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Students' Preferences in Visual Consumption on Instagram as the Basis for the University PR-strategy

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Abstract. In the mediatized society, traditional institutions, specifically high school, are included into economic and communicational competition. They face the necessity to communicate with their publicities by new unfamiliar means, like Instagram, and sometimes fail this challenge because of poor strategy preparation. The present study addresses the issue of incongruity between the visual communication of a higher education organization (Karazin Kharkiv National University as the case) and its young audience's preferences in visual consumption. To gain a deeper understanding of the real and potential students' preferences, an online survey was conducted. Data analysis included distributions, means, factor and cluster analysis. As a result, we identified the favorite patterns of photos and their perception, segmented the audience on Instagram by practices of picture evaluation. All this allowed proposing the strategical recommendations for the University PR-strategy, which has already shown its effectiveness for Karazin University and is potentially implementable for any educational institution facing the same challenges.

Keywords. Young Ukrainian Instagram Users, Sociology of Communication, Public Relations of University, Mediatization

1. Introduction

Contemporary culture is often described as visual due to the excessive usage of visual imagery, which recently began to dominate the realm of social communication. This visual means supremacy came after the social reality mediatization, understood as the "increasing temporal, spatial and social spread of mediated communications; over time we have become more and more used to communicating across distance via media in an increasing range of

contexts. But mediatization also refers to qualitative dimensions, that is, to the social and cultural differences that mediated communications make at higher levels of organizational complexity” (Couldry 2017, p. 49). As digital communication technologies spread our lives, the everyday informational space became packed with the visual imagery supplied by them, making its addressees both more used and more sensitive to it. These processes conjunction led to the Instagram social network popularity surge.

Instagram embodies almost every contemporary trend in communications: it’s fast, user-friendly, aggregates the visual and the textual, allows the private and public modes, etc. That is why today Instagram is not merely a network for photos sharing, but the means for consumers and brands to communicate. The favorites change in verbal vs visual communication race poses a challenge for the modern PR-subjects.

A century ago, the main means for PR were facts described in the texts and organized into a press release, a journalistic article or an essay, today it is always a combination of visuals and media releases. For example, to promote their brands, modern universities are forced to shift the emphasis in their messages from classic rhetorical instruments to vivid visuals (not only static but also video) and emotional storytelling. However, for modern public relations filling the information resources with the visual content does not narrow to the bare replacement of all text messages with pictures and videos. Brand's communication has to be held in line with the style expectations of the content consumers, as public relations is “a decision-making management practice tasked with building relationships and interests between organizations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods” (IPRA 2020).

2. Urgency & novelty

Ukrainian universities nowadays tend to present their programs, scholars, conferences, innovations, publications and other useful collections. This conservative policy is understandable since it follows the long academic tradition, but it does not always fit the visual style preferred by its main target audience – the current and potential students, whereas the university’s visual branding strategy should take into account the style preferences of particular social network users. In recent years, the most popular social network amongst Ukrainian students was Instagram. According to the PlusOne Communication Group’s report on September 2019, 99% of Ukrainians aged 18-24 have the profile in this social network (PlusOne 2019). Social networks also have a significant level of audience trust as the source of information. Thus, according to a survey conducted by the Sociological Group "Rating" in November-December 2017, more than a third of Ukrainians trust social networks (37 %) (Ischenko 2018). The social networks member’ preferences research is of practical importance for the organization’s communicative strategy and tactics development, especially in such complex field as visual representation.

Despite the current high prevalence of social networks, there are quite a few sociological researches in Ukraine that would help to understand the user, to explore his/her preferences and behavior strategies, so the visual forms that can evoke the trust and sympathy on Instagram users remain uncovered. The higher education institutions’ administrative and press departments are facing the necessity to answer, how can the Instagram mechanism and user habits affect PR communication, and how can one plan the measurable effect on a network that distributes predominantly visual content? In this paper, we present the research that was conducted to reveal the student’s audience preferences in visual stylistic and thematic of the Instagram content with the practical purpose to develop strategic recommendations for higher education institutions’ communication by this social media.

In Ukraine, valid Instagram audience studies within the PR-strategy perspective are not mainstream among neither PR-practitioners nor social researchers. Current studies employ majorly theoretical analysis of Instagram as the media and social phenomena, giving new opportunities for business (Sadilo 2020) and marketing instruments including those for an educational institution promotion (Zaskalna & Sabadash 2019, Pavlenko 2019). Most empirical studies deal with tasks of particular businesses (Zavhorodnia & Pisarenko 2018), specific features of Instagram users (Bolotova 2020, Iurchenko 2020), and social network usage in recent political campaigns (Shvets 2019). Any of these does not regard the specific visual content rating, though it definitely is the daily routine of any Instagram user, and the traditional quantitative methodology isn't also used much for such studies.

3. Research goal and tasks

Regarding the youth as the target audience for University content on Instagram, we have to take into account that its views are been shaped not only by the network visual content consumption but also by the wider contexts of their social position. The purpose of our study is to propose scientifically grounded recommendations for the University PR-strategy on the visual content management on Instagram to communicate with its target audience in the context of mediatization. To do this, we have to: 1) analyze the current state of research of youth on Instagram; 2) conduct the empirical part of research using the quantitative methodology (an online survey); 3) reveal the young audience's preferences in visual content creation and consumption, grounding on the survey results analysis; 4) propose the recommendations for V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University to create and post Instagram content, basing on survey results, with regard to the audience's preferences, though still in frames of its communication strategy.

4. Literature review

As the visual means of social communication, Instagram is a part of anthropological trend in which the sight has achieved predominance among perception channels. Like for other higher animals, for human seeing became the leading way of the direct cognition of the physical world, but it had also played a major role in how our social world has been being shaped and constructed. Based on McLuhan's and Luhmann's approaches to social communication, one may say the very character of iconic/imaginative and textual communication prescripts itself as immanent to the meaning, whether in terms of the system's unity provision and empowerment, or the individual experiences and preferences formation.

Approaching the seeing from the broader research perspective, including anthropology, philosophy, art critics and history, gives an opportunity to state that contemporary human's sight isn't that much natural as it is social. We tend to see others and ourselves in the context of values and beliefs backed by the society's prevailing *views* on the topic in certain epoch. For instance, when studying the optical systems of the classic arts, L. Limanskaia (2008, p. 182) states that «the linear perspective and ways of the space construction and organization associated with it shaped the “urbanistic” psychotype». In the study on the late-medieval cathedral's interior constitution, R. Recht also postulates the correspondence between the vertical visual structure of Gothic architecture and the idea of the God's order, eternal and unchanging (Recht 2014). From Aristotle to S. Hall (1985), visual phenomena, namely the arts, have been theorized as closely connected to its social background and functionality.

From the late XIXth century onwards, the area of the visual widens due to the photography and cinema invention and spreading. Technology invades the imagery creation process, causing some thinkers to claim the highbrow (“genuine”) culture decline because of artificial copying (W. Benjamin) and mass production (J. Ruskin). Being given to average

people instead of bohemia, the camera comes to embed the life in detail that is to become a decent object for ethnographical, cultural, and emerging visual studies afterwards, in the late XX century. Photos begin to be analyzed as representatives of being (A. Shutz, E. Gofman), the means of communication (R. Barthes), the sociological data (P. Shtompka). However relatively new it may seem in the context of visibility itself, photography has also had its history: being born and frequently used as the medium of memory storage, it was redefined by the high speed of communication in the digital space of today. S. Lishaev (2012) names the social functions of the photo concerning its memory imprinting ability: (1) fixative (something was somewhere), (2) expressive (the point of view in all meanings), (3) commemorative (the personal memory construction as opposed to previously dominant collective memory-as-history).

As of today, photography exists mainly in the form of the digital communication artifact, the value of which is rather personal and consists of the social trajectory articulation, the narrative illustration, and the image construction. The various forms of visual communication and particularly photo in the digital space context are studied majorly in the symbolic interactionism perspective based on the G.H. Mead classical approach. However, the person rarely has such difficulties with self-determination that question her/his identity and belonging while posting to Instagram, so if the visual narrative appears at all, it appears consistent enough. When an organization tries to build a conversation with its publicity, it has to make it personal to succeed (Herkeens 2017). Consequently, an organization takes the role of a collective subject, who carries out the visual dialog with everyone individually, trying to construct its image and to hold a high reputation (Grunig & Grunig 2008). On its turn, the audience possesses the “personalistic” image of an organization, and (probably) uses the comparable criteria for its messages assessment. Concerning Instagram as the most developed photo social network service, one can suggest the Instagram strategy of the brand communication immensely contributes to its overall perception and the resulting image, especially among younger segments of the target audience. The interest and positive impression from visual messages contribute to the trust-building, which is often seen as the aimed result of PR. As trust is regarded as the necessary condition of the normal society functioning (Davydenko & Romashkin 2011), it also works as a competitive advantage for the educational institution, influencing the potential students’ and their parents’ choice (Zaskalna 2019).

As the specific means of social communication, Instagram has formed its own set of rules and stereotypes of photos creation and consumption, mediated by its assessment. The media culture expert prof. Lev Manovich (2017) states the existence of the photographic language, in which “certain subjects are more likely to go along with certain compositions, certain lighting or other particular choices on different visual dimensions. In the case of professional visual languages, these connections exist as explicit techniques or rules that are taken for granted, such as three-point lighting for studio photo portraits. In the case of vernacular photography, such connections are implied and common-sense (they can be thought of in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus)” (Manovich 2017, p. 18). These unspoken rules and habits are incorporated on the individual level and at the same time shape the communicational environment where the educational brands have to make their strive for attention and correct perception.

That is why the analysis of Instagram audience’s preferences and photos assessment criteria is crucial for the educational brand’s visual PR-strategy building. Though it is much easier to be made abiding by the qualitative methodology, we seek the more representational view that could be given by the quantitative perspective only. Recent quantitative studies of photos, using Instagram as a database, were undertaken by Manovich and his colleagues from the Cultural Analytics Lab. In the “Selfiecity” project they analyzed Instagram selfies from six

megapolises around the globe, making it possible to characterize each city by its citizens' emotional, mimic, and social parameters (Manovich et al. 2014). Despite the inclusion of some photos' stylistic and aesthetic parameters analysis into this study and its followers, the general perception of certain photos, correlating with the practices used in the visual content creation, wasn't in the focus.

5. Data & methodology

The empirical basis of the research is a survey of young Ukrainian Instagram users (18-35) at the end of 2017-beginning of 2018. It was carried out within a framework of the master's work at the Department of Applied Sociology and Social Communications of Karazin University (Master's Degree applicant – Darina Chumachenko, Scientific Advisor – Galina Kravchenkova, scientific consultants – Alina Kalashnikova, Serhiy Shkrebet). Grounding on the comparison of the data about the youth population in 2017 and the selected sample, the statistical error of the study results was estimated at 4.09%.

The research questionnaire in Google Forms (Questionnaire 2017) was tested on a sample of students ($n = 37$) and, after edits, was distributed through targeted advertising and Facebook themed groups to local communities in the Eastern, Western, Southern, Central Ukraine, and Kyiv. Dissemination with these means allowed us to present Ukraine rather complete geographically, which is reasserted by the different types of settlements among the study participants. Participation was encouraged by a competition for the valuable prize, which is a common practice among Instagram users. The sample was spontaneous, implemented by the snowball method using the statistics on the network structure.

According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (Official report 2018), the proportion of men and women in 2017 was 46% and 54% respectively, but on Instagram in 2017 it differed. According to the data, kindly shared with us by Kantar Ukraine (Inner data 2017), by fall of 2017 there was 42% of men and 58% of women using Instagram on their Android mobile devices. According to the NapoleonCat data, there were 38% of men and 62% of women users in Ukraine (Kowalzyk 2017). We went on with the last source, as it is closer to the data of the Higher Education System of Ukraine Reformation Monitoring'2017 (Zvit 2017), where the proportion of women among students was reported as high as 75.6%. By age, in 2017 the proportions of 18-24 and 25-35 years old users on Instagram were equal, so we weighted the sample by gender and age of users. After the procedures of mandatory control and the sample repair (removal of twice filled questionnaires), 571 respondents were selected to the final sample ($n = 571$).


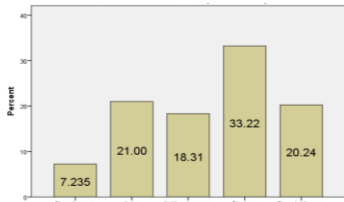

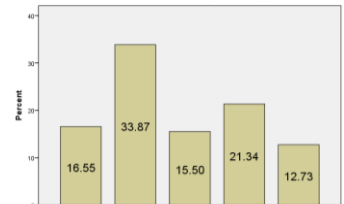

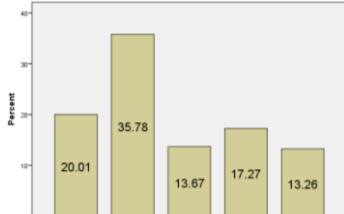

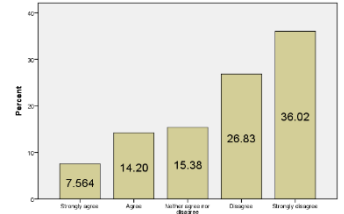

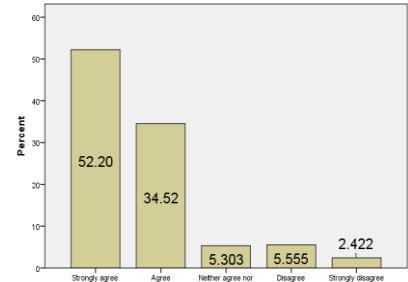
6. Key findings

The purpose of the empirical study was to analyze the practices of the visual content on Instagram creation and consumption. It demanded to examine the frequency and duration of visits to the network, the survey participants' socio-demographic characteristics, thematic and stylistic preferences, the features of visual content for publication creation/procession, and the typical images that users share. In the present analysis, we will focus on revealed visual strategies of Instagram users representations, their assessment criteria and their application for Karazin University brand's communication strategy development.

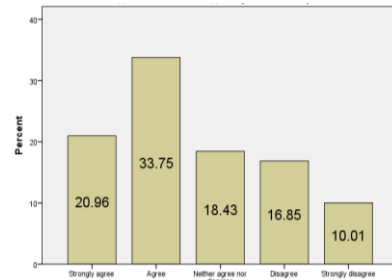
To build the research model, there were selected the typical photos, which, according to experts in the promotion on Instagram, form the basis of the application users' visual representation. Photos for the questionnaire sample were taken abiding by the results of the illustrator Joanna Zhou's observation of the most frequent Instagram photo types (Zhou 2013). They were also expanded by the comments of SMM experts who participated in the questionnaire piloting. The question was formulated in the frame of the photo perception logic:

"Do you like similar photos on Instagram?", and was measured on a Likert scale: 1. Yes. 2. Rather yes. 3. It is difficult to answer. 4. Rather no. 5. No. The following descriptive statistics show the distribution of respondents' answers (Table 1).

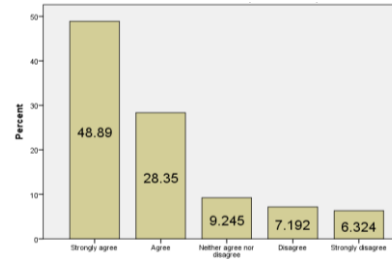
Table 1. The distribution of the answers to the question "Do you like similar photos on Instagram?" measured by the Likert's scale

Name of Photo	Photo	The distribution
25. Office workplace		
26. Friends at the party		
27. Food		
28. Selfie of a girl with new hairstyle		
29. Interior		

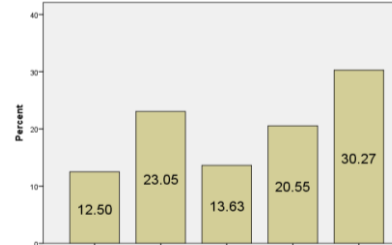
30. Friends at the gym



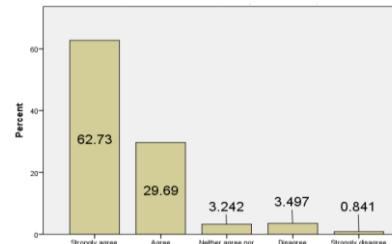
31. Bunny



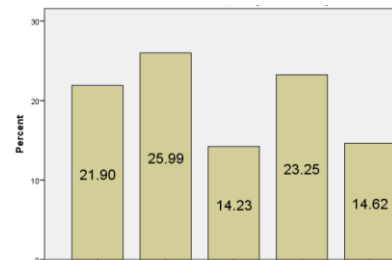
32. Manicure



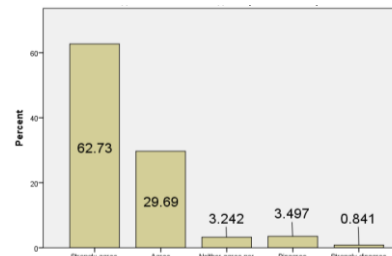
33. A girl with an expensive rose bouquet



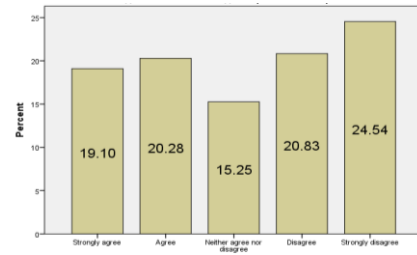
34. Travelling girl (the "Follow me" meme)



35. Architecture/ travelling



36. Beautifully arranged things/bag contents



Ranking the features by averages gives us the general idea; photos of what kind are popular across the dataset (Table 2). This ranking could be obtained by means of the photos' popularity by hashtags estimation using the Instagram rating algorithms. However, Instagram does not provide the ability to dislike a photo, whereas our research tool does. The distribution presented in Table 2 should be considered as a baseline for comparison with indicators further obtained from the factor analysis.

Table 2. Photos ranking by mean statistics
(1 = sympathy, 5 = antipathy)

Photo topic	Mean
35. Architecture/travelling	1,4837
29. Interior	1,7180
31. Bunny	1,7946
30. Friends at the gym	2,6752
27. Food	2,6799
34. Travelling girl (the "Follow me" meme)	2,7050
36. Beautifully arranged things/bag contents	2,7227
26. Friends at the party	2,7478
32. Manicure	2,8556
33. Girl with the expensive rose bouquet	3,0988
25. Office workplace	3,3077
28. Selfie of a girl with new hairstyle	3,8184

Using factor analysis (the major components method, Varimax rotation), three factors were identified to mediate the present preferences. KMO and Bartlett's tests have shown that data are appropriate for factor analysis and interpreted (KMO = 71,8%, Bartlett's Test's Significance Level = 0,01). The total variance of the three significant factors equals 48,084.

The correlation of the factors with the variables is shown in Table 3. Extraction Method: Major Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.



Table 3. Components distribution by variables' weight

Rotated Component Matrix ^a	1 Compo nent	2 Compo nent	3 Component
33. Girl with the expensive rose bouquet	0,739		
28. Selfie of a girl with new hairstyle	0,705		
30. Friends at the gym	0,668		
36. Beautifully arranged things/bag contents		0,745	
25. Office workplace		0,703	
27. Food		0,642	
35. Architecture/travelling			0,778
29. Interior			0,665
31. Bunny			0,647

The first factor was influenced by the photos of people getting expensive gifts, playing sports, and taking care of their appearance. The decisive criterion for this factor (with the value 0.739 in the Rotated Component Matrix) was a photo of a girl with an expensive rose bouquet. The factor demonstrates that social network users tend to pay particular attention to pictures showing successful people and on top of that the emotional moments of their life related to the socially valued activity. We can call it "**the story of achievement**". The factor included the variables with the different photo average ratings, but all these photos were the most powerful trigger for the study participants. All three photos combine the presence of a person with a certain story behind it, whether we like it, as it is a result of previous interaction with others (the photo of friends at a party or a flower gift), or not (the selfie photo with the new hairstyle). It is also worth mention that all these photos include girls posing specifically for the photo. Pictures of the girl's back in "Follow me" meme or the larger group of people at the party weren't included. Thus, the visual message for a story of achievement must have a clear heroine or a hero to create a meaningful message core.

The second factor contains photos of everyday things that have a certain composition. The criterion with the most weight for this factor (the value in the Rotated Component Matrix is 0.745) was a photo of the girl's handbag or cosmetic bag contents. The other Factor 2 variables represent the classical Instagram photos of food and the office workplace. These photos relate to objects commonly met in the situations of an average life, though with a touch of visual editing. They are not rearranged completely for the picture and the result doesn't call for much emotional connection from the viewer, so let's call this factor "**everyday experience**".

The third factor aggregates photos that convey a certain beautiful image with a positive story about a trip, a place, or a cute animal. Here the emotions emerge, too, but they do not include other people anymore. It is the photographer we are invited to identify ourselves with, not the social interaction situation, as in the first factor. It seems to reveal the egoistic nature of the individual emotions generated by aesthetic visual content consumption. The most powerful correlation with this factor (the value in the Rotated Component Matrix equals 0.778) has the architectural ensemble photo. Pictures of this kind are published most often by people during the trip or to accompany the mood for demonstrating wide horizons of the thought. Returning to the distribution of average by figurative features 25-36, it should be noted that the factor 3 included the photos that are most popular among the respondents, so this factor can be called "**aesthetic feeling**".

Our factors included photographs that represent the socio-emotional aspect of a successful life (gifts, sports, and care of their appearance), its everyday context, and pure individual emotional aesthetics. The one that shaped the answers of the most users is the personal achievement story, immanently including Others' participation, whether in form of the activity, as in Girl with the bouquet, or the proposed assessment, as in Selfie of a girl with the new hairstyle. The absence of a heroine or a hero for a viewer to identify with, though, can be compensated by the objects' or the environment's aesthetics.

To distinguish groups with common features, we performed the K-means cluster analysis on questions 25-36, the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The cluster analysis results by variables 25-36

Cluster	Unweighted	Weighted
1	158	154,794 = 155
2	155	174,345 = 174
3	258	241,874 = 242
Valid	571	571,013 = 571
Missing	0,000	0,013

Instagram users were divided into 3 groups of visual content consumers, which are presented in Table 5. Their evaluation of the photos is presented by the mean statistics of Likert scale, where responses covered the continuum from 1 (like) to 5 (dislike).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the clusters obtained by 25-36 variables

Photo topic	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
25. Office workplace	3,66	3,80	2,90
26. Friends at the party	2,02	3,64	2,70
27. Food	3,04	3,41	1,92
28. Selfie of a girl with the new hairstyle	3,69	4,44	3,16
29. Interior	1,98	1,77	1,51
30. Friends at the gym	2,25	3,44	2,25
31. Bunny	1,84	2,53	1,57
32. Manicure	3,42	4,30	2,83
33. A girl with the expensive bouquet	2,51	4,72	2,86
34. Travelling girl (the "Follow me" meme)	3,43	3,72	1,80
35. Architecture/travelling	1,60	1,58	1,38
36. Beautifully arranged things/bag contents	3,87	3,94	2,04
The overall mean for cluster	2,77	3,44	2,24

Cluster 1 represents mostly undecided consumers, who rather do not like the presented photo. Cluster 2 representatives do not approve of the vast majority of photos. Cluster 3 is represented by the users who tend to approve most of the photos used in the study.

The most beloved photos across all clusters are those with Architecture, Bunny and the Interior. The first cluster included the respondents who liked pictures of Friends at the party and the gym, being rather neutral to the Food and the Girl with the rose bouquet, and rather do not liking the Bag content, Selfie with a new hairstyle and an Office workplace.

Cluster 2 members can be described more as haters, since their rating on most photos overpasses three. The most negative evaluation, though, they demonstrate of the Girls with the bouquet and the new hairstyle, and the Manicure. These people do not like others' show-offs, so we can hypothesize here a certain kind of jealousy. Cluster 2 likes only the calming pictures of interior and architecture/traveling. When it comes to the sex structure, the second cluster includes significantly more fraction of men (47,1 %) than the third (31,8 %). Means and deviation analysis in Table 6 shows that men and women from the second cluster strikingly differ in their opinions on the Bag contents (men are more sure to strongly dislike it), Manicure (same), and Bunny (men are closer to be indifferent about it, though with higher dispersion of opinions). This corresponds with (and probably stems from) the cultural stereotypes of mainstream gender roles, expressed visually.

Table 6. Cluster 2 sex differences in opinions
(mean by sex, 0,05-significant only)

Photo topic	Male	Female	Mean difference
36. Bag contents	4,53	3,41	1,12
32. Manicure	4,66	3,99	0,67
31. Bunny	2,83	2,27	0,56
34. Follow me meme	3,97	3,50	0,47
28. Selfie of a girl with the new hairstyle	4,20	4,66	-0,46
30. Friends at the gym	3,21	3,64	-0,43
27. Food	3,60	3,25	0,35
29. Interior	1,95	1,61	0,34
33. Girl with expensive bouquet	4,83	4,62	0,21
35. Architecture	1,62	1,54	0,08

The occupational structure is presented in Table 7. Cluster 1 contains fewer people with the distant job, then the rest (10,9% only). There also are much less working students (12,3%), then in the third cluster (18,3% vs 51%) and more unemployed people, then in the second (40,8% vs 12,2%), so the third cluster also contains more people with unfinished higher education (56,1% of them), then the rest.

Table 7. Crosstab by clusters and main activity

Cluster	Study	Job	Combining work and job	Distant job	Temporarily unemployed	In all clusters
1	28,6%	31,2%	18,3%	10,9%	40,8%	27,0%
2	22,1%	32,6%	30,8%	45,3%	12,2%	30,5%
3	49,4%	36,2%	51,0%	43,8%	46,9%	42,5%

Geographically, cluster 1 includes almost half of the informants from South (48%) and less from North than others (20,7%), whereas cluster 2 is significantly more Northern (33,6%) and Eastern (44,2%). Cluster 3 has an equally high amount from North (45,6%), but also includes 40,8% of Southerners. On more than a half it consists of people from Kiivska and Kharkivska oblast. 15,1% live in oblast centers and 81,4% live in cities and towns that are not oblast centers.

The age profile by cluster (we used two-dimensional distributions and z-criterion) allows to characterize the 3rd cluster as the youngest one since more than half of its members are 18-24, with significantly less amount of 31-34, whereas in the 1st cluster includes the opposite. It means the third cluster is the closest to our target group, so we need to analyze it in more details.

The third cluster consists of people visiting Instagram every day, who tend to look through the feed or just surf interesting profiles. They prefer to observe, not to publish the content, but when they do, it is a good-looking photo rather than video or text. More than 77% of them edit their photos constantly or from time to time (so they do not regard edited photos as fake or unaesthetic). When they do, they mainly edit color scale (54,7%), light flaws (25,6%) and general composition (15,9%), so we may conclude these features are crucial for their aesthetic view. By data from Table 5, the top-rated images for Cluster 3 are Architecture/Travelling, Interior, Bunny, Follow me and Food. Cluster members, in general, evaluate suggested photos positively or neutrally. Unlike other clusters, they rather like the Food image, the "Follow me" girl, and the Bag content. Even the Girl with the new hairstyle (the most hated photo across the dataset) is at average evaluated in the third cluster just slightly worse than neutral (3,16). We may suggest the nucleus of our audience holds the calm and positive attitude to the content they see and, possibly, they may also prefer the content transmitting such mood.

Speaking of the visual content assessments, we analyzed the opinions of the members of our clusters on the target impressions, which: (a) Instagram users want to create by their visual content; (b) they personally want to create by their visual content; (c) and the imagined young girl wants to create by photoset (fabricated from typical Instagram photos). As the alternatives were measured nominal and differed in the quantity for each question, we used Kramer's V on the distributions of opinions. It showed a moderate connection between (b) and (c) for clusters 1 and 2 and between (a) and (c) for clusters 2 and 3. This may mean that members of clusters 2 and 3 tend to separate themselves from the social practices of showing off, therefore, they may fall for more sincere, that is, more emotional content.

7. Results implementation

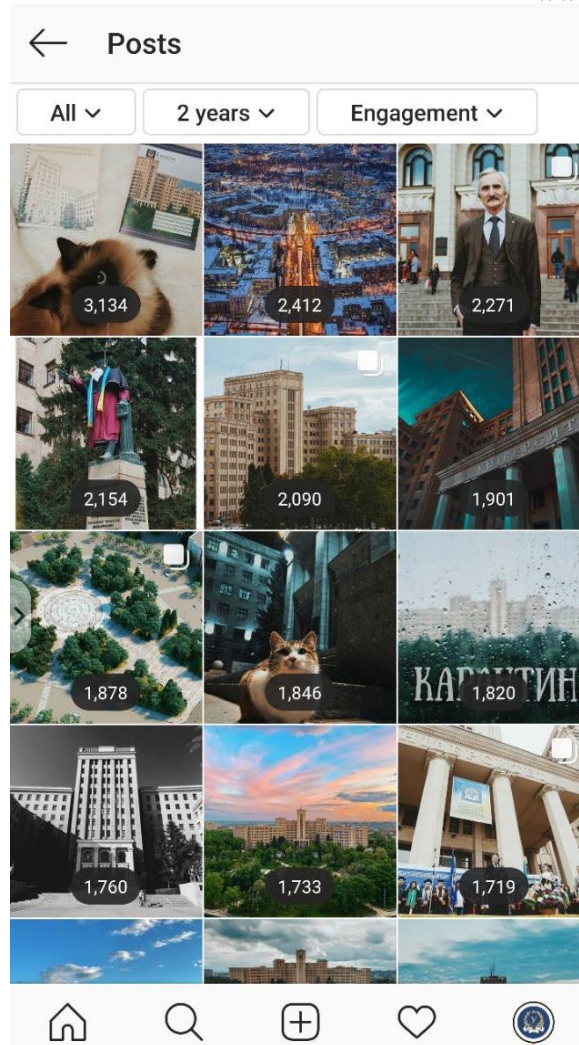
The gender and age structure of the subscribers of the Karazin University official account on Instagram, @karazinuniver, coincides with the gender and age structure of the sample model. That is why we implemented the obtained sociological insights into the strategy

of PR-communications of Karazin University via Instagram. Halyna Kravchenkova, co-author and research director of this project, combines the positions of associate professor and the editor at the Public Relations Center of Karazin University. She used the obtained data to adapt the University's communication strategy to the Ukrainian Instagram users' needs. During the period after the survey and the process of implementation of the received proposals (since January 2018), the page received 60% organic (without advertising) growth of subscribers. This part highlights some strategic implementations.

The visual representation of Karazin University on Instagram normally based on photos of the main building from different angles and the images from significant events, featuring Academic Council members and the University administration. With such visual content, the page was quite slow in reach and finding new subscribers. However, during the 2018-2020, the number of followers has grown from 3.8 thousand to 14.9 thousand (as of August 11, 2020), and continues to grow. An important component in this process was the change in the strategy of visual representation.

This change included the following key points:

- Storytelling with an accent on emotions and achievement, featuring University students and staff, including the elements of a beautiful life, travelling, entertainment, and success. The mood of account has to remain positive and cheerful.
- University architecture presentation in the aesthetically pleasant manner – as part of the naturally beautiful landscape or with strong editing.
- The cute animals and memes engagement into the content (with regard to University resources and brand values, we weren't able to use interior and food pictures or lifestyle photos like Friends in the gym from our research).
- Overall visual editing, though always start with a real photo: color and light filters usage, diagonal composition lines, non-conservative shot cropping etc.
- Constant monitoring of likes, coverage, reach and other measures, creating the content in consistency with trends in visual fashion, accenting on the stylish photos with a creative connotation.
- Interactivity – answering to comments and marking people on photos.



Picture 1. Photos from the @karazinuniver account, which have brought the most involvement over the last two years (as of August 11, 2020).

The top three photos over two years of our new visual content strategy implementation included a cat, a landscape with interestingly edited light and color, and a person with reference to the story of life achievement –all corresponding the latent factors of photos evaluation. Total number of visits and reach increased, too, to present day becoming almost equal the whole number of Karazin University students. To see if this is just the tendency, we tried to compare the subscription statistics over other major national classical universities in other parts of Ukraine. Suggesting the possible indirect impact of the number of students, we also weighted it by their quantity. This is measure from scratch; however, we may postulate an effectiveness of our findings implementation to the educational brand promotion strategy for the young audiences on Instagram.

Table 8. Number of subscribers on the national universities accounts with relation to the quantity of their students

University	Subscribers in Instagram account (as of 2020, August 11)	Students (data from the Osvita.ua)	Ratio
V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University	14 967	15 000	99,8%
T. Shevchenko Kyiv National University	3 916	28 000	14,0%
I. Franko Lviv National University	6 501	21 072	30,9%
I.I. Mechnikov Odesa National University	4 723	10 680	44,2%

8. Discussion & conclusions

The visual content one consumes shapes the taste for further perception. Like in any other sphere of communication, with visuals it is crucial to be aware of practices the brand audience participates in, their content preferences and aesthetic views. This research tried to bring some insights of this kind about Ukrainian youth's preferences in consumption of visual content on Instagram.

The most favored pictures were those related to the so-called classical aesthetics – architecture, nature, an interior harmonized in color, and cute animal. These same generally popular visuals are essentially evaluated as pleasant by anyone, as Schopenhauer stated. They form the basis, which to count any later and more sophisticated visual aesthetics from, – for instance, contemporary fine arts or artistic photography. This is the evidence that the essence of visual aesthetics remain relatively stable even after the shift from offline drawings and pictures to online tools like Instagram. Meanwhile, the filters enabling simple pictures editing on Instagram probably made some impact on the perception of photo as beautiful by its color and light balance, though this issue needs special investigation.

The photos assessment analysis allowed us to identify three latent factors, defining the distribution, which were called “story of achievement”, “everyday experience” and “aesthetic feeling”. It can be suggested that they denote certain causes evoking emotions, positive or negative depending on whether person identifies him/herself with the mindset related to the situation from photo.

Limitations. The unique part of our research was the usage of typical Instagram photos sample to make our informants express their opinion on it. Though it provided an interesting and novel material, the visual character of question material in the survey can be regarded as limitation of research, especially in terms of its repeatability with regard to the networks and its content permanent growth. Anyway, communication in social networks is necessary for any educational brand to succeed, so we hope this research will come at hand for education and business working with youth and will encourage more explorations of visual communication on social networks.

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