content already launched by Gina Tricot as well as suggestions by the author on additional platforms and applications the brand can adopt. It is mostly concerned with consumer psychology with little to no involvement of guidelines on technical know-how regarding visual content establishment.

1.4 International Aspect

A global marketing campaign is inevitable for an international expansion of a business and social media has become the gate where global users get an access to the firm's products and branding. Recognizing the great potential of visual as a universal language, companies are incorporating more and more exciting visual content on their social media channels.

About the stakeholders of the thesis, the case company – Gina Tricot is one of the leading Nordic fashion brands for fashion-conscious women, offering apparel and accessories for more than 30 countries with 180 physical stores in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Germany (Gina Tricot 2018). The Gina Tricot store manager who takes part directly in the research comes from Finland, the thesis author is a Vietnamese student studying in Helsinki and respondents of different nationalities are invited to take part in the survey.

1.5 Anticipated Benefits

There are two primary stakeholders in this thesis: Gina Tricot, as the commission company, and the author carrying the research.

First of all, the thesis is conducted with a case company, so the studying theme is closely attached to the corporate activities. In particular, the key objective is to make recommendations to the clothing retailer by providing insights into the visual social media content it has been working on and that in the market. The company will gain an access to a review of its visual marketing efforts as well as valuable data subtracted and analyzed from the online survey. It is expected that the thesis findings will display as fresh elements

contributing to the future marketing strategies of Gina Tricot that strengthen the visibility of corporate brand and communication with customers.

This is a research-oriented thesis that concentrates on modern marketing methods in the digital area, particularly social network. Conducting an analysis of one of the most popular marketing channels as well as rising trends is a good reflection on the author's comprehension of theoretical study. Not only is the thesis built on academic materials, but it also evolves a case company. The selected company is a fast-growing fashion retail which has optimized social media for many of its marketing campaigns; therefore, authentic resources are available to support down-to-earth and in-depth understandings of the subjects in research.

Regarding a huge interest in the fast fashion retail, this topic motivates the author to both consistently engage in the research and gain exposure to the stated industry. Digital marketing and social media marketing, have been witnessed as one of the leading strategies in modern marketing industry. Expanding knowledge and acquiring skills related to the field will provide a strong foundation for the author to pursue the marketing career path in the future.

1.6 Key Concepts

Social media is a platform for virtual conversation that enables the access to many people at one time. From a branding point of view, social media platforms make a great tool for companies to utilize as they allow brands to engage with customers in real time and discover their needs, thoughts, or emotions at any given time. (Coles 2014, 4.)

Visual content or visuals imply to the use of images or videos (photographs, graphics, images, or videos) that are produced to strengthen visual social marketing (Neher 2014, 10).

Visual social marketing is the tactic in which marketers use images and videos purchased or produced themselves to connect with consumers via social networks channels (Neher 2014).

Fast fashion is the business model that is capable of delivering commodities to retail outlets within a few weeks meeting increasing consumer demands for new products, by combining rapid response to the agile, lean retailing and leagile procedures (Buzzo & Abreu 2019, 1).

Customer loyalty occurs when a customer purchases a product or service repeatedly for a long term, and has an emotional attitude towards the product/service or towards the business providing that good/service (Wong & Sohal 2003, 2).

1.7 Risks and Risk Management

As the research method of this report was online survey, the author's concern was whether she would able to gather enough responses to generalize the findings. An insignificant amount of data was likely to influence the credibility of the final results. The plan was to first approached participants that shared a personal connection, including friends, relatives and colleagues who had shown particular interests in the research topic or involved in similar activities. Once the author succeeded at persuading them to fill in the survey, she could look forward to more responses provided by people who received referrals from the former participants.

1.8 Case Company Introduction

Gina Tricot AB, founded in 1997, is a Swedish fast-fashion brand that designs, manufactures, and sells clothing and accessories for women. The company operates a chain of stores in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Germany and online shopping. Their head office is located in Borås and so is their warehouse. (Gina Tricot 2018.)

The key objective of Gina Tricot is to supply customers with a new and exciting shopping experience despite their frequency of shopping. Gina Tricot regards keeping things from the designs and working methods simple as one of their strengths. (Gina Tricot 2018.)

According to Göran Bille, CEO at Gina Tricot, the corporate focuses on reinforcing their local presence by increasing and expanding country organizations, which suggests that their central functions, such as controllers, market coordinators, and merchandisers stay close to their markets. Within the process of expansion, Gina Tricot remains a constant emphasis on evolving as an international fashion supplier in the long run. (Gina Tricot 2018.)

2 Visual Social Marketing in Fast Fashion

This chapter discusses a variety of features as well as practices of visual content in social media marketing, an overview of the fast fashion industry and their associations with customer loyalty.

2.1 Visual Content in Social Media Marketing

Humans evolved over millennia to process visual communication long before they developed the ability to understand a written language (Gioglio & Walter 2014). Following this ideology, the upcoming section explains from the basis of visual interpretation to the role of visual content in social media, digital visual engagement and the visual platform – Instagram, in order to identify the impacts of incorporating visual content on social media marketing.

2.1.1 Visual Perception

Among the many definitions presented, perception is discussed as a creative procedure in which individuals are not only able to connect the content with distinctive ideas and concepts, but also conceives the image as such along with its creator (Ursyn 2013, 98). Dating back to 40,000 years ago, early human tribes started caving walls and ceilings as canvasses to spread knowledge, beliefs and stories. Visual communication has been taken into account as one of the earliest forms of communication. Evolutionary theory reveals that the visual system has developed to handle multiple images at the same time during the human evolution. (PWC 2017.) Various studies advocate that the human brain processes visual information much more rapidly than the way it handles text, in which images can be recalled 60,000 times faster than text and 90 percent of information conveyed to the brain is visual (Neher 2014).

The dual-coding theory, which studies the human's comprehension of information, suggests that people perceive and recall visual and textual information using two separate but interdependent mental systems (Blanco, Sarasa & Sanclemente 2010, 670). When words or any verbal messages enter the long-term memory, they are processed with a single code; whereas, picture cover two codes: one visual and the other verbal, each stored in distinctive areas in the brain (Dewan 2015, 2). For a better explanation, images and visual concepts are typically stored on both sides of the brain, while verbal information is stored only on the left side. The theory also identifies that humans are more inclined to remember information displayed in the form of images than that of text (Chau, Au & Tam 2000, 7). Furthermore, visuals facilitate comprehension and learning by contributing illustrative examples, extra-

lingual information, contexts for clarification, and redundancy that reinforces memory recall. However, the types of image also influence how the brain conveys visual concepts, in which decorative images are less likely to be recalled than informative ones. (Dewan 2015, 2.)

2.1.2 The Role of Visual Content in Social Media

Customers nowadays have better and faster access to information which was formerly unreachable or difficult to retrieve. Valentini, Romenti, Murtarelli & Pizzetti (2018, 362) identify that due to the expansion of electronic technologies and digital contents which has preceded to a great exposure to information among online users, customer's attention is growing more strained and challenged than ever. It is unquestionable that companies need to determine different approaches to deliver values. Otherwise, falling behind the competition is the reality they have to face sooner or later in a rapidly changing industry like social media marketing.

Content on social media is designed after the specific target that is active on a certain platform so as to build brand awareness and improve customer retention as well as satisfaction. The main purpose is to let customers discuss on the virtual space actively while maintaining a dialogue with the brand. In order to communicate with users directly, companies tend to establish social media content formatted as short chunks so that viewers can process them easily. (Pulizzi 2014, 8-9.) Pollard (2017) claims that social media has observed a noticeable shift towards visual content online over the past few years. People are becoming more engaged in a visual culture where the visual plays a vital and binding role of social life (Valentini & al. 2018, 362). Dimofte, Haugtvedt & Yalch (2016, 71) argue that this departure from the text-based reviews in online pages such as Amazon and ePinions, encourages the vividness of the shared experience which correlates to the product and brand's message persuasiveness, and at the same time offers further valuable sources of information for opinion seekers. Neher (2014) also suggests that visual content is gaining more popularity and generating an opportunity for marketers to associate with customers on social media in the formats that they find most interesting.

Previous studies points out that there are two main modes of information in product presentation: visual and text. Visual information implies the images displayed in various sizes, angles and viewpoints, as well as the feature movement or animation; whereas, textual information demonstrates the product in words with specific details of product characteristics. Engaging visual information in product marketing might be more effective than incorporating textual content in the way visual concepts improve the sensory experience, speed up information-processing and foster decision-making on product purchase. (Blanco & al. 2010, 670.)

Real-time figures show that visual content on social media gets shared 40 times more than posts with words alone. More specifically, articles that include a picture every 75-100 words gain as much as double the shares. (Gioglio & Walter 2014). Visual content offers numerous advantageous for companies such as building deeper connections, enhancing the credibility of the corporate marketing efforts, and support fast-paced communication. There is a norm for social media users to scroll through the news streams which are comprised of numerous status updates only to pick up a few pieces of information that interest them the most. Pictures and images, therefore, are more likely to catch the attention of users before texts can users respond to and process them at a higher speed. (Neher 2014.)

2.1.3 Online Visual Engagement

Among 1500 marketers invited to partake in a survey concerning social media engagement, 72 percent of the participants ranked engaging content production as their first priority, followed by measurement of the effectiveness of content efforts with a figure of 65 percent (Roope, & Oliver & Jan 2017, 1153). In order to cope with the new changes in virtual communication, companies are required to address and optimize online engagement to interact with their audience more effectively. Digital or online customer engagement, a term that has become increasingly popular nowadays, refers to the psychological process or behavior characterized by major personal attachment of users with the content, brand, or cause demonstrated in an online public space (Cheung, Lee & Jin 2011, 2-3; Valentini, Romenti, Murtarelli, & Pizzetti 2018, 363). Engagement in an online social platform generates positive impacts on both users' interest and/ or personal relevance and word-of-mouth communication about the online social platform; on the other hand, involvement and social interactions enhances customer engagement on a social network site. (Cheung & al. 2011, 4.)

Although engagement strategies vary from firm to firm, there has been an increasing number in the distribution of digital visual content. The reasons include its ability to cover the public's demand for visual communication, indirect impacts on enhancing strong business reputations and positive stimulation to purchasing intentions (Valentini & al. 2018, 362). It is also noticed that the current visual production is offered in a wide range of forms. With the insistent popularity of images, companies have been tapping into more illustrative creations such as memes, quotes, and animated GIFs, which are bringing a new breath and context into a photo's storytelling abilities (figure 1). Blanco & al. (2010, 670) supports that the impact of either a combination of images and words or simply images is more substantial than words alone when assisting consumers to recall messages and develop positive attitudes towards the product. Videos while continue to delight, entertain and inform

the viewers, also are adapting more to their attention spans, such as the 15-second video feature introduced by Instagram. (Gioglio & Walter 2014.) The way consumers interpret visual advertisements is positively associated with their awareness and attitudes and later turn into the beliefs about a brand (Hellberg 2015).

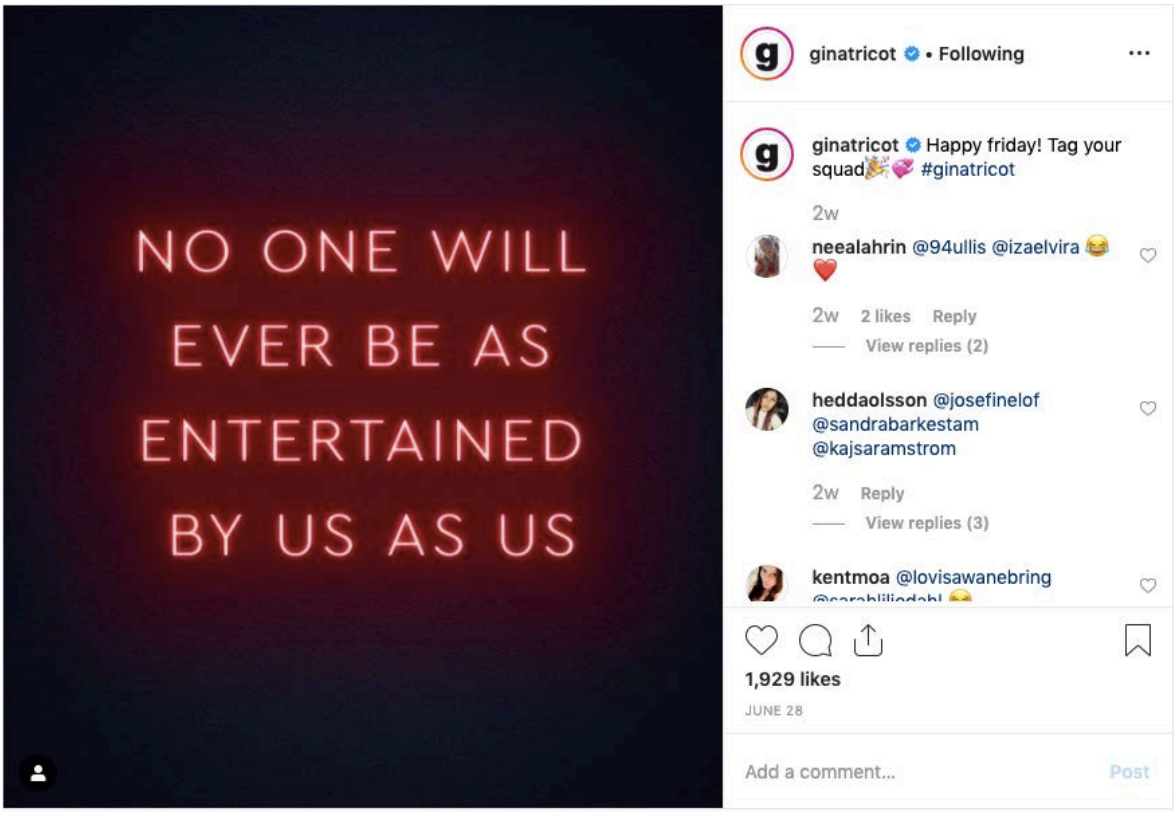

Figure 1. A quote image posted by Gina Tricot on Instagram (screenshot)

In a study carried out by Adobe, posts containing images are identified to enhance higher engagement on social media comparing to posts with no visual elements included (Roope & al. 2017, 1154). Furthermore, online users grow greater interest in photos that capture real people, enclose detailed product information and are uploaded in large sizes (Nielsen 2010). Bakhshi, Shamma & Gilbert (2014, 971) discover that photos comprising of at least a human face increases the likelihood to acquire likes and comments more than those without facial presence. However, there are findings to the number of faces existing in the photo does not necessarily alter the discussed effect, while there is little to no influence of the age and gender of faces on the engagement rate. (Bakhshi & al. 2014, 970-971.)

Further study demonstrates that digital artifacts being self-made or augmented are regarded as significant factors to why online users cherish their digital possessions. In another work conducted by the same group of authors, there are strong relations found between image filters and the number of views and comments. Users on social media are 21 percent more likely to view and 45% to leave comments on filtered photos comparing to unfiltered ones,

especially those with warm color temperature, emphasizing contrast and escalating exposure. It is also recognized that the more the followers an account owns, the more views and comment their photos receive; likewise, the more the hashtags a photo includes, the higher the number of views. Nevertheless, high posting frequency does not guarantee more significant engagement from the audience. (Bakhshi, Shamma, Kennedy & Gilbert 2015, 18-19.)

2.1.4 Instagram

Ranking the eighth on the largest social platforms in the world, Instagram is considered to be the number one in fashion world with a focus imagery that exploits the importance of visual communication (Volynchuk, 2018). Instagram is an online application that can be installed on mobile devices (e.g., smartphones or tables), providing users with photo and video sharing functions, filter editing tools and a social networking service (Harris 2017, 89). Unlike another visual-focused platform Pinterest, where pins are mostly constituted by images available and previously shared online, Instagram allows users and marketers to produce new and original content (Diamond & Singh 2014). Neher (2014) discusses that Instagram displayed trends towards visual storytelling and shifts from sharing images rather than text. The idea is further supported by Harris (2017, 89) stating that the platform emphasizes the presence of imagery, utilizes the significance of visual communication and is engaged with creativity, intimacy and immediacy.

According to Neher (2014), people use Instagram to edit photos, partake in a social network community, and experience the ease of sharing Instagram photos on other social media channels. Users are particularly fond of the installment of filters as personal photos are upgraded with a more professional appearance while minimum efforts are required (Diamond & Singh, 2014). Users on Instagram also view, like, and comment on billions of photos and videos on a daily basis (Neher, 2014).

James Quarles – Instagram's global head of business and brand development, states that "fifty percent of people follow a business on Instagram, and sixty percent learn about products and services on Instagram" (TechCrunch 2017). Instagram supports companies and brands in the sense of relatability. Due to the fact that customers enjoy doing business with the people they are familiar with, Instagram generates an opportunity for firms to present the real people who are working behind the curtain. (Zimmerman 2013, 82.) Companies, in this way, are able to humanize the brand by attaching lots of behind-the-scenes and encouraging self-made content created by users. (Hellberg 2015, 22.) Likewise, influencer marketing is uncovered to gain huge interest from brands and attracts large audience with its ability to create trust with consumers because when an influencer

recommends a product or service on their channels, it somewhat equals a reliable reference from an acquaintance (Later & Hubspot 2018, 21).

Figure 2. Instagram Stories posted by Gina Tricot on Instagram (screenshot)

Instagram stories, a feature introduced by Instagram in 2017, observed a growth in daily active users of approximately 300 million in the same year. Instagram Stories allows users as well as companies to share photos and videos, edit them with filters, text, or stickers, and is displayed in the form of a slideshow that will disappear after 24 hours (figure 2). Particularly for business, companies find it useful to attach website links, hashtag as well as store location and do livestream for instant engagement. Poll and puzzle features, otherwise, let brands can ask their followers for feedbacks and suggestions which helps companies in responding to the followers' demand and boosting engagement. In addition, brands can also perform livestreams on Instagram Stories to tease or launch new products, run Q&As, workshops, tutorials as well as promote special marketing campaigns. (Later & HubSpot 2018, 14-20.)

2.2 Fast Fashion

This section introduces the audience to the world of fast fashion, involving its prevalent characteristics, target consumer group and current presence on social media.

2.2.1 The Nature of Fast Fashion Industry

Fast fashion is stated as the business strategy that emphasizes the reduction of several processes involved in the purchasing cycle and lead times for delivering new apparel products into physical stores so as to meet customer demand at its peak (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood 2006, 259). The continual product change associating with shifting consumer

lifestyle as well as high demand for distinctiveness account for the emergence and rapid dissemination of the fast fashion industry (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood 2006, 260; Gabrielli, Baghi & Codeluppi 2013, 206). There are two core principles of fast fashion that make it a contemporary phenomenon: a short time gap between production and distribution and trendy, fashionable products that are affordable worldwide and continually shifting (Gabrielli & al., 2013, 206). Delivers of new products are allocated to physical stores regularly in order to ensure products' availability and satisfy consumer needs and desires. There has been a significant decline in the product life cycle of fast fashion due to faster arrival of new merchandises which suggest constant replacements of clothes in stores. (Watson & Yan 2013, 145.)

According to Miller (2013, 161), hedonism – the human's capability of embracing pleasure that includes the pursuit of entertaining, illusory, and satisfying experiences or products, influences fast fashion consumers. In one of her study, participants claim to enjoy products offered only within a short amount of time, regarding the pleasure in possessing an exclusive item which is no longer available to others (Miller 2013, 166). The consumers experience an prior hedonic competition between the instant pleasure of acquisition and an equivalently immediate concern of having to pay, when finding themselves wondering whether to make a purchase (The Atlantic, 2015.)

Knutson, Rick, Wimmer, Prelec & Loewenstein (2007, 153) argue that consumer buying decisions comprise of separate dimensions associated with estimated gain and loss, rather than just a single dimension associated with anticipated gain. The joy of shopping is not only concerned with the desired item, but also the price approved, or in other words, the good deal consumers achieve (Knutson & al. 2007, 152-153.) While the pleasure originates from observation, it later develops in purchasing and getting a bargain. Fast fashion, therefore, fits entirely with this neurological practice, in which fresh and frequent collections launching at stores satisfy the look and the reasonable price assists little time in making a decision to buy. (The Atlantic, 2015.) The fast fashion merchandise represents a compromise between consumers' preference to make a frequent purchase and budget they can afford (Gabrielli & al. 2013, 219).

With the rise of minor collections of merchandise, apparel retailers are urging consumers to visit their stores more often with the concept of 'Here Today, Gone Tomorrow' (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst 2010, 166). Fast fashion, with its free and uncharacterized traits, has the capability to fulfil the needs of modern consumers, in terms of establishing an heterogeneous personal identity, by arranging clusters of temporary and amendable components (Gabrielli & al. 2013, 207). Fast fashion demonstrates a new concept of

wearing that concerns even to luxury business: the interest of contemporary consumers is not only associated with the core quality of a product, but also the experience and emotional attributes they find in that item (Gabrielli & al., 2013, 218). Another factor that differentiates fast fashion from traditional fashion retail model is the withdrawal of personality association from a single designer which motivates consumers to partake in a universal culture (Buzzo & Abreu 2019, 4). Fast fashion provides shoppers with a variety of options involving those of mistakes, because such choices cost little to moderate yet remain assuring with low levels of economic and psychological investment. Apart from offering new sovereignty in aesthetic content that closely imitate stylists' counseling and tailoring, fast fashion reveals even greater potentials in constantly motivating contemporary mature consumers who no longer buy something simply because they need it. (Gabrielli & al. 2013, 207.)

2.2.2 Consumer Profile of Fast Fashion

According to Michaela & Lavie (2015, 173), the majority of consumers identified as the target consumer group of fast fashion imply to fashion-conscious shoppers. In particular, fashion-conscious consumers are described as strategic shoppers due to their likelihood of embracing fashion and trends. This group of buyers tend to gain more interest in fashion, make purchases on clothes frequently, and are eager to adopt new apparel products than the rest of the public. (Michaela & Lavie 2015, 173-174.) In addition, fashion-conscious consumers are more likely to discuss fashion with friends, seek information related to fashion and style, examine opinions via electronic word of mouth and consider themselves as a competent source of information (Kim, Park & Paige 2018, 304; Michaela & Lavie 2015, 174). Fashion consciousness is an essential consumer attribute for fast-fashion companies because this character trait encourages the consumers to be more responsive to and make use of fashion marketing communications (Kim & al. 2018, 304).

In previous studies that focus on consumer-driven approach, it is suggested that the fast pace of information and trends around the globe are the main reason for rising demands among post-modern consumers for more affordable clothes and more frequent shopping. The shift also marks the arrival of "disposable" fashion that drives the attention from product quality to affordability and variability in substitutes. This approach is trans-generational, in the way it is shared by young consumers who wish to pursue trends by purchasing inexpensive products as well as more mature consumers who are likely to turn down former standards for premium quality and have the urge to renew their wardrobes more often. (Gabrielli & al., 2013, 208).

2.2.3 Fast Fashion Presence on Social Media

ASOS

Although influencer marketing is gaining popularity and being adopted by many brands, ASOS has taken it to the next level by launching sponsored accounts for influencers called "ASOS Insiders".

Figure 3. ASOS Insiders (Ometria 2016)

The group of "Insiders" is comprised of stylish 20-something individuals from all around the world, known as micro-influencers who possess significant but not massive social media following. Rather than just partnering and/or featuring them on the brand's official page, accounts such as @asos_ashley and @asos_olive (see figure 3 above) are run by the influencers who have been formerly famous on their personal account, but different in the way that they incorporate and promote the ASOS brand exclusively. ASOS Insiders (mainly on Instagram, but also Pinterest and YouTube) provide consumers with beauty, fashion and style inspirations in a more personalized and continuing scheme. (Ometria 2016; ASOS 2019.)

While Instagram influencers have achieved some kind of "celebrity status", there is a shorter gap between micro-influencers and everyday consumers in which users find them more relatable and trustworthy. Some studies also discover that it is more likely for influencers with a minor following number to maintain higher levels of engagement comparing to top-tiers. (Later & Hubspot 2018, 22.) With this strategy, ASOS is not only building brand awareness across social media channels, but also thriving for a long-term engagement between the corporate brand, the influencers and their followers.

Fashion Nova

Ranking among Google's top-searched fashion brands, Fashion Nova has established a massive fanbase on Instagram with serious efforts to satisfy customers' longing for attention (Quartzy 2018).

Figure 4. Fashion Nova Instagram (screenshot)

Within a week time, the brand reposts around 30 customer photos of all types, from outfit-of-the-days to selfies, as well as engage on every single photo tagged. Robert Levenhagen – CEO of InfluencerDB advocates that Fashion Nova encourages followers to share their organic, daily and even provocative looks, which most brands typically feel resistant to repost, to get featured as brand ambassadors and might further grow their own fanbase. (Quartzy 2018.) Another factor that differs Fashion Nova from other brands is that Fashion Nova targets a wide range of audience which displays in their selected and promoted ambassadors or influencers coming from diverse ethnicities and belonging to all sizes. Nova (Refinery29, 2019). Figure 4 features a customer of Fashion Nova wearing the brand's products while attending its headquater. With strategic focus, the retailer does not only provide consumers with certain benefits including more options for clothes, but also gains attention from the public with a positive corporate reputation.

Nyden

Nyden, a sister brand launched by H&M to highlight on collaboration with rising artists, designers and influences, collaborates with influencers (e.g., senior editor of Refinery29

and Blonde Collective founder) to address the preferences as well as opinions of their customers about clothing materials (figure 5).

Figure 5. Instagram Stories Campaign by Nyden (Adweek 2018)

The influencers open polls on Instagram Stories attaching supplementary visual content to gauge top picks by followers on certain design elements, such as sleeved and zippers versus buttons. The polls record a total view of around 425,000 over two weeks and received more than 35,000 votes. With the total responses collected, Nyden plans to turn the data into the design creation of two dresses. (Business Insider, 2018; Adweek 2018.) According to one of the participated influencers, the campaign places customers in a special position by inviting them to raise a voice in what they are purchasing. Her opinion matches the statement made by the creative director of Nyden, “At Nyden, we really believe in the power of the community and we think that’s way stronger than a smaller fashion design team”. (Adweek 2018.) This is a smart marketing initiative considering how the brand manages to put their audience at the forefront and get them involved in the product creation process.

2.3 Customer Loyalty

It is no longer unusual for companies to succeed at drawing customers who has the tendency to make repetitive purchases of a corporate brand as well as turning them into “brand advocates” to attract even more consumers. Loyalty is said to be associated with having the customer develop a connection that results in the acquisition of that product or service. (Leventhal 2006, 372.) In this segment, we will approach customer retention,

consumer brand loyalty, customer loyalty within the fast fashion context and evaluate how fast fashion companies can leverage social media to build customer loyalty.

2.3.1 Customer Retention

The effort of business activities has shifted from solely competing for new customers to securing the loyalty of existing ones. The underlying reason behind this new approach can be explained by the costs of attracting new customers that outweigh those of securing current consumers' loyalty. (Magin, Algesheimer, Huber & Herrmann 2003, 294-295.) The high cost involved in the process of acquiring new consumers, such as advertisement and promotion to influence their purchase behavior, puts the early period of a new customer relationship in an unprofitable state (Group Emerald 2005, 248; Hanaysha 2018, 4). The relationship only becomes profitable once such cost involved descents in serving a loyal customer in the later stage (Group Emerald 2005, 248). Companies can improve their market share with the support of their loyal customers due to the frequency these consumers commit in purchasing from the brand, and at the same time, resist situational factors as well as competitors' marketing influences. (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001, 84.)

Customer retention is explained as the process of developing customer loyalty toward a particular brand, hence getting customers to repurchase its products or services over time The objective of building a customer retention strategy is to encourage repetitive patronage which mostly correlates with consumer's repurchase behavior and brand loyalty. In more detail, customer retention entails a continuing customer commitment in a brand and sustaining such relationship as a result of positive perceptions and past experiences. (Hanaysha 2018, 4.) An increase in customer retention will lead to declining costs and escalating profits as a result. This is particularly accurate in the retail industry, which is driven by a combination of overcapacity and growing consumer expenditure. (Group Emerald 2005, 248.) Retailers have gradually recognized the importance of determining drivers of customer value to create sustainable competitive advantage and strengthen customer retention. Thus, offering added values to customer is considered one of the key strategies to stay competitive because it provides consumers with a clarification for price variations. (Hanaysha 2018, 5.)

2.3.2 Consumer Brand Loyalty

Previous studies advocate that brand loyalty is predominantly evident under the conditions of more positive emotional mood and affect; thus, brands who make consumers "happy" or "joyful" or "affectionate" are able to encourage more purchase and attitudinal loyalty (Su & Chang 2018, 94-95). Consumers will uphold brand loyalty as long as the brand is able to

fulfill their expectations, together with getting a sense of satisfaction towards the brand (Wiberg 2018, 5). The level of customer satisfaction, escalated from customer engagement, generates positive corporate reputation and enhances brand loyalty along with the frequency of purchases (Pulizzi 2014, 14; Hansson & Eriksson 2016, 14). Customers who contentedly make most of their purchases from a certain brand are more likely to experience higher degrees of satisfaction than those who show less commitment (Hanaysha 2018, 4). In order to successfully motivate consumers to repeat their purchase intentions, it is crucial for marketers to devote in launching and managing long-term relationships between the brand and its customers (Su & Chang 2018, 94).

2.3.3 Customer Loyalty within the Context of Fast Fashion

Su & Chang (2018, 92) argue that brand loyalty is the consequence of brand equity, or added value, and other brand equity dimensions influence brand loyalty. In a research that studies 400 young individuals, the four brand equities comprising of perceived value, brand uniqueness, brand awareness and organizational associations generate positive and potent influences on fast fashion brand loyalty more than brand personality and perceived quality.

In terms of perceived value, comparing what consumers get (trendy, inclusive and socially visible merchandises) to what they give (economical expense, time and effort in purchasing), fast fashion retailers seem to offer them both tangible and intangible values. The uniqueness, defined as a trait of pursuing exclusions that sets one apart from others, is found in trendy design and product scarcity of fast fashion that provides consumers with a boost in self-image as well as social image. (Su & Chang 2018, 92.) This goes in line with a study executed by Group Emerald (2005, 248.) that states due to the intensifying competition in the retail industry, a sense of distinctiveness makes a major contribution to the success of retailers in all industries. In this study, however, the later attributes (brand awareness and organizational associations) will be assessed more explicitly as they are closely correlated to the field of research – social media.

According to Su & Chang (2018, 92), the high street presence and visibility on multi-media channels raise the brand awareness of a fast fashion retailer among consumers. As a result, not only will consumers become familiar with the fast fashion brand, but they also interact with the organization that lies behind it actively and tend to purchase more products offered by the brand. More and more retail companies are making an attempt to improve customer connections and interactions by promoting customerization, customer co-creation, and reverse marketing, wherein, customerization accounts for the best strategy giving customers the advantage of modifying products to personal needs, creating unique and inclusive products, as well as engraving their “self” on the item. Customers perceive their

involvement as meaningful due to the contentment and pleasure that come with it. These benefits are compared to the hedonic and creative achievement values consumers obtain during the cooperative design procedure in customization experience. (Kim & al. 2018, 304).

2.3.4 Building Loyalty on Fast Fashion's Social Media

According to Pulizzi (2014, 6), consumer brand loyalty is an output of content marketing, in which the emotional connection developed with the brand motives customers opt for the company and its products despite having to pitch about its offerings. The priority of developing a content marketing strategy is not concerned with selling alone, but the effort to consistently deliver valuable information to make consumers more intellectual and entertained, so as to earn customer loyalty in return. Likewise, the author suggests that content and social media marketing should be taken into consideration as interdependent processes. On social media, content is designed after the specific target whom is active on a certain platform so as to build brand awareness and improve customer retention as well as satisfaction. The main purpose is to let customers discuss on the virtual space vigorously while maintaining a dialogue with the brand. (Pulizzi 2014, 8-9.) Social media channels of brands that place narrow emphases on providing products' information, but performs as a platform encouraging interactions among users and the brand, are more likely to gain higher satisfaction from customers (Wiberg 2018, 5).

A feedback-based customer involvement system, including virtual brand communities and social network sites, is considered an effective platform that encourages credible information sharing for fast-fashion retailers. This is due to the fact that online platforms allow companies to collect customers' responses, opinions and suggestions on new product launches, trends and needs for the latest updates. (Kim & al. 2018, 304). Earlier research also claims that consumers obtain content (or informational) value along with social (or connecting) value from their involvement in social media brand communities. While content value indicates consumers' perceptions of the compromise between the benefits gathered from interacting with interest-relevant contents and the sacrifices entailed to achieve them, users gain social value by staying socially connected with others and fulfilling their desires for belonging and cognition with individuals who share the same customs, values, and interests. (Jiao, Ertz, Myung-Soo & Sarigollu 2018, 21.)

On a company's social media channels, users get involved and express opinions that can either be favorable or unfavorable for a brand's reputation. Anything being mentioned on social media, either positive or negative, eventually exert impacts on the brand loyalty among all industries, including fast fashion. Pulizzi (2014, 6.) Similarly, the level of engagement that customers hold onto will increase or decrease which significantly

influences their loyalty to the brand. (Wiberg 2018, 12). Fernandes & Esteves (2016, 125) state a similar indication that engagement plays an essential role in contributing to the understanding of customer outcomes, namely loyalty-related consequences. By escalating the interaction and engagement rate, companies are able to foster the emotional, psychological or physical investment a consumer has in a brand (Kindblom 2018, 11). Companies can improve the customer engagement by delivering superior value than competitors to establish trust and commitment in long-term relationships, while communicating as well as cooperating with customers in the co-creation process of new products at the same time (Arrigo 2018, 659).

3 Research Methods

This chapter demonstrates how the research method was designed and how the data were collected. It covers the summary of chosen method, questionnaire design, sample recruitment, data collection and research limitation.

3.1 Selection of Method

The chosen research method for this study was quantitative research in order to examine the underlying perceptions and opinions of customers towards visual content marketing efforts made by fast fashion brands. The quantitative research strategy refers to an approach of gathering numerical and statistical data and generalizing it across groups of individuals or to demonstrate certain phenomenon (Bryman & Bell 2015, 160). Quantitative method, therefore, was the appropriate method as it utilized numerical analysis of the target consumer group to establish behavioral patterns of social media usage, purchasing intention and their association to brand loyalty.

Survey was selected as the practice for data collection. Survey method is defined as "the systematic gathering of information from the respondents for the purpose of understanding and/ or predicting some aspects of behavior of the population of interest" (Sontakki 2009, 158). Another definition advocates that survey is involved of quantitative studies that emphasizes the evaluation of numerical distributions of variables in the population (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer & Tourangeau 2004, 259). Burns and Bush (2014, 172) suggest that there are 35 advantages of surveys, including standardization, undemanding administration, ease of statistical analyze and disclose of subgroup differences.

The thesis begins with a theoretical review on the subject, in which secondary data used was accumulated from books, academic journals and a variety of online data sources. The primary data, however, was collected through an online survey on Webropol. It was distributed online, primary through 3 social media channels: Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. The aim of this distribution was based on the target consumers who use social media and to reach out to as many respondents within the set time frame as possible. In addition, a printed version of the survey was also handed out to collect responses in face-to-face meetings.

3.2 Design of the Survey

In order to examine the relevance of the questionnaire, a pilot study was primarily executed. The term “pilot study” is defined as a pre-testing of the research method which has previously been created, for instance, the questionnaire or the questions for the interview. The aim of pilot study is to ensure the appropriateness of the survey as it allows the author to analyze the sampling methods used and to make possible improvements for questions required. (Teijlingen & Hundley 2001.) In this research, a pilot study was handed out to three respondents to identify whether it was convenient to get accessed to the survey platform, whether the length was appropriate and whether the questions were understandable, relevant or required further improvement.

The final questionnaire was designed in a short and precise form, comprising of close-ended questions with possibilities for open-ended responses. There were a total of 10 questions in English, containing two questions investigating basic background of the population and the rest studying the perception, opinion and expectation of consumers towards visual social marketing. The forms of the questions varied from closed-ended, multiple-choice, matrix, rating scale questions to Likert scale questions. The data was collected within four weeks from the third week of July until the second week of August 2019.

3.3 Sample Recruitment

The sample size involved consumers living in metropolitan areas as urban dwellers tend to raise bigger concern to fashion and spend more on clothing. Two thirds of the respondents participated in the survey through an online version on Webropol. Most of whom were located in Helsinki and other megacities such as Hanoi, Sydney and London. The rest of the respondents filled in a printed version of the survey, including customers who were shopping at two Gina Tricot stores in Helsinki and shoppers in Milan and Paris who were invited to participate with the written form during the author’s private trip to Western Europe. With participants coming from diverse regions, rich perspectives into global consumption might be achieved. Gina Tricot, therefore, can use these insights to improve its marketing development decisions to expand in foreign markets.

In the survey, respondents were divided into subgroups by age and gender. Previous study notices that different age groups have dissimilar shopping orientation as well as clothing retail evaluation criteria and so do different genders (Seock & Sauls, 2008). Due to the fact that young shoppers represent a substantial proportion of total fast fashion consumption, millennials (or those born between early 1980s and early 2000s) were recognized as ideal

samples whose profiles more or less matched the target audience, and therefore occupied a great proportion of participated respondents in the research. Since the target consumer group of Gina Tricot comprises of multinational, fashion-conscious and diverse women, responses from female consumers would make the most relevant outcome to the business objectives of Gina Tricot, male opinions could offer further insights to the study. The aim of the gender subgroup was to compare males' and females' perceptions towards visual social marketing and gain further meaningful insights about the application of visual content on fashion brands' social media marketing.

3.4 Data Collection

The survey responses were exported from Webropol and imported as a dataset. The dataset was then transferred to an Excel file. In the Excel file, the data was converted into frequency and proportional distributions. It was enclosed with interactive result tables and graphs for visual reporting and analysis. The results were mainly displayed in percentages in order to simplify the comprehension of data collected.

3.5 Research Limitation

There are certain limitations involved in this research. First of all, the study is based on samples but not the whole population of target consumers. Due to the limited time and financial margins, a non-random probability sample was adopted which might affect the generalized intentions of the final results due to the researcher's bias selection and personal judgements. Showkat & Parveen (2017, 6) state that unlike probability sampling method, non-probability sampling technique adopts non-randomized methods to approach the sample. Because the findings obtained through this method apply mostly to the group examined, it may be inaccurate to extend these findings beyond that specific sample.

Geographical and cultural issues indicate another complex factor to be taken into consideration. Apart from the main group of respondents located in Finland, the rest are residents living in distant continents of Western Europe, Asia and Australia. Cultural differences in lifestyle and behaviors may as well lead to diverse insights towards social media usage and fashion sensitivity.

4 Results

This chapter focuses on presenting and examining the results of the survey conducted. There were a total of 75 responses to the survey, in which 62 responses came from Weprobol and the rest were recapped from an offline version of the questionnaire.

4.1 Demographic Profile

This section gives an overall view of the demographic profiles of the survey respondents. The majority of participants were in their twenties (91%), while 5 percent belonged to the age group of 16 to 19 and 3 percent were between 30 and 40. In addition, solely 1 percent of teenagers under 16 years old took part in the research and no answer given by women over 40 was successfully recorded. The exact numbers representing each age group were demonstrated in figure 6.

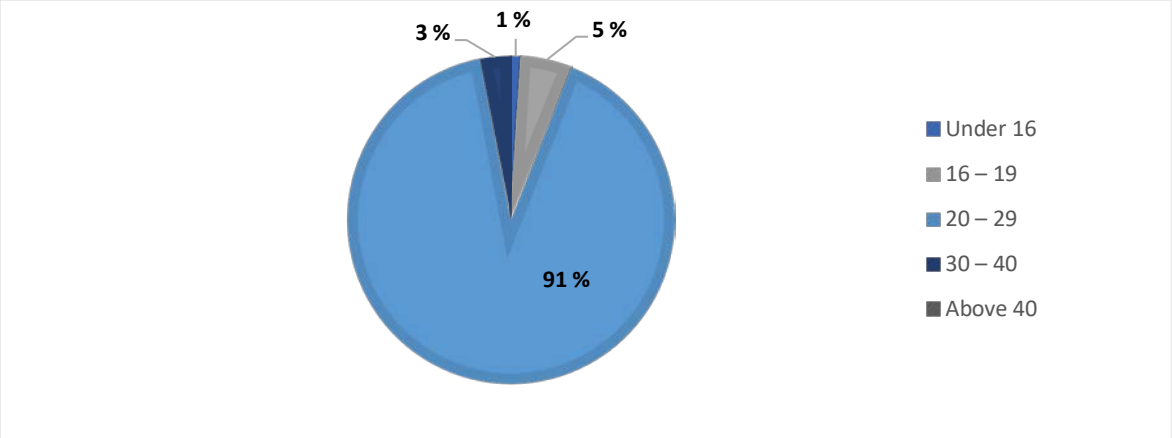

Figure 6. Age distribution of the respondents

In terms of gender, female participants dominated with 86 percent, whereas a minor proportion of 13 percent were categorized as males and 1 percent wished not to reveal their gender (figure 7). There was no question concerning the incomes of the respondents because consumer earnings are critically associated with complex issues such as culture, geography, government policies, economic growth, etc. Corresponding to the global business approach of Gina Tricot which targets multinational, fashion-conscious and assorted consumers (IFS 2017), this study was not restricted to any factors mentioned.

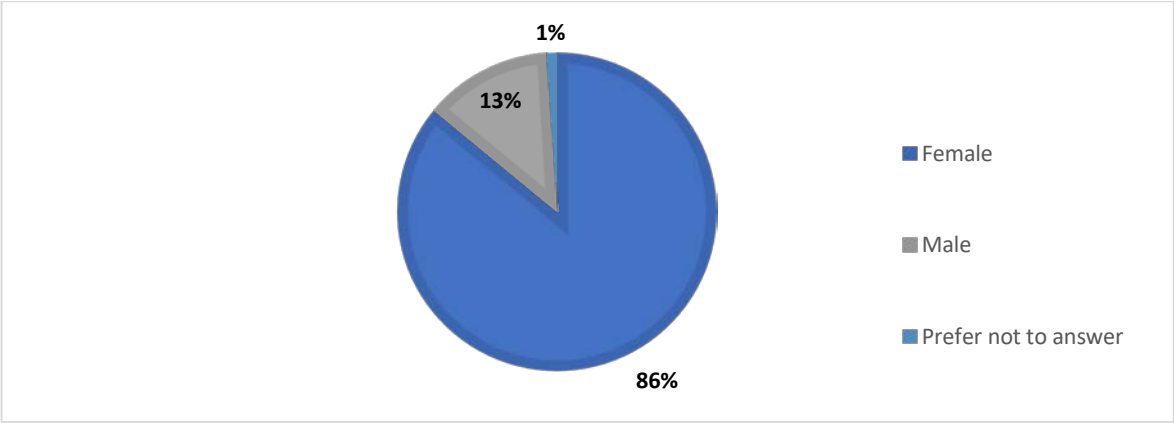

Figure 7. Gender distribution of the respondents

4.2 Habits of Social Media Usage

The next section demonstrates the social media habit of fast fashion consumers. When it came to following a brand on social media, opinions varied. Figure 8 below illustrates the tendency to follow a fast fashion brand on Instagram among loyal customers. A brand loyalty report shows that nearly 80 percent of consumers believe that it takes them at least three acquisitions to consider themselves a loyal customer (Yotpo 2018). The survey, however, suggested that despite seeing themselves somewhat loyal to a brand, consumers remained reluctant to keep track of that brand online. Most of consumers who revealed to have purchased from a specific brand more than twice just sometimes followed the brand on Instagram (32%). Two respondent groups with equally 28 percent of votes answered that the likelihood they were going to make a connection was either usually or rarely. Only 8 percent of social media users hardly never minded following the brand, which doubled the number of those who always did.

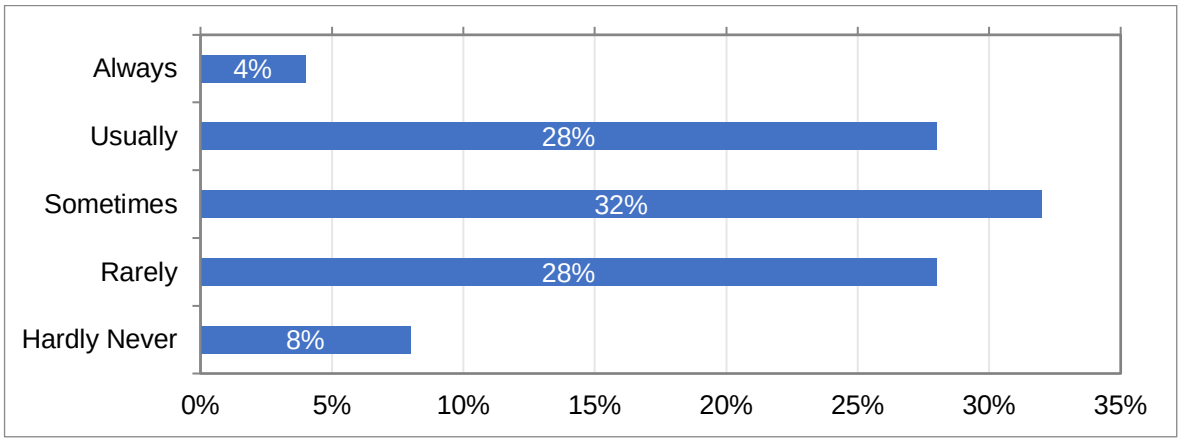

Figure 8. The likelihood to follow a fast fashion brand on Instagram among loyal customers

There are several reasons to why consumers follow a fashion brand on Instagram. A report that investigates users' intentions for their current following concludes that 40 percent of

users tend to check on news on a social media platform comparing to 41 percent of whom do it to keep up with friends. While nearly 40 percent of consumers are following their favorite brands on social media, 1 out of 4 users are following the brand which they might make an acquisition from afterwards. (Forbes 2019.)

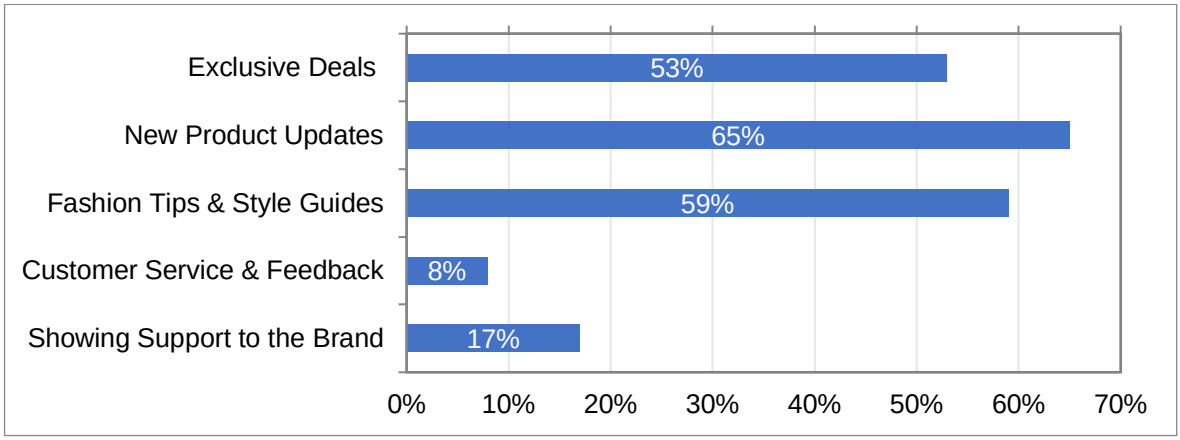

Figure 9. Purposes of following a fast fashion brand on Instagram

Figure 9, which illustrates the plausible motivations for following a fast fashion brand, verifies that consumers were most eager to keep an eye on new products on Instagram (65%). Many of the consumers selected gaining fashion tips and style guides (59%) along with getting exclusive deals (53%) as the second and third most significant reasons respectively. On the contrary, an insignificant proportion of 8 percent respondents looked for customer service or gave feedback. It seemed that the demand for educational and informational content outweighed that for product/service assistance on Instagram. Lastly, only 17 percent revealed to have followed a fast fashion brand account simply to support the brand.

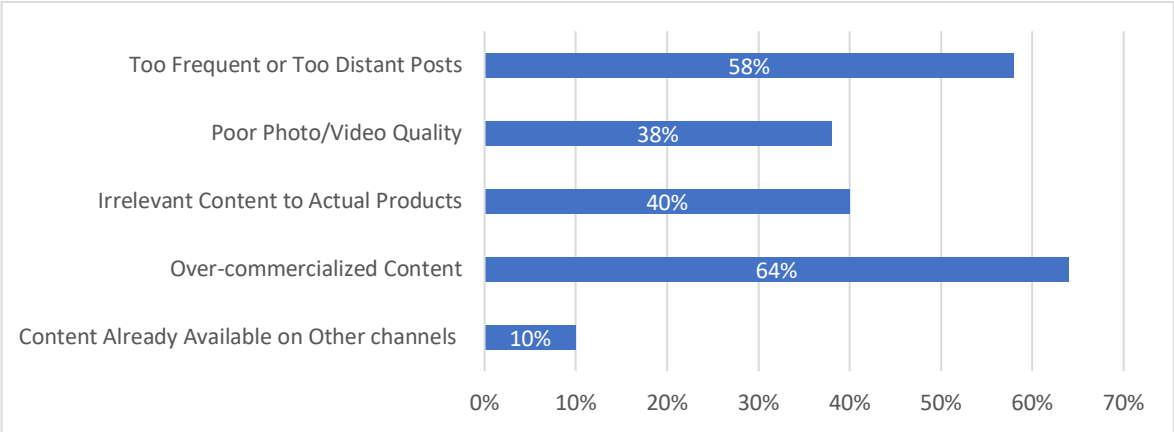

Figure 10. Reasons for subsequently unfollowing a fast fashion brand on Instagram

When a customer follows a brand online, there is no guarantee that this bond will last indefinitely, unless the company prepares a comprehensive social media plan to both inform and entertain users. According to the survey, the major irritations to why conssumers decided to unfollow a brand belonged to over-commercialized content (64%) and disproportionate frequency of posts (58%). In addition, 40 percent of the participants listed content that was irrelevant to actual products or services as another major reason to stop following an account. It was noticeable that low-resolution visual posts might also contribute to customers' loss of interest. On the contrary, only 10 percent users expressed negative feelings about the content posted on the brand's Instagram which they had spotted on other marketing channels (figure 10).

4.3 Preference of Visual Content on Social Media

Two following questions addressed how consumers perceived visual content on Instagram and what were their opinions about current visual content in used. Figure 11 below gives information about what kind of visual social content users enjoyed the most from fashion brands on. While almost 80 percent of consumers continued to find official updates from brands (e.g., look-books, product imagery) most engaging, a far smaller number of 27 percent picked informal content (e.g., behind-the-scenes) as their favorite. Posts generated by or partnering with influencers, likewise, witnessed 40 percent of the respondents whom revealed to enjoy them. Both Instagram Stories and user generated content recorded a figure of 21 percent. Visual posts that incorporated text such as quote images, however, received the least votes from consumers of solely 11 percent.

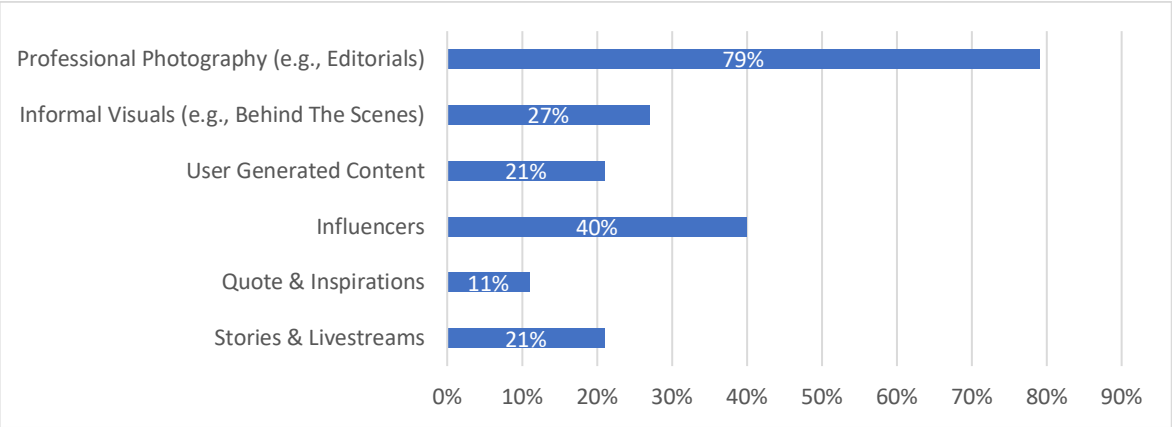

Figure 11. Preference for visual content types on Instagram

The next question broke down the stated Instagram posts into more specific content types for consumers to rate their significance. The scale used in this section was classified as: 1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=very good, 5=excellent (figure 12).

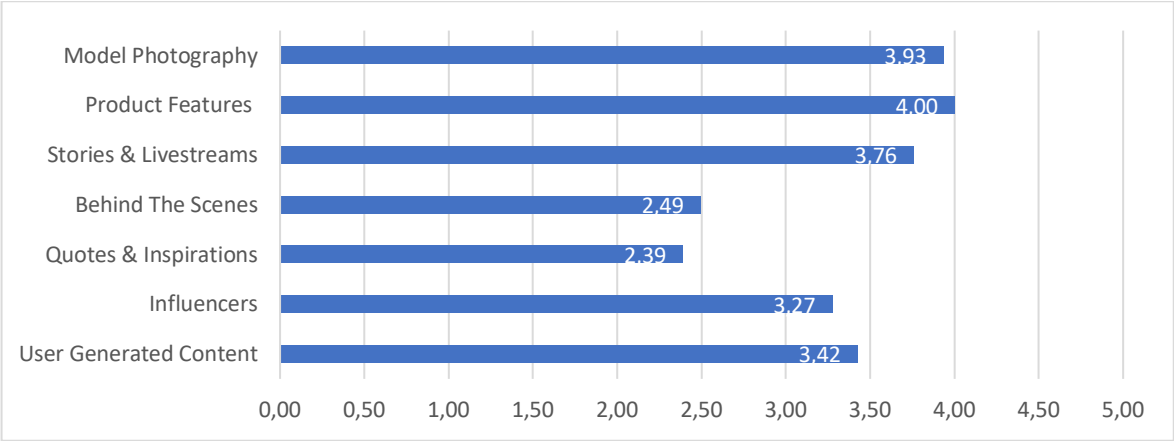

Figure 12. Assessment of the value delivered by visual content

Original or professional content was divided into two subdivisions of post featuring models and those highlighting product features. In particular, product features received the highest point of precisely 4 out of 5, and followed by model photography which scored 3.93. Positivity for Stories and Livestreams features was also shown with a point of 3.76. Not far behind was posts related to influencers (3.27) along with user generated content (3.42). Fashion shoppers, however, conveyed to gain less information from informal behind-the-scene updates, which marked 2.49, and quote visuals, which marked 2.39.

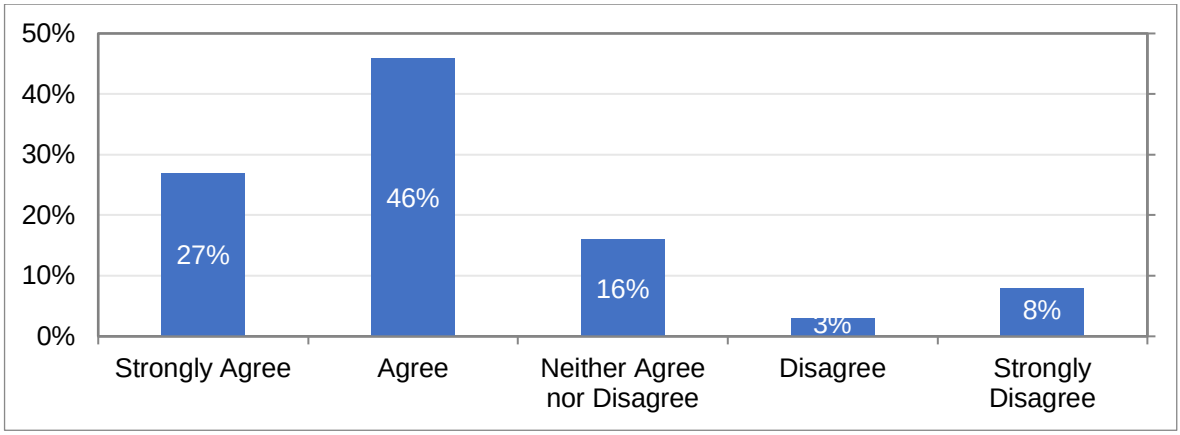

Figure 13. Comparison between visual and textual content

As the term “visual content” could be viewed as distant or unclear to some buyers, question number 5 and 6 were arranged before question 7 in order to give respondents a specified approach of different forms and applications of visual content on social media (Appendix 1). After getting rather precise comprehension of visual content would respondents be able to provide a conscientious opinion relating to the comparison between visual and textual content. With evidence and support by former studies, it was anticipated that a collective number of 73 percent respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am more captivated by an Instagram post containing images/videos than pure text”. Holding

an opposing view to this idea, a sum of 11 percent expressed having a preference for textual content; whereas, 16 percent neither preferred visual nor textual posts. More specific data is displayed in figure 13.

4.4 Customer Loyalty Dimensions

The next section examines potential effects that visual content had on consumer brand loyalty. There was no direct question that addressed the opinions of respondents on brand loyalty, but rather questions that investigated the underlying motives behind their commitment to a brand.

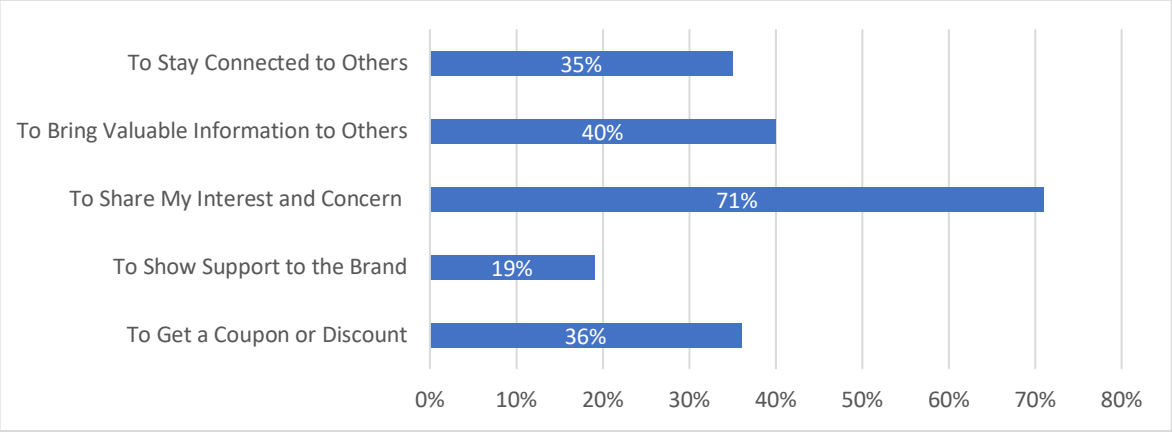

Figure 14. Motives for sharing an Instagram post

One research shows that consumers are nearly twice as likely to purchase a product they have shared it on their social media (WooEcommerce 2015). The most noticeable way people are likely to practice self-presentation is through things including buying and acquiring materials that signify who they are (Buffer 2019). In the survey, 71 percent social media users responded that expressing personal interest and concern on their private account was regarded as the most major purpose for sharing a post created by brands (figure 14). The results showed indifference to the statistics provided by Buffer (2019), in which more than one third of all people's speech addresses about themselves and online dialogue almost doubles the figure to 80 percent of total social media posts.

Following was 40 percent of consumers who shared to provide others with meaningful information. Group Emerald (2005, 248) suggests that because loyal customers tend to recommend their favorite products to other shoppers in the marketplace, it indicates a valuable opportunity for the brand to standout and receive more exposure in a competitive market. Although a minor figure of 19 percent in the survey conveyed that they would share a post simply to support a brand, the decision to offer information alone was advantageous for retailers in the way it constructed strong brand reputative and initiates meaningful

conversations. Similarly, Su & Chang (2018, 101) argue that increased brand awareness and brand recall will positively affect consumer-brand relationships, and therefore, encourages brand loyalty. Other reasons included socializing with the online community and earning a promotional offer shared a variety of comparative figures from 35 to 40 percent.

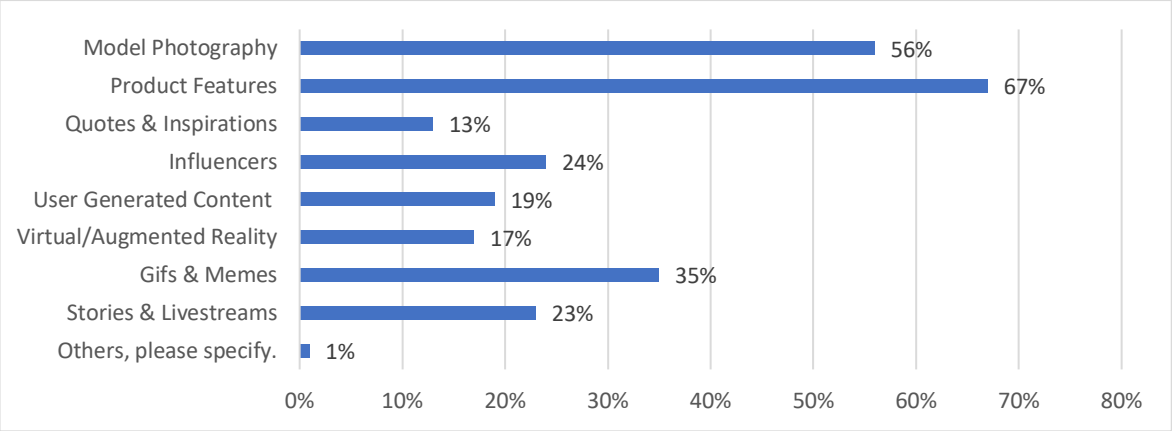

Figure 15. Expectation for visual content on a fast fashion brand' Instagram account

Apart from suggestions by previous studies that photos involving at least one face foster more engagement (Bakhshi & al. 2014, 971), almost two thirds of the respondents anticipated content related to product features to receive the biggest promotion in the future, followed by 56 percent of responses desiring model photography (figure 15). Having gained visible popularity on Instagram but yet on fashion accounts, less formal or prearranged content observed a lower rate of anticipation from respondents. It was observable that more than one third of responses were eager to see more of gifs and memes (35%), while Instagram Stories and Livestreams occupied 23 percent. Curated content including posts generated by influencers as well as social media users were recorded with figures of 24 percent and 19 percent respectively. In addition, users seemed hesitant to try new Instagram features such as virtual reality or augmented reality which were recorded with only 17 percent. Acquiring the least number of responses from the provided selections, quotes and motivational content covered just slightly 13 percent. With a single open-ended answer option available, one response was documented as "diversity and authenticity in models". Certain boundaries seemed to exist among fashion models presenting in public advertisements and marketing distributes.

5 Discussion

The last chapter summarizes the main findings based on the data gathered and analyzed, and therefore, provides recommendations to the commissioned company. Discussions concerning the reliability and validity of the study are included and so as suggestions for future study. In addition, the author includes her personal learning process throughout the development of this thesis.

5.1 Interpretation of the Results

The central focus of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of producing visual content on social media marketing so as to strengthen loyalty among fast fashion consumers. The quantitative research method was applied in the form of a survey to study the perception and attitude of consumers. Overall, the findings indicate that effective visual content marketing on social media positively influences customer loyalty in fast fashion. Fashion consumers get engaged in original and high-quality visual content due to its informative and educational contributions. As the preferred visual content is shared on social media, customers are likely to create meaningful conversations with the brand on a virtual brand community that results in customer loyalty.

5.1.1 Accessibility to Visual Content on Social Media

With consumers being eager to learn about new products on Instagram, updating visual creations that feature current product releases consistently can earn customers' attention and keep them hooked. There are evidences to the higher demand of informational significance comparing to that of socializing significance when it comes to following a fast fashion brand on Instagram. Another matter then needs to be considered is posting frequency. High frequency of social media updates is not closely associated with more significant engagement from users (Bakhshi, Shamma, Kennedy & Gilbert 2015, 19). With disproportionate visual posts, a fashion fast brand can easily piss off their followers which possibly results in an unwanted disconnection with consumers on the virtual brand community.

The results also show that following a corporate brand on Instagram has not become a norm for loyal consumers which diminishes the connection between the shoppers and the brand after purchasing. Although it is more common for shoppers to become followers of the purchased brand, the irregularity can be improved by further enhancing the brand's exposure on social media. Neher (2014) suggests that the objective of constructing brand awareness is to expose potential consumers to the brand repeatedly over time. Brand

awareness, therefore, exerts influences on buyer's perception of fast fashion apparels as well as their preferences, attachment and brand loyalty toward a fast fashion brand. (Su & Chang 2018, 95.). Overall, it is recommended that Gina Tricot schedules for a visual content posting plan that serves the right target audience which concerns elements such as buyer persona, time of post or suitable social tools.

5.1.2 Responsiveness to Current Visual Content in Use

Official content released by brands plays a significant role in capturing engagement on Instagram. Therefore, nothing beats out original, high-quality and thoughtfully composed commercial content. While the stock images or videos provide consumers with physical characteristics and details of the product, models help brands put up customer experience as well as encourage consumption, as their attractiveness is connected with the brands they represent (Park, Ciampaglia & Ferrara 2016, 64). The preference for model and influencers in visual marketing content interprets consumers' demand for a humanization and personal relevance in commercial production.

While staying true to the origin and initiative for producing visual content is sensible, adopting new trends and keeping content up-to-date will do companies more good than harm, owing to the possibility that they may discover new consumer perspectives and stay relevant to the target demographic over an extended period of time (ValueWalk 23 February 2018). New content creations such as animated gifs gaining anticipation from the findings can be explained by the constant desire for freshness and innovation of young users on Instagram. Also, it is recommended to include brief textual messages and separate all the written content in a distinguishing description for consumers to skim through the visual content while the script in text is prepared for them to read once the preliminary reaction emerges (ValueWalk 23 February 2018).

Despite the argument stated by Kim & al. (2018, 304) that customers' involvement in product development (via suggestions and feedbacks) generates strong bonds with fast-fashion brands through emotional connection and satisfaction that affect customer engagement, there is no strong evidence collected from the findings backing this indication. Shoppers have shown minor interest in submitting their personally created content to the brand and been also reluctant to search for customer support and feedback via social media. It is concluded that some visual content types can be more captivating than others; hence, Gina Tricot should measure the differences in visual content application and get customers involved in the value creation process to create consumer-centric content.

5.1.3 Influencing Factors of Customer Loyalty

Su & Chang (2016, 94) point out that brand loyalty is divided into behavioral (or purchase) loyalty which refers to repeated acquisition of the brand, and attitudinal loyalty which conveys the psychological commitment a buyer makes in the purchase act, including the intentions to buy as well as to recommend without taking the actual repeated purchase behavior into consideration. While behavioral loyalty is directly associated with reveal acquisition and measured by purchasing history (Kindblom 2018, 13), it is rather more complex to detect attitudinal loyalty. With a the magic “share” button on Instagram, companies nowadays are able to keep track of this process and encourage consumers to give recommendations via an online community where can be monitored.

A customer loyalty statistic report provides information that it is likely for 47 percent of customers to stop engaging with a company after a moment of disappointment towards the brand (Fontanella 12 March 2019). As the findings continue to show the significance of professional visual creations in consumers’ demand, managing their expectation for visual content will guarantee positive customer experience and satisfaction that impact their loyalty to the brand. In sum, Gina Tricot may assess the consumers’ choice from the study for the most preferred content types, and also surprise customers with new ideas and alternatives of content to exceed their expectations.

5.2 Reliability and Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which a measurement estimates what it intents to measure. Reliability, however, implies to the degree to which the outcomes acquired by a measurement and procedure can be replicated. Though reliability crucially contributes to the validity of a questionnaire, there occurs no adequate condition for the validity of a questionnaire. (Wong, Ong & Kuek 2012, 214.)

By Adopting and adapting questions, there is a likelihood that the terms and phrases used in the questions are familiar and understandable for the audience which will improve the validity of the survey. (Wong, Ong & Kuek 2012, 212). In order to avoid misleading questions, the questions were constructed as close-ended questions. Instead of using leading questions, the questions presented in the survey were mostly associated with factors influencing respondents’ selections which reflected not their view of the processes themselves but with the results.

The author had reviewed a variety of established surveys which investigated relevant research problem to this study in order to get ideas and foundations to generate a

dependable questionnaire. Previous studies also advise to either adopt or adapt questions from other questionnaires that would allow reliability to be assessed but warn that each question should be examined carefully before use as some questions are poorly worded (Wong, Ong & Kuek 2012, 212). The survey was also pre-tested to identify shortages with the drafted questions as well as the data collection instrument so as to look for possible solutions. After collecting pretest responses and earning suggestions for improvement from the participants, the author had made necessary adjustments to improve the final survey.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

In this study, only the sample that matched a particular target consumer group was addressed on purpose; thus an expansion in survey sample may be assessed to further proceed the results collected. The larger quantity of responses also helps the researcher analyze the research problem in a more comprehensive manner. Moreover, the findings presented mostly correlate with the benefit and focus of fast fashion. Researchers can apply these findings and make supplementary adaptions to generate more suitable marketing strategies for other industries. As this research approaches several visual content types on Instagram, future studies can also assess other visual elements and features of social media to study their impacts on the potential of consumer brand loyalty.

5.4 Personal Learning Process

Writing the thesis has been an inspiring and challenging process for the author. The main objective was to gain academic knowledge that could positively impact the personal development in professional career. Not only was the author able to carry out a comprehensive research from start to finish, she also had the chance to work and communicate with a renowned apparel company. The thesis demonstrated an outcome of the author's consistent research, meticulous observation, committed analysis as well as invaluable support from the internal commissioning organization. The author also gained many skills along the writing process which included planning, communication, and critical thinking. Besides in-depth knowledge and practical skills earned, there were several difficulties attached. Collecting the data was considered the most challenging steps as efforts were required in interdependent processes of external communication and internal evaluation. Overall,

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey

Visual Content Marketing and Customer Loyalty in Fast Fashion

Dear participants, this survey examines the relationship between visual content in social media marketing and customer loyalty in fast fashion consumption. It takes you maximum 10 minutes to complete. Your response is highly appreciated!

1. What Is Your Age Group? *

- Under 16
- 16 – 19
- 20 – 29
- 30 – 40
- Above 40

2. What Is Your Gender? *

- Female
- Male
- Prefer Not to Answer

3. How Likely Are You Going to Follow a Fast Fashion Brand on Instagram Having Purchased From Them More Than Twice?

Always Usually Sometimes Rarely Hardly Never

4. What Are the Primary Purposes for Following the Fast Fashion Brand on Instagram? (Select One Or More)

- Exclusive Deals
- New Product Updates
- Fashion Tips & Style Guides
- Customer Service & Feedback
- Showing Support to the Brand

5. What Type of Instagram Content Created by the Brand Do You Find Most Engaging? (Select One Or More)

- Professional Photography (e.g., Editorials)

- Informal Visuals (e.g., Behind-The-Scenes)
- User Generated Content
- Influencers
- Quotes & Inspirations
- Stories & Livestreams

6. On a Scale Of 1 To 5, Which of the Following Content Brings You the Most Value ? (5 is the highest point)

	1	2	3	4	5
Model Photography					
Product Features					
Stories & Livestreams					
Behind The Scenes					
Quotes & Inspirations					
Influencers					
User Generated Content					

7. To What Extent Do You Agree with The Following Statement: "I Prefer Visual to Textual Content on a Fast Fashion Brand's Instagram"

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

8. If You Were Going to Share an Instagram Photo or Video, What Would Motivate You to Do It? (Select One or More)

- To Stay Connected to Others
- To Bring Valuable Information to Others
- To Share My Interest and Concern
- To Show Support to the Brand
- To Get a Coupon or Discount

9. Have You Ever Followed a Fast Fashion Brand then Unfollowed, and What Were the Possible Reasons? (Select One or More)

- Too Frequent or Too Distant Posts
- Poor Photo/Video Quality
- Irrelevant Content to Actual Products
- Over-commercialized Content
- Content Already Available on other Channels

10. Which Visual Content Would You Like to See More on a Fast Fashion Brands' Instagram? (Select One or More)

- Model Photography
- Product Features
- Quote & Inspirations
- Influencers
- User Generated Content
- Virtual/Augmented Reality
- Gifs & Memes
- Stories & Livestreams
- Others, please specify.

Thank you for your kind cooperation!