A CRITICAL VISUAL ANALYSIS: MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY'S USE OF INSTAGRAM AS A PROMOTIONAL TOOL

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Abstract

Instagram is a predominantly mobile application that allows users to capture images in a square format, mimicking the Polaroid, which in previous decades was used to capture a moment in time. Instagram perfectly captures the zeitgeist of the era of social media and allows us to understand what types of images post-secondary institutions use to attract students. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador is the most easterly province in Canada and is home to Memorial University, the only university in the province. Given its isolation, Memorial University (MUN) has sought to take advantage of new technologies, such as Instagram, to promote its brand and attract students worldwide. This research is a visual critical analysis of the images used by Memorial University's official Instagram account @MemorialUniversity. It is argued that marketing relies heavily on visuals, and a critical visual analysis provides an interdisciplinary method for understanding images in their context. The purpose of this study is to explore how Memorial University uses its official Instagram account by specifically analyzing their use of images to promote MUN, thereby attracting students. This qualitative research relies mainly on the critical visual analysis of images, which allows for an in-depth understanding of images. This critical visual analysis is done through the thorough description of the images, Instagram posts and the comments each post received. After this, an interpretation is provided, which rounds up the analysis. The following research questions guided this study: 1) How are images used to promote Memorial University? and 2) how are the selected images helping to define Memorial University's brand? The key findings of this research are that the university uses emotional appeal to promote Memorial University, as this appeal sets out to create a connection with the viewer. Another key finding is that to create emotional appeal, the university falls back on its branding of large, open spaces, which suggests that space allows ideas to grow and blossom. The last key finding is that even though Instagram is used to connect, it does not all the time achieve its intended purpose.

General Summary

Instagram is known as being a smartphone application that allows users to post images in a square format, similar to the Polaroid, which in the past was used to capture a moment in time. Instagram perfectly captures the era of social media and allows us to understand what types of images universities and colleges are using to attract students. Newfoundland and Labrador is the most easterly province in Canada and is home to Memorial University, the only university in the province. Given its remote location, Memorial University has taken advantage of technologies such as Instagram to promote itself and entice more students. This research is a visual critical analysis of the images used by Memorial University's Instagram account @MemorialUniversity. It has been noted that marketing relies heavily on visuals, and a critical visual analysis provides a multi-view method for understanding images in their context. The purpose of this study is to explore Memorial University's (MUN) use of its official Instagram account @Memorial University, particularly how it uses images to promote MUN to attract students. This qualitative research relies mainly on the Critical Visual Analysis of images, which allows an in-depth understanding of images. A critical visual analysis is performed through the thorough description of the images, Instagram posts and the comments each post received. After this, an interpretation is provided, which rounds up the analysis. This study was guided by the following research questions: 1) How are images used to promote Memorial University? and 2) how are the images selected helping to define Memorial University's brand? This research found that the university uses emotional appeal to promote itself as it creates a connection with the viewer. It was also found that the university falls back on its branding of open spaces to create emotional appeal, which is a suggestion that ideas have space to become reality. The last finding is that although the intended use of Instagram to connect, this connection is not always established.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

"Social media platforms are the most important communication tools of the digital age" (Yücel and Yücel 2022, p. 167). Digital technologies and social media platforms have embedded themselves into our society. Many of us are or know someone who is always on their phones and scrolling through social media feeds. These social media platforms help many of us stay connected with friends, family, society, and world events, even when residing in a geographically isolated part of the world. Social media's benefits are seen by individuals, organizations, and educational institutions globally.

With the commodification of education, post-secondary educational institutions have seen increased competition for students (Brown, 2009). According to a study conducted by the Education Advisory Board (EAB) in 2019, students desire to interact with institutions through prominent social media platforms. Therefore, post-secondary institutions have had to shift their conventional advertisement and recruitment efforts to the digital world to effectively recruit top scholars. This chapter will address the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the research questions, the research design, the conceptual framework, and the finally, the significance of said research.

Motivation for the Study

I was recruited to Memorial University by a university recruiter visited my high school in Guatemala, the Central American country commonly referred to as the country of the eternal spring. Although more than a decade has passed, three prominent points from that presentation

remain fixed in my mind: the recently renovated accommodations, Memorial University is one of the cheapest, if not the cheapest, university in Canada, and that the climate of Newfoundland resembles the climate of Guatemala. There was other, more misleading information in the recruiter's presentation, such as it did not mention the two different campuses of the university in Newfoundland in 2013 and it was stated that art classes could be taken as electives. Eventually, I made the decision to study at Memorial University due to their reputation and economical tuition and because I wanted to move to Canada. Although I knew the weather would not mirror Guatemala's, I was disappointed to learn that I could not take visual art classes as electives upon arriving at the St. John's campus.

At the time I was recruited to Memorial University, Instagram was an emerging platform; therefore, the images I was looking at came from the recruiter, and they were tailored to show the finest aspects of the campus. The recruiter had effectively set certain expectations of what Newfoundland and Labrador would be like, and what Memorial University would be like. Some of those expectations unfortunately were not met when I first landed in St. John's. Understanding the way universities are utilizing Instagram to recruit students, while also drawing parallels to my recruitment story, led me to ponder how the images on Instagram are being used and what type of message they are sending.

The Background

In 2016, the government announced that Memorial University had to operate on a reduced budget with $7.05 million reductions occurring in 2016-17. This resulted in a massive disinvestment in Newfoundland and Labrador's sole university, as well as for the international

students that call Memorial University home. Further to the 2016 budget cuts in 2018, the Newfoundland and Labrador government announced that they would provide Memorial University with a budget of only $5.13 million, $9.13 million less than the previous year (Cooke, 2018). The major budget cuts have had a noticeable effect throughout the university as it struggles to adapt to operate on a lower budget and find ways to increase revenue.

At the time, the government and the university stated that the tuition freeze for in-province students would stay. However, fees for international students subsequently increased. It is noted by Cooke (2018) that Memorial University stated that although tuition increased, the total fee for international students remained the cheapest in Canada. It is important to note that although Memorial University may still be regarded as an affordable option for international students, these students still need to budget for other expenses, such as housing, food, transportation and more. In July 2021, the then-president of Memorial University, Dr. Vianne Timmons, announced the end of the twenty-two-year-old tuition freeze (CBC NL, 2023). This announcement came after the provincial government announced they would phase out the $68 million given to the university to maintain the tuition freeze (CBC NL, 2023). Both the end of the tuition freeze and the further disinvestment from the provincial government in Memorial University amplified the need for the university to find innovative ways to attract the broader student community.

The announcement of the end of the tuition freeze and further disinvestment from the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial government happened during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the highly contagious nature of the virus, the Canadian government declared that all non-essential services must close, sending the country into

isolation. With the added pressures brought by isolation, students did not react well to the announcement regarding the tuition freeze being lifted. The Newfoundland and Labrador chair of the Canadian Federation of Students said, "The tuition freeze is important in attracting many students to the province – especially international students (Roberts and Quinn, 2021). This statement signifies the importance of government investment in post-secondary education and highlights tuition cost as a driving factor of international students' attraction to the province's only university. The lifting of the tuition freeze is one of the crises the university had to deal with in recent years.

The next crisis was the two-week faculty strike during the Winter semester of 2023. In mid-January 2023, what is now known as the MUNFA (Memorial University Faculty Association) strike began; this is when MUNFA members withdrew their labour from the University. The purpose was to motivate the employer to reach a fair deal (MUNFA 2024). The strike united faculty and students in the fight to bring to the forefront the lack of wage transparency within the university's higher administration. The turmoil that was experienced during this time made the university and its employees think twice before making any rash decisions, as another public relations blow could shatter the then fragile reputation of the university.

The cultural climate in which this research takes place is a turbulent one as the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had recently been lifted and pre-pandemic day to day activities were resuming when the faculty strike happened. The strike brought to light all higher administration's mishandlings and united the faculty and student bodies as both fought for transparency and

governance. All of which negatively influenced how the university was viewed by the public and made the university's marketing department hyper-alter to what was being posted on the university's social media channels.

The Problem Statement

The island of Newfoundland is part of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the "most easterly province in Canada" (Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism, 2022) and home to Memorial University (MUN). MUN is the only university in the province given its isolated geographical location and the declining number of local students, Memorial University (MUN) has sought to take advantage of new technologies, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, to promote its brand and attract students from all over the world.

The Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore Memorial University's (MUN) use of its official Instagram account @Memorial University, particularly in its use of images to promote MUN to attract students. This account serves three purposes: it promotes the university, reminds students of deadlines, and connects with the public. Its broad reach and purposes make this account ideal for this study.

Research Questions

1) How are these images used to promote MUN?

2) How are the images selected helping to define MUN's brand?

Research Design and Context

The Design

This research is a visual critical analysis of the images used by Memorial University on their Instagram account @MemorialUniversity. Schroeder (2006) argues that marketing relies heavily on visuals, and Critical Visual Analysis provides an interdisciplinary method for understanding images in their context. The purpose of Critical Visual Analysis is not to generate universalities but to become aware of and to make explicit the visual history and the cultural context of images used for advertising.

The Context of Instagram

According to Samani and Moghaddam (2017), around 500 million images are uploaded to the internet each day, which has increased the demand for the collection of image summarization methods. Image summarization is when specific pictures of a collection are selected to represent the entire collection, removing redundancy (Scholten, 2017). With more than one billion users, Instagram is one of the most popular social media mobile applications (Frier, 2020). Universities are becoming increasingly active on social media platforms like Instagram due to their image-based characteristics (Stuart et al., 2017). Universities use Instagram to promote their brands as mobile phone photography is used with social intentions, such as creating and maintaining social relations (Stuart et al., 2017). As Frier (2020) noted: "Instagram has become a tool with which to measure cultural relevance" (p. 9).

Instagram was launched in 2010 as an iPhone exclusive mobile application. Its main intention initially was for its users to capture photographs in a square format mimicking the Polaroid, which in past decades was a popular way to capture everyday life (MacDowaall & de Souza. 2017). Instagram perfectly and prominently captures the zeitgeist of the era of social media, which is why it is essential that educational institutions use this platform to attract students. As stated by MacDowall & de Souza (2017), digital platforms such as Instagram are not just used as a space to display images but are designed to gather audiences who can experience the image through digital media. In previous Instagram research, hashtags, comments and other written media were used as a form of data, therefore neglecting the primary content, the image (MacDowall & de Souza, 2017). Thus, this research is essential in expanding the literature surrounding social media.

The *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account has been selected for this study because, as its Instagram description states, it is the official account of Memorial University. This means that the images and information shared on this account have been carefully created and curated by specialized members of the university who have a deep understanding of best practices for social media and specifically, what MUN's unified brand entails. There are more Instagram accounts associated with Memorial University, but these accounts are either run by other departments or faculties and have specific information tailored for that department. This study is only concerned with the images posted on the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account and can be found on the university's Flickr account.

Conclusion

This chapter gives insight into the origins of which this research topic stemmed from, and the cultural climate in which the research took place. It also introduces the research design within the context of Instagram by application of the Critical Visual Analysis framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

      This study examines the approaches in which Memorial University uses Instagram as a recruitment and promotional platform, first however, it is important to recognize that technology and social media has rapidly become engrained in today's society. The following literature review summarizes how this trend and other contributing factors required universities to adapt their recruitment efforts to the point where effective promotion over social media is now required to compete. According to Turner (2015) the generation of people born between 1995 and 2005 are knows as generation Z, youth in this cohort are those that have never experience life before the internet or multimedia technology. Meaning that these youth have always had technology accessible to them. The Education Advisory Board (EAB) study (2019) suggests that these students have grown up surrounded by social and digital media, making them experts at filtering out information they deem irrelevant. Dikec et al. (2023) suggests that youth born in generation Z are known through different names such as "GenZer", "internet kids", "digital generation" and "crystal generation" because of their dependence on technology. Therefore, post-secondary institutions have sought to recruit youth from generation Z to attend their campuses by using social media platforms, one of which being Instagram. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the historical literature of university advertising, how branding has become important for universities, and how they use of social media by universities for advertising purposes. Specific focus is directed towards how these institutions use Instagram to advertise and promote a university brand, especially when targeted towards individuals from geographically remote areas. It is important to conduct this research as education becomes more commodified; public universities will need to start implementing strategies used by private entities in order to reach their recruitment goals.

University Advertising

Jugenheimer (1995) noted in the 1990s that university advertising was a controversial topic. On the one hand, faculty often did not like the commercial nature of advertising, and many administrators did not want to spend money on something whose return was difficult to measure. On the other hand, public relations and marketing staff recognized the potential benefits. Over time, university advertising has become less controversial and more mainstream. The early 2000s to the present has seen an increase in competition for students and a decrease in domestic enrollment. Concerned about increasing their university profiles, post-secondary institutions have become more interested in advertising (Moore, 2004). This section will explore the use of university advertising during the 21st century.

Currently, it is paramount that universities invest in advertising to stay relevant. In the United States, for example, as enrollment rose in post-secondary institutions during the 1990s, state funding decreased, and colleges and universities had to rely more on brand advertising to attract out-of-state students to increase their revenue (Diel & Katsinas, 2018). The need for post-secondary institutions to rely more on brand advertisement is a consequence of the drastic change education has undergone during this past half-century.

Driving this change has been the impact of neoliberalism on post-secondary education. Bulaitis (2020) states that in the nineteenth-century the primary goal of education was to create a society that would be able to make moral choices and live meaningful lives. However, under the current neoliberal context as it relates to higher education, individuals are seen primarily as

consumers of education. Neoliberalism has turned the focus off post-secondary education and towards market values (Brown, 2009). Neoliberalism is the idea that every action between parties is a market transaction (Newson, 2020) and in the context of post-secondary education, this means that every action has inherent value for both the student and the institution. Newson (2020) proposes the idea that there are four threads to neoliberalism – corporatization, commercialization, financialization and valorization. The four threads can be seen in the post-secondary sector as government funding decreases and donors are asked for larger contributions. As education is increasingly commoditized, the use of social media can be further conceptualized a top of funnel tactic and tuition as the yield of its eventual market transaction, where conversion rates are correlated to its efficacy of deployment.

There has been an immense decrease in government funding allotted to universities between 1982 and 2019, collapsing from 82.7 percent to 24 percent (Smith-Carrier, 2020). This decrease in funding has forced post-secondary institutions to act more and more as private entities. Investment withdrawal from the government at the provincial and federal levels is of concern as the post-secondary industry is a $55 billion market per year. This constitutes 2.4 percent of the national Canadian economy, which is larger than agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting combined (Higher Education Strategy Associates, 2020). Even though the post-secondary sector makes up 2.4 percent of the national economy, government funding is decreasing, which has resulted in rising tuition fees for institutions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government established the Student Emergency Student Benefit. However, that benefit has since ended, and with the increased cost of living, students must rely more on government-funded and other types of loans, such as bank loans to fulfill the increasing tuition

rates (Smith-Carrier, 2020). In this climate of disinvestment, not only do students have to find loans to pay for education, but also institutions have had to resort to seeking donor's investment, which makes public institutions of learning resemble corporate and private institutions (Smith-Carrier, 2020).

With the commodification of education and the increase in higher education competition, post-secondary institutions have been forced to increase their visibility to the public. For example, enrollment in Canadian universities had a 68.9% increase between the years 2000 and 2010 (Statistics Canada, 2022). The high increase in enrollment meant that universities had to transition their product from education to experience, thus transitioning to the "what to expect" style of social media advertising in order to appeal to the increasing number of students looking to enroll in a post-secondary programs.

It is important to note that many academics have apprehension when it comes to the advertisement of their institution as they believe institutions of higher learning should not be sold as just another commodity (Jugenheimer, 1995). Both Jugenheimer (1995) and Moore (2004) note that one of the concerns regarding advertising in post-secondary institutions is the perceived lack of believability, stemming from the notion that advertising attempts to manipulate consumers into purchasing goods or services (Beltramini, 2006). The idea that advertising is a form of manipulation can be a cause of concern for academics and other post-secondary community members as it tends to promote what is desired, but not necessarily what is offered.

Diel and Katsinas' (2018) research takes place in the United States; however, their findings can help understand the post-secondary climate in Canada. Diel and Katsinas (2018) note that despite increased enrollment in post-secondary institutions, state spending on higher education has decreased, which means that universities and colleges are required to perform out-of-state recruitment for their student body. The primary reason behind recruiting non-local, domestic students is that those students generally pay higher tuition rates than in-state students (Diel & Katsinas, 2018). To attract these out-of-state students, universities have focused on setting themselves apart through emotional appeal (Diel & Katsinas, 2018). Lee and Hong (2016) state that emotional appeal is a way to persuade someone with little to no relation to the advertisement; it is meant to trigger a sense of motivational relevance, and this reaction can be either positive or negative.

Emotional appeal is often present in photographs as people may relate to or see themselves in that scenario by just looking at the image. Emotional appeal is used in advertisements as a communication means, often through creation of emotional reactions amongst individuals through pictures. The use of emotional appeal is an aspect of consumption as emotional experiences create a bond between the consumer and the institution (Davis & Piven, 2014; and Han & Ling, 2016). Universities advertise emotional appeal through images due to their power and efficiency; they can quickly and easily strike resonance with someone, for example simply by showing community scenes and scenic views. This idea is reinforced by Sontag's (1973) notion that photographs give people an imaginary possession of the past and give them the capacity to take procession of a space in which they feel insecure. The goal of emotional appeal is to "allow consumers to project themselves into their mental picture of the

advertised product, while conveniently setting aside complicating factors, such as price (Bishop, 2000 in Diel and Katsinas, 2018), and can be achieved through other forms of content in addition to imagery.

In Canada, the number of domestic students enrolling in post-secondary institutions is declining, while the number of international students is increasing (Firang & Mensah, 2021). Canada portrays itself as a safe and stable country with a quality educational system and a society that is generally tolerant and not discriminatory (Canadian Bureau of International Education, 2022). These selling points are meant to touch on potential international students' emotional side as they create a picture of what their futures will look like, which is particularly important to international students who are migrating from what they see as unstable and unsatisfactory circumstances. Chen (2006) notes that international students are looking for a safe, tolerant, diverse, and multicultural university, free of discrimination. This portrayal reinforces the notion that Canada is a safe and welcoming place for international students, which in turn has become integral to Canada's international education brand.

Universities and Branding

Creation of expected experience, or branding, is critical to produce effective advertising. Where to go for university can be a difficult choice for many due to the large number of available options, and subsequently to attract the best student population, post-secondary institutions must be able to distinguish themselves from the competition. To stand out, institutions need to have a strong, unified brand; this section explores branding and how universities use it to their advantage.

Branding, a term often associated with retail and merchandising, is now being used within the context of the higher education. Branding is the "promise of an experience" (Moore, 2004). This promise of experience is what we have come to expect from specific retail names, for example when we think about Apple, we attribute their products as devices that are not only beautiful but are also a pleasure and easy to use (Beattie, 2021). Considering Amazon, we anticipate a wide selection of competitively priced items with fast delivery. As Sataøen (2018) suggested "branding includes the visual, verbal, textual, and behavioural presentations and expressions of an organization's identity as well as decisions and strategies underpinning such expression". Identifying the characteristics of a brand is essential when analyzing how different social media platforms, especially Instagram, are used to propel each institutions individual brand.

The expectation that something will provide us with a particular experience is fundamental to what a brand is. Although branding is typically a concept associated with the consumer world, higher education institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge, and Harvard have used branding for centuries, albeit differently than contemporary branding. More traditional university branding is portrayed through the use of heraldic crests, seals, and mottos, to associate the institution with notions of prestige and fraternity (Sataøen, 2018). These well-known institutions have well-established brands, and these well-defined, established brand helps attract prospective staff, students, academics, and funding. Due to the proliferation of social media in modern society, university branding has become necessary for higher learning institutions in order to compete (Stuart et al., 2017).

Branding for the Student

Having a well-defined brand helps prospective faculty members, students, administrative staff and community members recognize a post-secondary institution and picture themselves as being active members of the institution. The post-secondary institution a student attends, a faculty member teaches in, or an administrative staff works for becomes part of their identity, meaning that from then on, the person will always be an ambassador for said institution (Moore, 2004). For example, when a member of the institution attends a conference, the question of what someone's alma matter is can be heard as a recurring phrase; by answering and providing the name of the university they attended, this individual serves as an ambassador for the post-secondary institution they attended. Another example is the purchasing of branded clothing, as it publicly displays the wearer is proud to represent the institution they currently or previously attended.

The main benefit or goal of a branding campaign in the academic world is to help prospective students identify the value the institution holds for them (Moore, 2004). By the end of the pitch, the stakeholders will know how the institution will help them achieve their goals. For example, Memorial University's Faculty of Nursing has received the highest level of accreditation given by the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, and through promotion of this achievement, potential students will know that they will be receiving the best Nursing education in Canada by attending their program.

Branding for the Institution

The shift in how universities and other institutions of higher learning are marketing themselves stems from the fact that they are now operating more like corporations. Institutions

are now competing harder to recruit the brightest students, and said students are increasingly

using mobile applications to shop for universities that best suit their needs (Moore, 2004). These

changes have led chancellors and presidents in leading US academic institutions to be interested

in the process known as integrated marketing. Integrated marketing is the process of coordinating

outreach activities to enhance the institution's image in the educational marketplace (Moore,

2004). This phenomenon is also present in Canadian institutions, for example, institutions such

as the Marine Institute, a division of Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, have

built their brand around the ocean economy.

Branding is not only limited to the visual but also includes verbal, textual and

behavioural ways of presenting and expressing the institution's identity (Sataøen, 2018).

Maersova et al. (2020) argue that a strong brand must be eye-catching, informative, and

entertaining, drawing the audience's interest and delivering the promised experience. Returning

to the Marine Institute as example, their branding is eye-catching, informative and, at the end of

their time, graduates are perceived to be experts in the brand, the ocean economy. Moore (2004)

states that the institution requires four essential elements to launch an effective marketing

campaign. The first element is culture; the different units of the institution need to cooperate and

set aside their differences to support each other in creating a cohesive brand. The second element

is the condition; usually, there are actions that determine why a marketing campaign is

necessary, such as declining enrollment or new leadership. However, a specific action should not

be the only reason to launch a campaign. The third element is the course of action; market

research should be complete, and strategies and tactics should be presented to all parties involved

in the marketing campaign. Finally, a champion must be appointed to coordinate the campaign

and foster collaboration. The effort invested towards launching an effective marketing campaign bolsters a strong brand which thereby strengthens institutions and their units, allowing them to withstand the change of times (Moore, 2004). Having a solid brand that defies societal changes is highly important in any marketing program in the academic world; the goal is for future students is to see the merit of their chosen institution. Through their investment of four or more years they will become ambassadors of their institution.

This idea of branding is supported by Aspara et al.'s (2014) notion that branding is not only concerned with physical actions but also about the perceived images of the institution by the stakeholders. However, branding that does not deliver can have adverse effects on the institution. For example, in the commercial world, if a false promise lures someone into buying a product they are embarrassed to show, the buyer will feel remorse. In the case of academia, if one chooses a post-secondary institution due to brand promises of a positive experience and this experience is not fulfilled, then the impact is significant and everlasting for both the individual and the institution (Moore, 2004). This disappointment can lead to a withdrawal altogether from higher education and further negative reviews of the institution through word of mouth; this poor experience, in turn, can lead to lower enrollment rates. The potential downside of branding is that everyone will know if the experience fails to meet one's expectations. Even though a bad experience can damage an institution's brand, this does not mean that branding is not favourable for universities and colleges as it is influenced by cultural codes such as history images, myths, etc, and the political and economic environment where the institution is located (Aspara et al., 2014 and Schroeder, 2009, p.124).). This means that societal factors influence the perception of the universities brand.

Use of Social Media

Since the introduction of the Internet, society has undergone a massive change due to the digitization and globalization of many aspects of our lives (Maresova et al., 2020). One of the many changes the internet has brought is the idea that having a presence online equates to staying competitive and relevant. Since the turn of the 21st century, post-secondary institutions have had to consider and adopt the emerging marketing and branding practices of the internet, primarily through the use of social media sites, not only to recruit students but also to maintain relationships with alumni and other stakeholders (Maresova et al., 2020, and Peruta & Shields, 2017). Given the current neo-liberal post-secondary emphasis, social media is vital to the advertising and branding of post-secondary institutions as it creates endless opportunities for engagement at any time and from anywhere (Davis & Piven, 2014). The rise of the social media age has seen engagement grow between the brand and the consumer. When viewed within the prevailing neo-liberal framework, the university creates meaningful relationships to effectively force aspiring academic down their sales funnel. Not only is social media an effective tool in reaching stakeholders outside the immediate area, having a social media account is free; anyone can create a profile.

The majority of today's post-secondary students are members of Generation Z, a generation that has grown in the era of social media, making them the first generation that does not life without technology. (McCrary, 2022 and Maresova et al., 2020). Therefore, through this perspective, a post-secondary institution that promotes itself using social media will successfully target this anticipated population. *Recruiting the Digital Native*, research conducted in 2019 by

Education Advisory Board (EAB) found that 86.1% of students think every post-secondary institution should have a social media presence. Having a strong brand helps the institution differentiate itself from the competition. A strong brand sparks curiosity and provides enjoyment through the presented experiences; it creates a sense of fantasy, a form of escapism (Davis & Piven, 2014). The characteristics mentioned above make brands stand out.

Youth within generation Z are almost constantly online, those aspiring to attend post-secondary education are actively seeking to interact with colleges and universities in this manner. This is why institutions benefit from having a social media presence (EAB, Recruiting the Digital Native, 2019). It is essential for universities to continue traditional recruitment methods such as email and print as not all students have social media; email being considered as the "official channel" of communication between the institution and this generation of students (EAB, Recruiting the Digital Native, 2019). One of the downsides of social media is that even though having a profile is free, to have high-quality content and stay relevant, universities must invest in the creation and maintenance of departments to manage these accounts (Kurniawan et al., 2020). Having a separate department to manage all of the university's social media profiles requires the institution to review its budget and to quantify the department's benefit.

The top four social media platforms that are the most used by universities for advertising are Facebook (93%), Instagram (83%), Twitter (68%) and YouTube (55%) (Dencheva, 2023). The following sections will expand on each of the sites mentioned earlier and how post-secondary institutions use them.

Facebook

Facebook is an online social media and networking site where users can create profiles and connect with family, friends and work colleagues (Caers et al., 2013). Facebook is one of the most popular social media sites, with over 4.26 billion users as of 2021, and its users spend an average of 144 minutes each day on the site (Statista, 2023). Individuals in different parts of the world join Facebook for various reasons. For example, American students joined Facebook because of its usefulness, however the research conducted by Caers et al. (2013) found that Korean students joined Facebook under social pressure to have a social identity. These differing motivations to join also affect how these users see university advertisements on social media platforms. The content published on Facebook can vary; most content is in the form of photographs, videos, links to other web pages, and information.

According to Maresova et al. (2020), universities tend to use Facebook and other social media sites to share the latest campus news, with the most popular type of post being a link followed by a video and then photographs. Posts that have the most engagement are those that show their success stories or announcements about their famous researchers. These posts have the highest level of engagement as they tug at people's emotions by celebrating success or showing sympathy, both of which constitute emotional appeal (Hang & Ling, 2016). Although Facebook started as a platform used to connect individuals, now the platform is also used by organizations, such as universities, to create a fan page and thus an instrument to communicate with their stakeholders (Caers et al., 2013). Users can "like" an organization's Facebook page if such a page catches their attention causing them to like and follow the organization; this is how educational institutions build their fan base. There are known downsides to the use of Facebook

by post-secondary institutions, some of them being that not all students use or have Facebook, and some of the engagement on the posts can be negative (Caers et al., 2013). However, benefits such as increased student participation, enhanced communication with stakeholders, and the reach to users often outweighs the negatives for many institutions.

X (formally known as Twitter)

X is a microblogging social media site that, unlike other social media sites, users can follow other users without them following them back. One of the unique characteristics of X is that messages, or tweets, have a strict limit of 140 characters, forcing users to be concise and to the point (Kwak et al., 2010). It is important to note that in July of 2023 Twitter was renamed to X, however this research took place while it was still Twitter. These characteristics make X a unique and popular social media site used by many different users, such as popular celebrities to higher education professionals. Academics use X as a space for dialogue with their connections and a way to spread education; an example of this comes from the Vice President of Student Affairs at the Community College of Aurora (Ahlquist, 2020), who uses X not only to communicate information about her institution but also to tweet about topics she is passionate about, such as social justice (Ahlquist, 2020). The way in which this representative uses X demonstrates that X can be a platform capable of serving various purposes for one individual.

X both promotes activities on university campuses and expands the reach of their faculties' research and passion projects. This in turn can positively sway potential students' choice to attend the post-secondary institution. Yolcu (2013) noted that consumers use social media to sample a product before purchasing or consuming. In the context of higher education, users may use social media to evaluate the reputation of the institution of their choice, which can

be deduced from their updates, news, and the consensus of the public. Institutions contained within Yolcu's (2013) study mostly tweet promotional information, ceremonies and celebrations, and scientific research. The way institutions in Yolcu's (2013) study used X helped create relationships between the institution and stakeholders. Making connections between significant players is important as the purpose of the digital leader is to influence in all settings, from the classroom to the keyboard and back again (Ahlquist, 2020).

YouTube

YouTube, created in 2005, is a free video-sharing website where users can easily watch and upload videos (GCF Global). At a time when other social media sites had a short life span, YouTube rapidly expanded through user-generated content (Arthurs et al., 2018). YouTube is a platform that lends itself to being used by different people with different intentions. Like other social media sites, YouTube allows people to communicate by sharing information, experiences, knowledge and emotions (Perifanou, 2021). Given the user-friendly nature of YouTube for both the creator and the viewer, institutions are increasingly directing their efforts towards setting up YouTube channels as the video format optimizes the connections with their stakeholders (Tafesse, 2020). Post-secondary education institutions use YouTube to share information to promote the institutional identity and to keep the public up to date on the institution's achievements (Pham et al., 2017). Similar to Facebook and Twitter, post-secondary institutions use YouTube as a way to communicate with the public, however YouTube allows for longer and more information-filled advertisements.

Instagram

Instagram was first launched in October 2010 with 25 000 users signing up on day one. By the end of 2012, Instagram had 7.3 million daily users, surpassing Twitter for the first time since its launch (Blaystone, 2022 and Abbott et al., 2013). With this milestone, Instagram cemented itself as one of the most prominent social media applications. Instagram's best-known feature is the ability to upload and share photographs and video-style media; these photos and videos can be enhanced and edited using filters (Blaystone, 2022). When Instagram launched, one of the key features was the ability to instantly share photos captured through smartphones. Instagram is a user-friendly platform that amateur and professional photographers alike use to communicate with their prospective audience. Communication on Instagram is not only performed through images but also the use of hashtags and geo-locational tags assigned to posts (Abbott et al., 2013). The use of hashtags and geo-locational tags enables accounts to gain exposure and to obtain followers. Users can follow each other on the platform, and this means that if a user is following another user, their posts will be displayed on their feeds (Blaystone, 2022). The posts that users see on their feed is based on an algorithm, which is anticipates what users would like to see on their feeds based on their interactions with the different content. Given that Instagram is a popular site for prospective students of generation Z, the next section will focus on how universities use Instagram as a form of advertisement and recruitment.

Instagram as a Promotional Tool

Abbott et al. (2013) note that "Instagram is a way of connecting physical and digital spaces, enhancing online presence and identity, interacting with customers and for marketing and promotional purposes" (p.1). Instagram is breaking the barriers between digital and physical

spaces due to its emphasis on images. Photographs have the power to transport the viewer to a particular place without the need to be there physically; it gives a taste of what could be. Given the fact that during the past decade, universities have been increasingly marketing themselves to potential students and having a unique brand is something that university presidents, chancellors, and marketing departments have become highly interested in, as Instagram is seen as a way to promote the institution and to provide potential students with a positive impression of the institution (Moore, 2004 and Stuart et al., 2016). Blanco-Sanchez & Moreno-Albarracin (2023) suggest that institutions of higher learning who have Instagram profiles use these profiles as loudspeakers enabling what used to be an offline campus to now become an online campus. This means that Instagram makes the institution accessible to a public who was previously unaware or could not avail of its information due to geographical proximity.

The rise of mobile photography has made platforms such as Instagram popular as pictures are shared as soon as they are taken. With the ability to use geo-tags, hashtags, and captions, conversations are enabled that otherwise would not happen (Abbott et al., 2013). The almost immediate interactions between the original poster and followers create a type of rapport and trust between the parties; interactions take place when the post is engaging. What constitutes as an engaging post varies from industry to industry, however there is a commonality in posts that perform best. Posts that are creative and elicit positive emotions generate the most interaction; to be creative, the post needs to be unique and relevant (Casalo et al., 2021 and Barroso et al., 2021). Instagram is a visual platform with different formats, such as short videos, collections of photos, still images with audio and more, that enables transmission of unique and creative content that is relevant to the life of students. For example, when graduation ceremonies are

conducted, institutions often showcase these events, which acknowledge current students and provide a flashforward to new and aspiring students.

Instagram portrays daily life activities and is widely used by young adults, but it differs from other social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter as it is primarily a visual content application (Blanco-Sánchez & Moreno Albarracin, 2023). As noted in the Education Advisory Board (EAB), Recruiting the Digital Native (2019) research, 86.1% think universities should have a social media presence. The notion that students believe universities should have social media indicates to us that they are more likely to interact with the advertisements placed on such platforms. Having a presence makes it easier for institutions to create communities, not just between the institution and its members but also between members and to those not yet affiliated with the institution (Blanco-Sánchez & Moreno Albarracin, 2023). Creating a community feeling is important to allow potential students to picture themselves in that space before starting their journey, thereby creating stronger ties with the university. Instagram is powerful as any member of the university can simply snap a photo of what is happening on campus, post it and tag the institution whereby the photo available to anyone. This in turn, removes intimidation and makes the physical space of the university a more inviting place (Abbott et al., 2013).

The study Instagram Engagement for University conducted by Kurniawan et al., (2020) investigated the opinions of BINUS university students on the institution's Instagram account. BINUS, or Bina Nusantara University, is a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. The researchers wanted to examine if students found the BINUS Instagram account a) attractive, b) informative regarding events and educational activities, c) contained high quality pictures, d) had

information that was relevant and easy to find, e) employed short, clear, and inviting captions, and f) provided educational and motivating information (Kurniawan et al., 2020). The research found that even though students agreed that the BINUS Instagram account provided them with all the required information, as mentioned earlier, students do not tend to engage with BINUS' posts by "liking" or commenting. The lack of interaction is concerning as the Instagram algorithm will not consistently display BINUS' posts to their followers as a consequence. Despite the low engagement rates, students from BINUS University desired to see Instagram posts relating to campus news, events, and seminars/workshops (Kurniawan et al., 2020). This example shows that even if the university posts content that its student population wants to see, the lack of engagement impedes the posts being disseminated to all of their account's followers.

In the 2017 study by Stuart et al., "An investigation of the online presence of UK universities on Instagram", found that at the time when this study was taking place, universities in the UK had a limited presence on Instagram, however, units within the universities had more presence. The authors of this study acknowledge that at the time of the research, universities were only starting to use Instagram, but it was not widely adopted. This shows that in the last ten years, the use of Instagram by universities to promote themselves has increased exponentially. What has not changed though is the type of images being posted by post-secondary institutions. Stuart et al., (2017) note that the most common images posted by UK universities were pictures of university mascots and logos, pictures of staff and students in events, pictures of nature around campus grounds and images that intend to provide positive sentiment to the institution. Not much has changed since the publication of this study; Blanco-Sanchez & Moreno-Albarracin's (2022) study found that in the five studied universities, the most common posts

were about members of the university community, such as students and staff, posts about campus life, architecture, and multi-disciplinary events. This shows that the types of posts have stayed consistent, having the same goal, and showing the institution in a positive and welcoming light. Although images on Instagram can be taken at face-value, what are the hidden messages that students are receiving?

Critical Visual Analysis

Schroeder's (2006) Critical Visual Analysis provides the conceptual framework for this study. Schroeder (2006) argues that marketing relies heavily on visuals and that Critical Visual Analysis provides an interdisciplinary method for understanding images in their context. Schroeder's method combines the humanities (genre, narrative, content, interpretation) with the social sciences (context, effect, implications). Although we can never fully understand or interpret an image, this method allows a researcher to ask: How do images strategically communicate? How do images relate to brand meaning? What are the social implications of these images (Schroeder, 2006)? When an image resonates with the recipient, it connects with the individual's thoughts, aspirations, memories, or identity, and thus the impact is far more profound and engaging than text alone could provide (Abbott et al., 2013, p. 3). This is why marketing has come to rely on visual identity (Schroeder, 2006).

Martinez Lirola (2023) suggests that critical visual analysis helps to establish relationships between discourse and society by not only describing the world but also by aiming to change as it allows for the deconstruction of the way language and power are related and how communication reproduces reality. Meaning that Critical Visual Analysis provides the tools

necessary to break down visuals into parts to understand how reality is reproduced. As explained by Ledin and Machin (2018) visual analysis helps to clarify the process of understanding how specific semiotic recourses create meaning. Which means how certain symbols create meaning in advertaments and marketing.

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the reasons universities use social media as a form of marketing is because it creates a connection with the consumer. Conducting a critical visual analysis of images on social media will help us understand how marketing acts as a liaison between images used for advertising and the cultural codes that create meaning for such images (Schroeder, 2006). Critical visual analysis begins with a *description*: subject matter, colour, light, genre, medium, size and so on. Breaking an image down into components sheds light on the reasons why such an image was chosen to represent a brand, and how it fits in the current cultural context. Although there is a fine line between description and interpretation, it is worthwhile to attempt description. Barrett (1990) suggests that it is impossible to describe without interpreting and to interpret without describing but argues that the relationship between describing and interpreting is more of a cycle, disseminating the entirety of an image to parts before consequently regressing. The understanding of an image is and will always be subjective to the viewer; people will always have their opinions, but by using description, the researcher will be able to justify their interpretation in relation to their study. The second step in Critical Visual Analysis is comparison, followed by *interpretation* and *evaluation* (Schroeder, 2006). Images used for branding are selected for rhetorical effects; an individual's knowledge, beliefs, values, and attitudes are influenced by culture and are reflected in the way photographs are taken

and the way they are interpreted (Barrett, 1990). Unpacking these rhetorical effects is important comprehending what we are consuming through images.

The purpose of Critical Visual Analysis is not to generate universalities, but to become aware of and to make explicit the visual history and the cultural context of images used for advertising. As suggested by Kukkonen (2011) there are three different ways of representation in visual communication, the image as a mirror of reality, the image as a map of reality and the image as a simulacrum which only seems to reproduce reality but ultimately hides it (p. 55). This backups Schroeder's notion that a Critical Visual Analysis helps us understand the cultural codes given to images in social media as it can be argued that images posted in social media sites act a a mirror of reality, the images provide a map of reality but in cases the images selected hide reality and portray the positive ascpects of reality. From the seven studies used it has been found that a Critical Visual Analysis can be helpful in understanding the ways that images and visuals are used to understand reality at a specific point in history. Since this study focuses on how Memorial University used Instagram to recruit students, it is important to discuss how MUN has branded itself and how are they using Instagram to represent reality.

Memorial University's Brand

Memorial University's out-of-province recruitment is emblematic of the trends seen in US based universities and colleges. At Memorial University, 20% of the student population is international students, and 40% of all graduate students are international students. (Memorial University, 2023). The underlying reason for this trend is that MUN is the only university in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, so most of its student population comes from within

the province. However, MUN recruits international students and out-of-province students as these groups of students pay more tuition fees; international student fees being the highest among the three which is similar to what Diel and Katsinas (2018) show in their study. As stated on the *Become a Student* webpage, Memorial University is the home of over 18 000 students from over 100 countries (Memorial University, 2021).

In the strategic planning document titled *Transforming Our Horizons*, one of the strategic priorities for Memorial University is to "Promote and Pride" (Transforming Our Horizons, 2021). It is stated that Memorial University needs to find new and creative ways to connect, engage, and advocate for the importance of the university to the province's future ((Transforming Our Horizons, 2021). If Memorial University wants to recruit students, faculty, and staff, then using the modern tools provided by social media is of utmost priority. Instagram is used by 82.5% of college-age people, and of that percentage, 74.6% state that they are interested in interacting with post-secondary institutions through social media (EAB, Recruiting the Digital Native, 2019). These statistics show that Memorial University and all of its campuses need to establish a strong social media presence in order to attract talent from within the province, outside of the province and internationally alike. The purpose of this study was to explore MUN's Instagram account, *@MemorialUniversity*, and to provide a critical visual analysis of a sample of the images used, to comprehensively understand the images used to promote MUN and attract students.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the rise of advertising in the post-secondary sector during the 21st century and the use of branding by institutions. The chapter then explains how advertising and branding are used in social media, or more specifically how the visual platform Instagram is used by universities and other post-secondary institutions. An explanation of how critical visual analysis can be used to interpret and give meaning to stock images used as promotional material on Instagram by institutions then follows. Finally, the chapter concludes by examining how Memorial University of Newfoundland uses and can continue using Instagram to solidify its brand and recruit prospective students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study aims to explore Memorial University's use of the Instagram account *@MemorialUniversity*, particularly the use of images to promote Memorial University's (MUN) to attract students. Various Instagram accounts are associated with MUN; most of those accounts are managed by faculties, departments, or student associations, however *@MemorialUniversity* is MUN's official Instagram page. This account promotes the university, reminds students of deadlines, and connects with the public. Its broad reach and purposes make this account ideal for this study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodology used while conducting this research; it starts with a description of the paradigm and design, followed by a description of the setting. Next, the chapter elaborates on sampling and data collection, concluding by describing how the data was analyzed and organized during the study. This chapter also discusses Critical Visual Analysis.

Paradigm and Design

Cohen et al. (2017) state that qualitative research amasses information from several sources, such as audio, film, documents, and pictures. Merriam & Tisdell (2015) mention that the "main characteristic of all qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (p.24). Furthermore, qualitative research supplies the researcher with an in-depth, intricate, and detailed understanding of meanings and actions (Cohen et al., 2017). As focus is directed toward the interpretation the meaning in visual elements, the project will be substantiated by qualitative research.

Tracy (2010) argues that good qualitative research is relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative, and this research embodies these qualities. A qualitative study may shake reader's status quo assumptions and generate astonishment (Tracy, 2010). Another quality of qualitative research is the richness of descriptions and explanations; it must present full, abundant data (Tracy, 2010).

In a qualitative paradigm, there are different *types* of research, such as case studies or phenomenology. This study will employ what Merriam & Tisdell (2015) label as a basic qualitative study using the conceptual framework of Critical Visual Analysis. Basic qualitative studies are found throughout the discipline of Education and are applied in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Basic qualitative research consists of studying how 1) interpretations of experiences and actions, 2) exploring how meaning is constructed and 3) the meaning is attributed to experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Saldana, 2011). In much simpler words, a basic qualitative study is interested in understanding how meaning is constructed in life through experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Conducting basic qualitative research would yield the best results for this study as qualitative research seeks to interpret visuals and generate meaning rather than test a hypothesis, allowing the research to be conducted in an open-ended exploratory manner (Cohen et al., 2017).

Research Setting

MUN is a comprehensive university offering certificates, diplomas, and undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs across their five campuses, as well as online. More than 19 000 students call Newfoundland and Labrador's sole university home. The context for this

research is Memorial University (MUN), but the units being studied are Instagram images posted by their official *@MemorialUniversity* account. The images posted by this account are retrieved from MUN's photo library, which can be found on the platform Flickr (https://www.flickr.com/photos/memorialuniversity/albums). Flickr is an online photo management and sharing application. Its main goals are "to help people make their photos available to the people who matter to them, and it also enables new ways of organizing photos and videos" (Flickr, 2020). Memorial University uses Flickr to store images that anyone can use later. Memorial University's images on Flickr are organized into different categories, such as students, campus buildings (exterior), campus buildings (interior), scenic photos, etc. The images that will be used in this research will be selected from the album 'Students', which has also been featured in the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account.

The Division of Marketing and Communications is a stakeholder in this research, as said division "works to distinguish Memorial University by using collective ingenuity to engage stakeholders" (Marketing & Communications, Memorial University, 2021). The Division of Marketing and Communications (Marcomm) works to meet the university's marketing and communication needs collaboratively, creatively and innovatively. The division also provides quality products and services in marketing and communications (Marketing & Communications, Memorial University, 2021).

In-Depth Interviews

Although MUN's ICEHR granted ethics approval for me to conduct the interviews, unfortunately despite repeated attempts, the unit and specialist did not respond to my requests for

interview. The university had recently engaged in labour action early in 2023; the strike was visible in the community and the university was criticized in the local media. This is possibly why I did not get a response, and consequently, was unable to conduct any interviews.

Critical Visual Analysis

Kleih et al. (2022) have argued that photographs have become an important part of society due to developments in digital photographic technology, the emergence of smartphones with integrated cameras and large storage capacities, and social media (p. 439). A photograph can elicit emotion upon a single view, making them a powerful tool for social science research (Kleih et al., 2022). Data collection in the form of photographs is best used when a researcher is looking to understand the meanings people give to objects, events, persons, issues, or phenomena (Lauri & Lauri, 2019). In the case of this study, the images selected will be used to explore how social media branding can be used to attract students to a university situated in a relatively isolated geographical location.

Marketing and Communication's (Marcomm) Webpage and Branding

The Marketing and Communications website defines a brand as a promise to represent, in this case, an institution based on a set of values. They also define Brand Positioning as how an organization would like to be seen and talked about by their key audiences (Marketing & Communications, Memorial University, 2021). The Marcomm website states that one of Memorial's brand goals "is to capture and express a singular, compelling idea about Memorial that will engage our audiences, enhance profile and reputation, and help advance the university's

position locally, nationally and internationally" (Marketing & Communications, Memorial University, 2021).

As mentioned previously, the Division of Marketing and Communications is a stakeholder in this research study; they create and post Instagram content as well and are knowledgeable of best practices and the population that the university is trying to target with these images. It is important to note that the Instagram images that will be used in this research are images that are taken from the university's Flickr account.

Sampling and Data Collection

Sampling in qualitative research is led by the study's research questions and conceptual framework; doing so helps focus the research and establish definitions and boundaries (Farrugia, 2019). It is important to note that for qualitative researchers, a case is not necessarily a person, and can consist of anything from a household, a hospital, a culture, an organization, or a procedure (Farrugia, 2019, p. 69). In this case, the setting consists of an organization, Memorial University (MUN). Participant selection in qualitative studies must be clearly delineated and help answer the research question (Clearly et al., 2014).

For this study, the type of sampling chosen was purposive sampling, although there are different approaches to sampling in qualitative research. Purposive sampling is characterized by the researcher deliberately selecting participants based on their expertise in the phenomenon being studied (Furrigia, 2019, and Gill, 2020). Locating participants who can provide rich information is a common challenge faced when conducting purposive sampling (Gill, 2020).

"The reason for purposive sampling is the better matching of the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, thus improving the rigour of the study and trustworthiness of the data and results" (Campbell et al., 2020, p. 653).

Data Organization and Analysis

Data was organized according to Schroeder's (2006) Critical Visual Analysis framework beginning with the description. Coding is defined by Merriam & Tisdell (2015) "as nothing more than assigning some sort of short-hand designation to various aspects of the data so that it can be easily retrieved when needed" (p.199). For this research, I coded ten images obtained from the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account, assigning descriptions combined of single words and short phrases to explore themes within images. The notations made during the coding process are important to allow information to be easily reviewed during the data analysis and write-up stages (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). "The important task is to create an inventory of the entire data set" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 200). Having an inventory of the images selected will help in organization and deciphering themes. Morris (2015) used Table 1 to organize and record interviews; I adopted this table to organize and record each image collected as such a table helps identify themes across Instagram images. The photos collected will be stored both in an electronic copy and a hard copy and labelled accordingly with the information found in the Table 1.

Table 1

Morris 2015 Table

Name of Interviewee	Date of the Interview	Location	Quality of Interview out of 10	Any other comments

Data Analysis

Critical Visual Analysis (Schroeder, 2006) was used to organize and to analyze the data; to start the process, Barrett (1990) and Schroeder (2006) recommend a description. Describing an image comprises listing facts about the subject in the image. The essential elements of describing are: subject matter, form, medium, style, genre; these elements help answer questions such as: 'What is here? What am I looking at? What do I know for certain about this image?' which Barrett refers to as data-gathering (Barrett, 1990, chapter 2). After the elements are described, comparison can take place, allowing for interpretation and evaluation. To better understand how these elements are used in Critical Visual Analysis, the following subsections will explain each element.

Describing an image at the beginning of a Critical Visual Analysis establishes the interpretation that will follow, lessens personal biases, and helps the reader pay attention to the elements being studied and ignore those that are not (Barrett, 1990, and Ownby, 2013). Providing the reader with a description of the elements that will be analyzed in the image is essential as the interpretation of the image varies from person to person. Guiding the reader to the elements being analyzed decreases biases and increases the validity of the results.

A powerful way to start the description of an image is by describing the *subject matter* (Barrett, 1990). A description of the subject matter should note the subject's attire, their location, their relation to other objects in the image and their relation to the photographer. This, in Barrett's words, typifies the object, in this case the individual. Next, is *form,* Barrett (1990) states that form is how the subject matter is presented, referring to the creative elements used to

construct the image. For example, the utility of light, tone, texture, and space within the image. After describing the *form,* the *medium* should then be described, referred to as "what an art object is made of" (Barrett, 1990); in the case of this study, the *medium* is the social media platform Instagram. *Style* is the relationship between the creator of the piece and the subject matter of the image (Schroeder, 2006), and this is what attracts the viewers to the photographs. The final essential element within the describing phase, *genre,* establishes the category the image belongs to (Schroeder, 2006). Examples of *genres* are portrait images, group images, scenic images, perspective etc. Following describing, a *comparison* is achieved by juxtaposing against a significantly different image to identify unique features (Schroeder, 2006). *Comparison* helps establish the group in which the brand has nested itself. This is followed by interpretation allowing the researcher to give meaning to the data they have obtained, and finally, evaluation, when the data is reviewed by making a judgement of the assessment.

Validity and Reliability

Since qualitative research is interested in understanding how people view their lived experiences, producing credible and valid research is of utmost importance to professionals in applied fields (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative research must be conducted ethically to ensure that the study has validity and reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merrian & Tisdell (2015) argue that regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that should be approached through careful attention to a study's conceptualization, namely, how the data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and how the findings are presented.

To show validity, I employed the process outlined in Critical Visual Analsyis including the descriptive steps. Each image was clearly described before comparison or interpretation took

place. This audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) helped me reflect on any bias I may have had and helped me refrain from starting interpretation until the descriptions were complete. Although the research data would have been stronger with the planned interviews, the 10 images and the detailed analysis provided a detailed view of the images used by the Instagram account.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the archetype and the research's design, which in general is qualitative in nature. The chapter notes the setting for this research as Memorial University's *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account. This chapter continues with information regarding in-depth interviews and an overview of Critical Visual Analysis, which is also discussed in breadth during the data analysis section of this chapter. Critical Visual Analysis emphasizes description which is important to the validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter 4: Image Description, Comparisons, and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter sets out to present the data collected to address the following research questions: 1) how are the images selected used to promote Memorial University? and 2) how are the images selected helping define MUN's brand? The chapter starts with an explanation of the image selection process, followed by descriptions, analysis, and comparison of the ten images used in the study.

Image Selection

The image selection process started by typing into my internet browser, www.mun.ca. Once there, I went to the search bar and typed "marketing"; the results page was linked to the Marketing & Communications Unit page. I selected the second link, which took me to the "Connect with us" | Marketing & Communication | Memorial University page. Once on the Marketing & Communications page (https://www.mun.ca/marcomm/), I selected the tab named "Memorial's brand" then I clicked on the subheading "Brand standards," then selected the hyperlink "Brand standards (PDF)", which re-routed me to the second version of a PDF document outlining Memorial's brand, released in 2017. Once the document loaded, I looked at the index and noted the Photography guidelines located on pages 84 – 87.

The images I selected appeared on Flickr as Memorial University uses the platform as a storage mechanism for its stock images. These images also appeared on one of the most popular social media mobile applications, Instagram (Frier, 2020), under the university's main account *@MemorialUniversity*. The images selected were posted on Instagram from January 6th, 2022, to

June 21st, 2023, and align to Photography guidelines within the Brand Standards document. The reason I decided to use this timeframe is that for the Winter 2022 semester, most COVID-19 regulations were lifted, and in-person activities started to return to what they used to be pre-pandemic. Another element that influenced the images was the Memorial University Faculty Association (MUNFA) strike. The MUNFA strike happened from mid-January 2023 to mid-February 2023.

I selected ten images and used the following guideline as a recommendation: "Memorial's brand photos have a raw intensity that captures the Newfoundland light and environment — subdued, moody, ethereal, intense, dramatic. Shadows are cool and deep, while highlights are bold and punchy. The bright colours in the colour palette work well in contrast with the moodiness of these photos. When considering composition, angles and facial expressions should be unusual, unexpected, and candid. A shallow depth of field should be used when shooting a subject" (Memorial University Brand Standards Version II, 2017, pg. 84). The Memorial University brand is representative of the environmental elements of Newfoundland and Labrador. The selection process was randomized, requiring me to go back and forth between Flickr and Instagram to ensure the image was showcased on both platforms. Once I had one image selected, I took a screenshot of the image and numbered as "Image #1", the next image numbered "Image #2", until all ten images had been coded.

Image Analysis

Once I had selected all ten images, I proceeded to analyze each image following Table 1. Table 1 is a modification of the way Morris (2015) organized and recorded interviews. Instead of

recording interviews, the table was modified to allow me to number each image such that I could refer to it when describing the images. After all, ten images had been described, I compared images that were significantly different but had similar features; the images selected for comparison are shown in Figure 1. The images with stars of the same colour were the images that were compared to each other. The final analysis done on all ten images was to compare the Flickr version and the Instagram version of the same image, to note the similarities and differences, to note the caption, and to document the number of likes and comments. If the images had comments, then I read and noted the comments. Following each description, there is the interpretation of each image.

Table 2

Image Analysis Table; Source: modification from Morris (2015)

Image Analysis Table			
Image Number	**Date posted on Instagram**	**Quality of Image**	**Additional Comments**
Description The description is listing facts about the subject in the image. This list helps answer questions such as: what is here? what am I looking at? what do I know for certain about this image?			

Subject matter	**Form**	**Medium**	**Style**	**Genre**
Refers to what the subject is wearing, where are they located, the relation to other objects in the image.	Refers to the way light is used, the tones of the image.	Refers to what the object is made of.	Refers to what attracts the views to the photographs.	Refers to whether the image is a portrait, group, scenic or perspective images.

Figure 1

The 10 images used in the study.
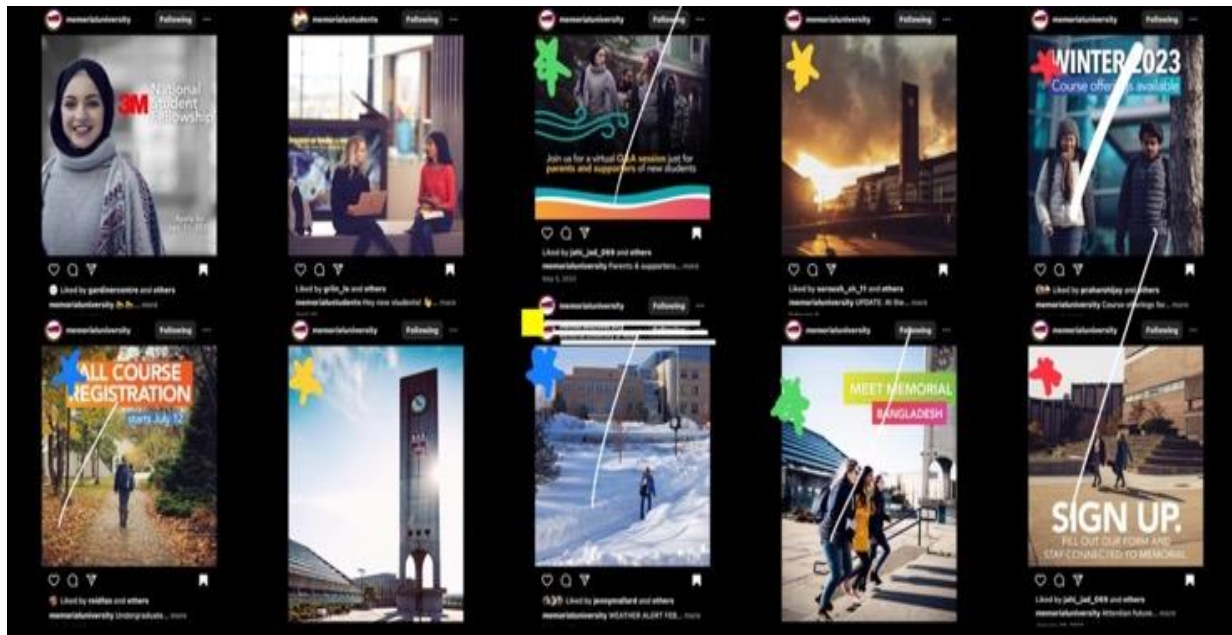
Describing the Selected Images

The method I used to describe the ten images in this study is Critical Visual Analysis which is built on Barrett's 1990 method of understanding photographs. Schroeder (2006) state that the description of an image lists facts about the subject in the image, which helps answer questions such as: what is here? what am I looking at? what do I know for certain about this image? They suggest starting by describing the subject matter. The description of the subject matter should note what the subject is wearing, where they are located, and the relation to other objects in the image and in relation to the photographer. After the subject matter, it is suggested to describe form, which is the creative elements used to construct the image. For example,, the way light is used, the tones of the image, the texture, and the use of space. A description of the medium follows, which refers to what an art object is made of (for example paint, photography, yarn). After the medium, a description of the style of the image follows. Style refers to the

relationship between the piece's creator and the image's subject matter, which is what attracts the viewers to the photographs. Finally, the genre is noted, classifying the type of image the photograph being analyzed. Common genres of images include portrait, group, scenic, and perspective, amongst others (Schroeder, 2006). Not only do detailed descriptions allow for easier analysis of each image but they also help to identify themes between images and contribute to reducing researcher bias.

Image #1

Table 3 Image 1 Describing Table

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments
Image #1	April 20, 2023	HD Quality	N/A

Image 1 Two Sitting Students;

Source: Flickr

Subject Matter

There are two subjects in this image; the first is positioned close to centre, looking at Subject 2. Subject 1 is wearing all black, making their fair complexion and blond hair stand out. Subject 1 sits with their right leg crossed over their left leg while balancing their laptop on their lap.

Subject 2 is positioned on the right side of the picture, also sitting crossed-legged, however, with their left leg crossed over their right and a book placed on their lap. Subject 2 faces Subject 1 who seems to be in the middle of saying something. Subject 2 has a darker complexion and what appears to have black wavy hair. Both subjects are sitting on what appears to be a concrete block in front of a poster inside a well-lit building. There is a backpack and piece of clothing to the right of Subject 1.

Form

The focus of the image is the two subjects as the background is blurred, which does not provide many clues as to where they are located. The image is bright, with the light coming from the top left corner of the image. There are no blank spaces in this image as the background is the inside of a building. The prominent tones of the image are cooler colours with blue undertones. By using this tone, although noticeably different, both subjects' skin tones are bright.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

The subjects of the image are having a discussion which gives the feeling that this moment was not planned, making it a candid moment as if the photographer just happened upon these two people.

Genre

This is a group image.**Interpretation:**

This image appears to be two students in discussion in a library. The atmosphere seems to be friendly, welcoming, and accepting. This image includes diversity, and sense of place.

Image #2

Table 4 *Image 2 Describing Table*

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments
Image #2	May 5th, 2022	HD Quality	When the image was used in Instagram text was added.

Image 2 *Four Walking Students;*

Source: Flickr.

Subject Matter

There are four subjects in this image; two of them are female, and two are male. The two female subjects are in the front centre of the image, and the two male subjects are in the background of the image, somewhat hidden behind the two female subjects. The two female subjects are of fair complexion, and both wearing heavier clothing, which might reflect that this image was taken in the colder months of the year. The female subject on the left of the image is wearing a winter hat and the female subject on the of the image is wearing a head scarf. The two male subjects are of darker complexion and are also wearing heavier clothing. The background of this image is blurred, making the subjects stand out.

Form

The light in this image is coming from the top right corner, which emphasizes the subjects. The light is then carried toward the middle of the image, where a tree is observed. From the start of the tree left of the image, blacks and shadows are more prominent, this is carried all the way to the bottom of the image. The tone of this image is on the cooler side and the subjects are taking up most of the space in the image; the background is blurred.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

The subjects of the image seem to be walking and the creator/photographer, who is right in front of them has captured them. The subjects do not seem to be aware that this image is being taken, making it a candid shot.

Genre

This is a group image.

Interpretation

This image appears to be of a group of students talking, laughing, and walking. The image appears to have been taken outside at the student residence side of Memorial University campus. The atmosphere seems to be friendly and playful and this image includes diversity, a friendly atmosphere, and a sense of place.

Image #3

Table 5 Image 3 Describing Table

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments

Image # 3	February 6th, 2023	HD Quality	N/A

Image 3 *Memorial University's Campus at Sunset;*

 Source: Flickr.

Subject Matter

This image does not have a human subject; however, the clock tower, which is a recognizable Memorial University element, is the focal point of the image. In the background of the image, the newest building, the Core Science Building, can also be seen on the right side of the image. The Queen Elizabeth II Library building is on the left side of the image though this building is in the shadow.

Form

The light in this image emanates from the centre of the image, in what appears to be a sunset or sunrise. Above the sun, we can see a cloud formation. The light of the image creates a moodier scene through the abundance of deep shadows. The tones of the image are cooler tones which help show the building elements.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

The image seems to be taken at a wide angle. A wide angle in photography as described by Dove (2023), has a "focal length of 35mm or shorter, which gives a wide field of view, the wider the field of view the more of the scene will appear in the frame. This type of photography makes spaces feel more expansive and impressive."

Genre

The genre of this image is architectural photography, which the Nashville Film Institute defines as "a genre of photography that focuses on capturing photographs of buildings or structures, this kind of photography is less dynamic.

Interpretation

This image shows part of the Memorial University campus at sunset. The style of the photograph combined with the intense light reminds the viewer of the vast size of the province in which the university is located. This image shows a sense of place through the iconic clock tower building, and it evokes emotional appeal through the portrayal of light and shows.

Image #4

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments
Image #4	October 21, 2022	HD Quality	In the Instagram version of this image, text has been added to the image. The text is advertising the courses that will be offered during the Winter 2023 semester.

Image 4 Two Students Between Trees;

Source: Flickr

Subject Matter

There are two subjects in this photograph; both subjects front and center of the image, taking almost all available space. Subject 1 appears to be Asian and female. This subject is on the right side of the image, with light coming from the left side of the shot. Subject 1 is wearing a heavy winter jacket, a scarf, winter gloves and a winter hat, as well as a backpack. Subject 2 is a male of a darker complexion, also wearing a winter coat and winter gloves. Subject 2 is on the left side of the image, with light coming from the edge of the photograph. Both subjects are walking toward the photographer in what seems to be a conversation in front of a building. The outfits that both subjects are wearing suggest that this image was taken during the colder months of the year. The building behind them has a blue hue and is reflective. On the each side of the image there is a tree trunk which frame the subjects and emphasize their presence.

Form

The source of light in this image is coming from the left edge of the image, which helps highlight the subjects. This image gives the impression that the subjects are entranced in an engaging conversation and are not aware of the photographer, making this feel natural and impromptu. The use of the tree trunk to frame the image and subjects is interesting as even though it is not the focal point, one's eye is still drawn to it. The subjects on the forefront are not blurred however, the background is. This image seems to have been cropped to fit the square format of Instagram, creating little to no blank space. The tones of the image are of cooler temperatures.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

A candid shot of two students having a conversation.

Genre

This is a group image.

Interpretation

This image is of two ethnically diverse students engaging in friendly conversation. The trees remind the viewer of nature as does the striking blue colour and this image portrays themes of diversity, a friendship, and a sense of place.

Image #5

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments
Image #5	July 12, 2022	HD Quality	In the Instagram version of this image, text has been added to the image. The text is advertising Fall 2022 registration.

Image 5 Student Walking in Fall;

Source: Flickr.

Subject Matter

There is one main subject in this image, facing away from the camera, walking through a gravel path surrounded by trees on both sides. The subject on the gravel path is located directly in the middle of the image. The main subject is wearing a sweater, jeans, tall boots and a backpack. Right in front of the main subject, the head of another person is visible. The trees in this image are in the middle of changing colours from green to yellow to orange; there are dry leaves on the ground, and it looks like the ground is wet, suggesting that it rained prior to this image being taken. The natural elements of this image suggest that it is Fall.

Form

The subject in this image is blurred and facing away from the camera; the scene is what is in focus. The subject is facing away from the camera, and being blurred suggests that the

photographer took this photo in the spur of the moment. The light source for this image is coming from the centre of the image, just above the main subject. The way the light is being used helps illuminate the scene, but it also provides space for shadows on the bottom edge of the image, creating depth. The elements and subject make this image seem full; however, all the elements work together to create a cozy feeling. The tones of this image are on the cooler side, except for the leaves which give the image warmth.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

Candid shot, the subject does not appear to know that this image was taken.

Genre

This image falls under the genre of perspective. Rose and Tom (2023) state that perspective photography is the spatial relationship between subjects in the frame and it also suggests that the composition of the image helps the viewer see the world from a new perspective.

Interpretation

This image is of one student facing away from the camera. The direction the subject is walking, and the way they are holding their backpack suggests that the subject is going to or leaving class. Right in front of the main subject, the head of another person is visible, suggesting that they are doing likewise. The students carrying backpacks to and from classes intend to show dedication and preparedness. This image shows a sense of place and it evokes emotional appeal.

Image #6

Table 8 Image 6 Describing Table

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments
Image #6	February 15, 2023	HD Quality	The subject in the image and the building compete to be the focal point. Due to the subjective nature, when looking at the photo one may argue the building is in focus while another may claim that it is in fact, the subject instead.

Image 6 Snowy Walk;

Source: Flickr

Subject Matter

In this image is clear that there was a snowfall the day prior to when the photograph was taken as there is snow covering 1/3 of the image, primarily located on the bottom third. However, some snow can be seen on the trees and on the edges of the building. The subject of the image is located on the bottom third of the photo towards the center. They are facing away from the camera, walking towards the building in front of them. The subject is wearing jeans, a winter jacket, winter gloves and a backpack. Their outfit combined with the snow indicates that this image was taken during the winter months of the year. The building in this image takes the upper part of the space and spans almost the entire breadth of the image.

Form

The way in which the building is incorporated into the image, makes it the main focal point, with the subject being the secondary focal point. The angle in which this image was taken is intriguing as it looks to be taken from an elevated position, purposefully making the subject look small in comparison to the other elements. The light source is coming from the left side of the picture; however, there is also light being reflected on the inner part of the building, suggesting that there is also a light source slightly right of centre. This makes the composition somewhat confusing as there is no certain source of light. The snow helps with making this image very bright. The tone of the image is on the cooler side.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

This image falls under the genre of perspective. As mentioned in the previous image the perspective photography is the spatial relationship between subjects in the frame. Rose and Tom (2023) also note that placing a figure in a landscape shot gives a sense of scale, which is characteristic of this image.

Interpretation

This image shows a student walking through a snow-covered campus. The student carrying a backpack suggests that they are either going to or leaving class. This image sends a message of large, open spaces due to the style of the shot. This image shows a sense of place.

Image #7

Table 9 *Image 7 Describing Table*

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments
Image #7	November 14, 2022	HD Quality	This image is part of a carousel post. A carousel post in Instagram is a post containing more than one image but no more than ten.

Image 7 *Three Friends:*

Source: Flickr

Subject Matter

There are three subjects photographed, and all three appear to be females. They are walking up a set of stairs and all three of them are also wearing backpacks. Behind them, there are two buildings and a structure which is referred to as the clock tower by the Memorial University community. The day in which this image was taken appears to be a sunny day, but all three subjects are wearing jackets suggesting a cool, crisp breeze is present. Subjects 1 & 3 are of lighter complexion, and subject 2 is of darker complexion. I think it is interesting to note that subject 3 is in the middle of subjects 1 & 2, but they are not overpowering or hiding her. Subjects 1 & 2 seem to be talking with each other, while subject 3 seems to be a passer-by, as they have a more serious look and walking gate. The subjects are positioned somewhat in the centre of the

shot, but the way they are positioned creates a depth of field. The background is also blurred, which adds to the 3D feeling of the image. The angle in which the photograph was taken suggests that the photographer has just overtaken them due to the slight backward angle.

Form

The way the shadow of the three subjects suggests that the light source is coming from behind them, illuminating the whole image. One building is further out than the other building, and the way these buildings are laid out on campus, in addition to the angle of the image, creates a perfect triangle which helps direct the attention to the three subjects. This image seems to have been edited by increasing the brightness and increasing cool tones.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

Candid appearance but posed. This image is a mixture of candid and posed due to the in-sync way the three subjects are walking up the stairs.

Genre

This image falls under two photographic genres: group imagery and perspective.

Interpretation

This image is of students walking up the stairs to the University Centre, perhaps to the food court. The subjects appear to be talking collegially, the atmosphere seems to be friendly. The sun is shining and there are no clouds in the sky. This photograph gives a feeling of

friendliness and shows the student body's diversity. This image shows diversity, a friendly

atmosphere and sense of place.

Image #8

Table 10 Image 8 Describing Table

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments
Image #8	January 20, 2022	HD Quality	Text has been added to the image

Image 8 Two Music Students by the Library;

Source: Flickr

Subject Matter

There are two subjects in this image, both of which are female. Both subjects are situated

in the middle of the image, walking away from the QEII building carrying instrument cases.

Subject 2 is wearing a long fall jacket, jeans, a dark top and boots. She is carrying what appears

to be a guitar case, Subject 1 is to the left of Subject 2, also wearing jeans and boots, a white top

and a burgundy fall jacket. She is also carrying a case but of what appears to be a different

musical instrument. Both subjects are of fair complexion; however, subject 2 has blonde hair

while subject 1 has brunette hair. As mentioned above, the subjects are positioned in the middle

of the image, but they are not taking the entire space since the photo seems to have been taken from a distance. The buildings that surround the subjects make them look small. By the color of the trees, it can be deduced that this image was taken during the fall. As both subjects are carrying what appears to be musical instruments, these appear to be music students heading to or from class or practice.

Form

The light in this photo is coming from the top left corner as the shadow that the subjects, buildings, and trees are casting are to their right. The way the image is illuminated suggests that the sun is setting since there is a warm tone cast. However, this is balanced by the editing of the image, as the cooler tones seem to have been enhanced as well as the brightness of the image seems to have been increased. The shadows create a very cozy and inviting feeling.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

The style of this image is a candid appearance from a distance. The use of distance shows the theme of space.

Genre

The genre of this image is perspective in a specific geometric perspective. As noted by Rose and Tom (2023) geometric perspectives are parallel lines that when viewed at a distance appear to converge and lead the viewer's eye through the image.

Interpretation

This image of two music students is attempting to promote Memorial University's school of music. The style chosen for this image represents that even though the university is situated in

a large province, the focus is on the students. This image shows a friendly atmosphere and a sense of place, and it also portrays the library which is a key feature of the campus.

Image #9

Table 11 Image 9 Describing Table

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments
Image #9	April 26, 2023	HD Quality	N/A

Image 9 *The Clock Tower;*

Source: Flickr

Subject Matter

This image has no human subjects, rather is an image of Memorial University's St. John's campus. The image shows three structures, the one of the front is the iconic clock tower, behind the clock tower to the left is the library, and to the right of the library, but further back is another building. Those familiar with the university would know that this building is the education building. The way the clock tower is facing suggests that the image was taken by someone standing in front of the clock tower but had a wide-angle lens. By the colour of the sky

and the green of the bushes, we can assume this picture was taken during the spring or fall of the year.

Form

The light in this image is prominent, coming from behind the clock tower. This image appears to have been heavily edited; at the top of the image, where the sky can be seen, the sky is of a blue/green tone, and the windows of the library are also in the blue/green tone. Another hint that the image has been edited is that the windows in the library are pronounced, suggesting the image has been sharpened during the editing stage. Another editing giveaway is that there is a burst of light in the middle right of the clock tower, and this burst of light is of warmer tones than the rest of the image. This type of effect can be added post-production in any editing software. The image tones are on the cooler side.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

This image was taken from a distance.

Genre

The image fall under various genres of photography such as scenic image, perspective, and architectural photography.

Interpretation

This image at first glance is of part of the university campus, focusing on the clock tower. If you look closely to the left of the clock tower on one of the two benches, a student is sitting. They do not seem to know that the picture was taken given that they are so far away from the

photographer. Using the clock tower in images is strategic as it is a well-known symbol to the university community. This image shows a sense of place.

Image #10

Table 12 *Image 10 Describing Table*

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Additional Comments
Image #10	November 18, 2021	HD Quality	This image is the oldest image in terms of when it was published on Instagram.

Image 10 *Smiling at the Camera;*

Source: Flickr.

Subject Matter

There is only one subject in this image, and they are the only focus of the picture. The subject is female and she is wearing a head scarf and a thick turtleneck shirt with what looks to be a blanket draping over her shoulders. She is wearing a headscarf and two gold necklaces. She is of pale complexion with brown eyes and pronounced eyebrows, and she is smiling. She has a broad smile which might suggest she is happy. She is the sole subject of the image, and she is to

the left of the square. The background is blurred, making it difficult to decipher where she is located.

Form

Due the background being blurred, the background is pixilated, making it appear highly textured. There is no obvious source of light, which makes me believe artificial light was used. One way of using artificial light would be by using a camera flash, which is what I believe was used here. The image's tones are cool, making the subject bright and friendly. The image also appears to have been enhanced to make the subject more prominent.

Medium

This is a digital photograph shared on Instagram.

Style

The subject's relation to the photographer seems to be one of a photographer and a model since she looks as though she is posing, and the photographer is focusing solely on her.

Genre

The genre of this image is portrait image.

Interpretation

This image is of one happy student. This suggests that the student is happy to be part of the university and that they enjoy being at the university. The colours of the student's clothes and the background reflect the moody weather and light of Newfoundland and Labrador. This image shows diversity and friendliness.

Comparing the Selected Images

Comparison is achieved by viewing the image beside a similar but significantly different image to identify unique features (Barrett, 1990; Schroeder, 2006). Comparing images that are similar helps define recurring themes. As Barnet (2002) suggests, comparison is focusing on the unique features of an image by holding it up against one that is similar. In this research, the images chosen for comparison were images that contained similarities. For example, two wide-angle pictures or two pictures with two subjects. As will be seen in the following section, where the two images were placed side by side. Similarities were noted in green, and differences were noted in pink.

Comparison – Images #5 and #6

Image 11 Winter and Fall;

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

The images being compared are image #5 and image #6. The similarities are that the subjects in image #5 and image #6 are walking away from the camera, wearing jeans, a jacket

and a backpack. The path they are walking through is defined. Another similarity is that both images were taken during the quintessential parts of winter and fall, respectively. The primary difference is that the background of the images is different. In image #6, the building is prominent in the background while the foreground is not busy. Image #5 is the opposite; the foreground is busy with trees, leaves, without a distinguishable building.

Images #5 and #6 convey the environment university campus by depicting two seasons, winter and fall. Both images show students with backpacks sending the message that no matter what the weather is like, students are dedicated to learning and attending class. These images are cohesive making the viewer associate them with the same Instagram account.

Comparison – Images #4 and #8

Image 12 *Focus on the Students;*

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account
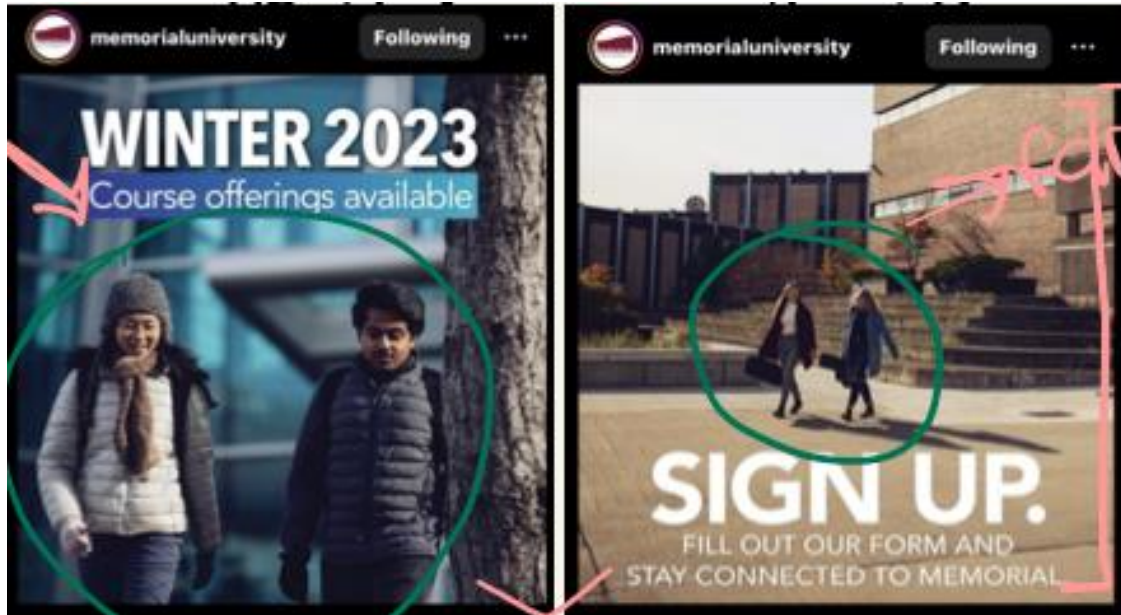
The images used for this comparison are images #4 and #8 as both images have two

subjects walking away from a building. Both images seem to have been taken during the cooler

months of the year as all four subjects are wearing fall or winter jackets. However, the main

difference is that image #4 is zoomed, focusing solely on the two subjects, and the background is

blurred. In comparison to image #8 where the two subjects are quite far away from the

photographer and the background is clear. Another difference is that the subjects in image #4 are

of different perceived genders (one female and one male) while the subjects in image #8 both

seem to be female.

Images #4 and #8 give a feeling of coziness and belonging, which comes from the way the

images were styled and the subjects depicted. These images send a message that the university

focuses on the student, as the focus point of both images is the students shown. Similar to the previous image, these students are carrying backpacks, suggesting that students are dedicated to their studies and attend class no matter the weather.

Comparison – Images #7 and #2

Image 13 *Two Student Groups;*

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

These two images were selected to be compared as both depict a group of friends walking. Image #7 has three subjects (all of whom appear to be female), and image #2 has four subjects, of which two appear to be female and two male. A big difference between these two images is the way the image has been edited, as even though both images have cooler tones, image #2 is a lot darker as it seems that the border was darkened during the editing process. By darkening the border of an image one can achieve a moodier look which helps draw attention to the subjects of the image. On the other hand, image #7 is bright and the border was not altered.

In both image #2 and #4 at least one of the students appear to be a person of colour or a person from another culture. These two images show the diversity of people and cultures that can be found in Memorial University. The diversity in the images sends the message that everyone is welcome, accepted, and friendships are multi-racial.

Comparison – Images #4 and #1

Image 14 *Students in Conversation;*

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account
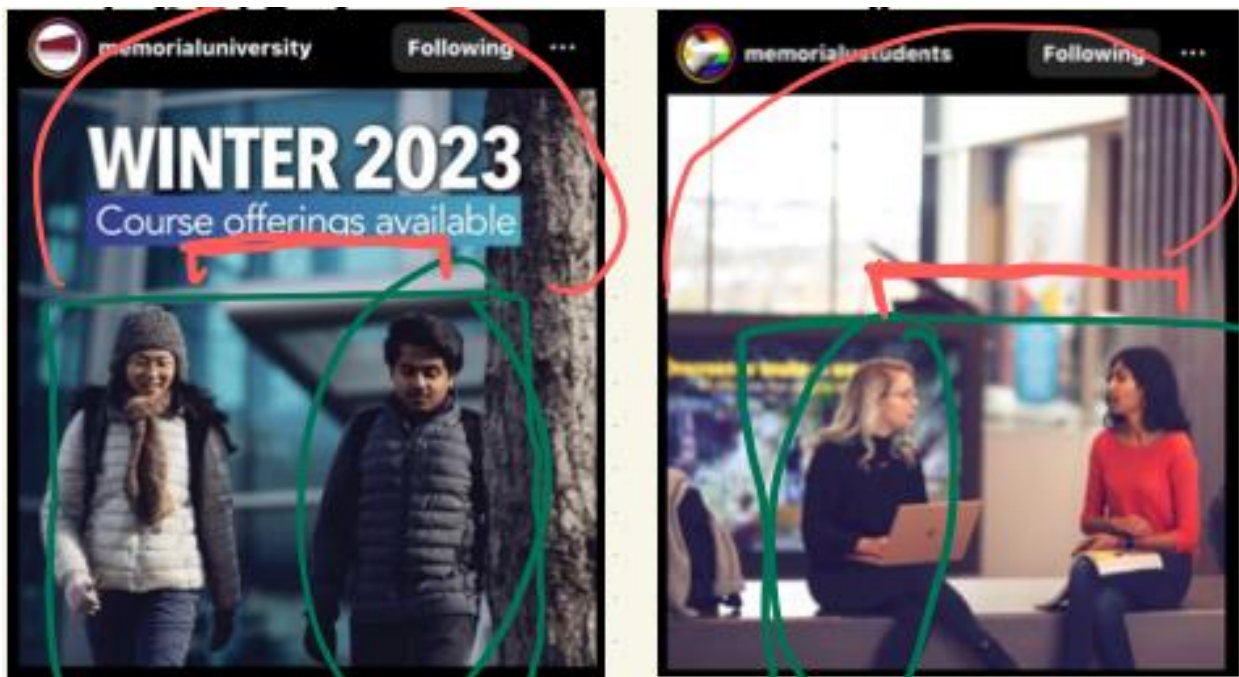
This set of images features two subjects in each, these subjects being the main focus of the photo, as the background is blurred in both. One subject in each of the images is wearing a dark outfit while the other subject is wearing a light-colored one. Both set of subjects appear to be talking to each other. The difference in image # 4 one subject is female while the other one is male; in image #1 both subjects are female. The background on both images is blurred however image #4 seems to be taken outside a building while image #1 seems to have been taken indoors.

The subjects on image #1 are sitting and have a laptop/book with them while the subjects in image #4 are walking and have backpacks.

Images # 4 and #1 send messages of cultural and racial acceptance, togetherness, and friendliness. Having the focus of each image being the students shows that the university is student-centered. Both images have a cooler tone, and they reflect the environment that can be experienced in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Images #3 and #9 are the same image but taken at different angles and at different times of day. Image #3 is edited to be darker and moodier yet keeping the cool tones. While image #9 seems to have been heavily edited to make it brighter. Image #10 is unique as it is the only one in this study that presents only one subject facing the camera with the angle being extremely close to the subject. While the three above-mentioned images could not be used in the comparison, they still portrayed the overall themes of cultural and racial diversity, a student-focused institution, and student reliance.

This section was focused on comparing images that had similar characteristics but were different enough allowing the themes of cultural and racial diversity, student focus, student resilience, and the environment of the geographical location of the university to be expressed. Even though the images were different, their characteristics allowed them to belong to one account. All ten images tell the stories of students at Memorial University, and each has its own characteristics just like the subjects in them. When put side by side, they all unite and help tell one overall story of success, belonging and happiness.

Captions, Likes, and Comments

The following section is an in-depth look at how the selected images were used on the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account. Table 1 was modified to record the number of likes and comments each post received. Each post's caption was also analyzed in search of how the university uses certain images to reach out and engage the community. It is important to note that the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account has 26 300 followers, is following 179 accounts, and has posted 1 841 posts. Is important to note as the number of likes and number of comments will be analyzed throughout this section.

Instagram Post #1

Table 13 Table Instagram Post 1

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image #1	April 20, 2023	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	101 likes	0 comments

Image 15 Two Sitting Students Instagram Version;

Source: *@MemorialUniversity Instagram account*

Caption

Image #1 is targeted towards new students. The caption talks about the MUN 101 which

is Memorial University's early and transition program aimed at first-year students.

> *"Hey new students!* 🤚
> *MUN 101 is Memorial's early orientation and transition program delivered online to*
> *help first-year undergraduate students prepare for university life, become involved in the*
> *community, and get set for success.*
> *It is delivered in Brightspace, Memorial's learning management system, to help you get*
> *acquainted with many of the tools and resources you'll be using when you officially start*
> *your degree program. MUN 101 is made up of six different modules to complete week-to-*
> *week on your own time. The information from each module will remain in the system so*
> *you can access it anytime.*
> *Log into Brightspace to get started!*
> *Note: All undergraduate students are automatically registered for MUN 101 and, while*
> *not a required program, students are encouraged to complete the course modules prior to*
> *the start of classes."*

The image of two students conversing in a library was used to promote this text as it

shows it shows that the university community is ready to help. One of the students in the image

has a computer which implies the older students are helping new students get acquainted with the

platforms and resources available at the university.

The Image

The image was cropped to fit the 1:1 ratio of Instagram. There were no other

modifications done to this image.

Likes

This post received 101 likes which means that the post was liked by 0.38% of the

account's following.

Comments

This post received no comments, which by nature is somewhat unusual. According to the website Mini Tool (2023) if the post owner turns off commenting, all current comments will be hidden and no new comments will be able to be made. A post targeted to new students and displaying no comments suggests that the university has turned off the comment feature for this post. The motivation behind deactivating the comments is unknown, but it can be speculated that comments were unhelpful and rude. Another reason why the comments might have been turned off may have been due to the MUNFA Strike. It is important to note that the Memorial University Student Union (MUNSU) was active during the strike.

Interpretation

The post promoted the MUN 101 orientation transition program. The image used to accompany the promotion of the orientation program, which was aimed at capturing the attention of new students by showing them that at Memorial University you will receive all the information you need, and that help will be available when required. The lack of engagement on this image might be due to it being posted in April while most new students are focusing on finishing high school rather than enrolling in university classes.

Instagram Post #2

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image #2	May 5, 2022	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	80 likes	4 comments

Image 16 Four Walking Students Instagram Version;

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Caption

Image #2 is targeted toward parents and supporters of students who have been accepted for the upcoming Fall semester. This image promotes a virtual questions and answers session for parents and supporters of new students. It also provides the audience with a link to register for the session.

> *"Parents & supporters! We know you have questions* ❓❓ *about your student attending Memorial this fall, so we're hosting a virtual Q&A just for YOU. Join us on May 18, at 7 p.m. NDT to get your questions answered by Memorial parents and staff.*
>
> *Register now* ☞ *www.mun.ca/student/new-students/parents-and-supporters/ (direct link in bio)"*

The post is aimed at parents and supporters of new students, therefore, having an image of a diverse group of students sends the message that Memorial University is an inclusive environment. Ensuring that parents and supporters of new students know that MUN is an inclusive and diverse institution helps put at ease doubts or concerns that international parents and supporters might have about sending their students to a Canadian institution.

The Image

The image has been manipulated and flipped from the original one. Text has been added as well as digital doodles. The text in the image is promoting the Q&A session, and the text and digital doodles are on the bottom half of the image. Nemet-Nejat (2003) suggests that seeing words on an image makes the viewer feel like the message is targeted to them. Therefore, the text that was added to this image helps connect parents and supporters of students to the university, as they will feel the university would like them to know that they also belong to the community.

Likes

This post was liked by 80 users meaning that it was liked by 0.304% of the users who follow the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account.

Comments

There are four comments in total. Two of them are replies from Memorial University to a user asking if the session was recorded. Memorial University provided the user with the link to the recording. The other comment is from a user looking for other users who have applied for a graduate program and they want to learn more about the master's in management. However, there are no replies to this comment.

By the university replying and providing the link to the recording to the comment asking if the session was recorded, they reinforce the notion that parents and supporters are cared for and belong to the university community. However, not answering the second comment suggests that the owners of the account do not want to engage with users whose comments are not related to the original post.

Interpretation

This post is targeted to one demographic, parents and supporters of new students, showing that the university cares for all members of its community. However, if users comment outside of the targeted message, the university will not engage with them. This is a promotional post as it is advertising a session with parents.
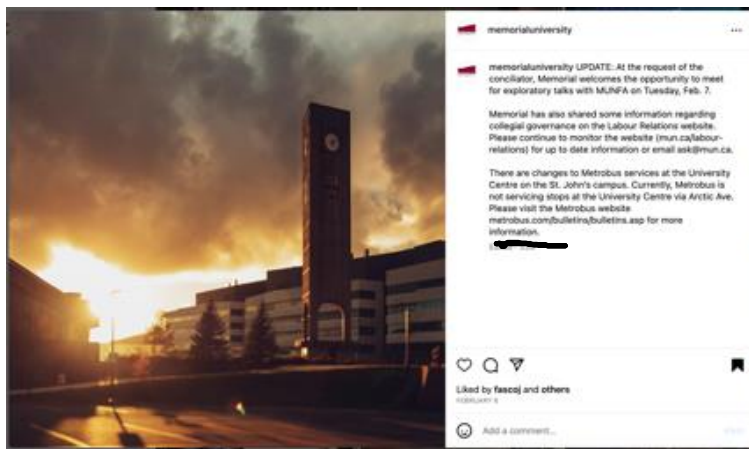
Instagram Post #3

Table 15 *Table Instagram Post 3*

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image #3	February 6th, 2023	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	100 likes	0 comments

Image 17 *Memorial University's Campus at Sunset Instagram Version;*

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Caption

Image #3 was posted during the Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty Association (MUNFA) 2023 strike, and was used to provide an update to the university community regarding reaching an agreement. It also provides information regarding collegial governance. The MUNFA 2023 strike sought to reach an agreement with Memorial University relating to changes that would improve the working conditions of its members (MUNFA, 2023).

> *"UPDATE: At the request of the conciliator, Memorial welcomes the opportunity to meet for exploratory talks with MUNFA on Tuesday, Feb. 7.*
>
> *Memorial has also shared some information regarding collegial governance on the Labour Relations website. Please continue to monitor the website (mun.ca/labour-relations) for up to date information or email ask@mun.ca.*

There are changes to Metrobus services at the University Centre on the St. John's campus. Currently, Metrobus is not servicing stops at the University Centre via Arctic Ave. Please visit the Metrobus website metrobus.com/bulletins/bulletins.asp for more information."

The image selected to accompany the message regarding MUNFA 2023 strike updates sends a message of calmness. Using an image that portrays calmness along with a message that invites exploratory talks gives the impression that the university is an open space and discussion is welcome.

The Image

The image was cropped to fit the 1:1 ratio of Instagram. There were no other modifications done to this image.

Likes

The image had 100 likes meaning 0.38% of the users who follow the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account liked the image.

Comments

This post has zero comments. As mentioned previously if no comments are displayed under the post this can often mean that the owner of the account hid the current comments, and disabled the comment feature such that no further comments could be posted. Given that this post was related to the MUNFA 2023 strike the university disabled the comments on this post to avoid inappropriate remarks.

Interpretation

This post was used to update the university community about the MUNFA 2023 strike. Using an image of the campus during sunset sends a message of calmness and openness,

however the lack of comments suggests that the owners of the Instagram account did not want

engagement related to the strike; this an informational post.

Instagram Post #4

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image #4	October 21, 2022	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	97 likes	1 comment

Image 18 Two Students Between Trees Instagram Version;

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Caption

This post is informing the university community that course offerings for the Winter 2023 semester have been posted online. It also informs that registration for undergraduate and graduate students begin on Nov. 7, Nov. 28, respectively. The caption also provides a link to the searchable list of courses.

The image that was chosen to go with the caption shows two students wearing winter jackets and accessories making a connection that next semester will be cold. The blue background also alludes to dawn of colder weather. The image provides an idea to students unfamiliar with the weather, what to expect and what to wear.

The Image

Graphics have been added to the image; the graphic reads *"Winter 2023 course offerings available."* This writing is at the top of the image, not covering the subjects. The image was cropped to fit the 1:1 ratio of Instagram.

Likes

The image received 97 likes, meaning that 0.36% of those who follow the @*MemorialUniversity* account liked the image.

Comments

There is one comment on this image where a user is asking why the remote delivery fee was reinstated, which goes unanswered. By the university not answering this question through a public forum, it suggests that the university does not want to acknowledge that the fee was reinstated.

Interpretation

The post informs students that registration for the following semester will open on certain days. The picture chosen to go along with this message alludes to the colder temperatures that will be present during the upcoming semester. This is an informational post directed towards students.
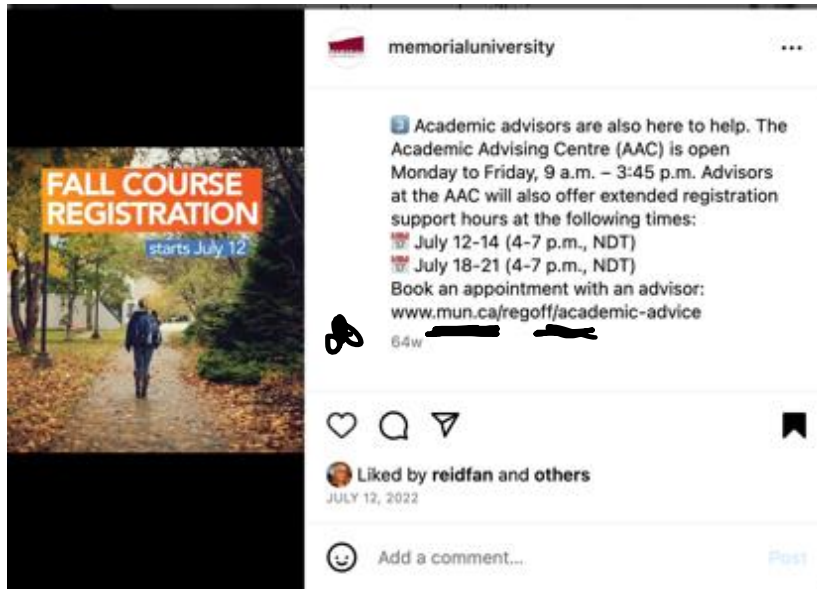
Instagram Post #5

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image #5	July 12, 2022	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	99 likes	0 comments

Image 19 *Student Walking in Fall Instagram Version;*

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Caption

This post informs the community that registration for the Fall 2022 semester starts on July 12. They are also giving new students tips on registering for the best course availability. If students need assistance registering, the post provides a checklist of what to look for. It also gives students information regarding the availability of academic advisors.

> *"Undergraduate registration for the 🍂fall 🍂 semester begins today, July 12.*
> *✨TIP ✨*
> *For the best course availability, register as close as possible to your registration date/time. Your registration time is in Newfoundland time.*

Need help selecting your first semester courses?
☐Review the course offerings and create a sample schedule/timetable before you register: www.mun.ca/regoff

2☐Check out www.mun.ca/undergrad/first-year-information for sample first year programs, courses available in your first year of studies, and other registration resources and advice.

3☐Academic advisors are also here to help. The Academic Advising Centre (AAC) is open Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. – 3:45 p.m. Advisors at the AAC will also offer extended registration support hours at the following times:
🗓 July 12-14 (4-7 p.m., NDT)
🗓 July 18-21 (4-7 p.m., NDT)
Book an appointment with an advisor: www.mun.ca/regoff/academic-advice"

The image selected to go along with this caption is related because it provides a visual of what the Fall season looks like. However, posting a Fall heavy image during the middle of summer does not produce engagement as students are likely enjoying their summer break. The abundance of information sends the message to new students about the resources and support the university provides and that the university is setting up students for success.

The Image

Graphics have been added to this image, and the graphics say, "*Fall course registration starts July 12"*. These graphics are located at the top of the image, which avoids taking away from the main subject.

Likes

This post received 99 likes meaning that 0.37% of those who follow the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account liked the image.

Comments

There are no comments on this post. Since the post has no comments it can be concluded that the owner of the account hid the current comments and disabled the comment feature, which

often means that the comments received under this post where not helpful or disrespectful and the university does not want them displayed.

Interpretation

This post and the accompanying image were posted during the middle of summer, which may have affected the engagement of the post, causing it to lack comments instead of Memorial disabling the feature due to them being inappropriate in nature. This is an informational post targeting students, especially new students who need to register for classes.

Instagram Post 6

Table 18 Table Instagram Post 6

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image #6	February 15, 2023	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	99 likes	2 comments and one reply

Image 20 Snowy Walk Instagram Version; Source:

@MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Caption

This post informs the community that on that day, February 15th the university and its

campuses on the east side of Newfoundland will be closed due to a winter storm. They note that

a further announcement will be made at 10:00 a.m., later that day. The post also advises the

community to download an app called MUN Safe, which gives updates about campus.

> *"WEATHER ALERT FEB. 15: Due to adverse weather, Memorial University's St. John's, Marine Institute and Signal Hill campuses are closed for the morning, for all faculty, staff and students. The Memorial University Childcare Centre is also closed for the morning.*
>
> *A further announcement will be made at 10 a.m.*
>
> *Please download the MUN SAFE app for complete details and updates."*

The image selected to go along with a post informing the community about bad weather is fitting, as it depicts a snow-covered campus. It also provides an idea to upcoming students what the winter semester looks like with regard to the weather.

The image

The image was cropped to fit the 1:1 ratio of Instagram.

Likes

This image received 99 likes which means that 0.37% of those who follow the account interacted with the post.

Comments

One commenter is asking if the strike has been sorted out, to which another user replies stating that the strike is over. The second commenter comments the following: *"It's beyond me why we wouldn't just go back to school after the reading week."* This post showing slightly opinionated comments, further solidifies the idea that previous posts' comment sections were hidden and disabled as the comments were not related to the message of the post.

Interpretation

This post shows that users will tend to engage and comment on posts about unrelated topics. It also shows that the university monitors the comment section of posts and disables those whose comments deviate from the theme of the post. This is an informational post.

Instagram Post 7

Table 19 Table Instagram Post 7

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image #7	November 14, 2022	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	99 likes	14 comments and 7 replies

Image 21 Three Friends Instagram Version;

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Caption

This post informs the community that follows the Instagram account

@MemorialUniversity, that the international student recruiters will be visiting schools and

communities in Bangladesh, to provide information sessions for students interested in Memorial

University.

> *We're on the way!* 😀 🎒 📃 💻
> *View the schedule: mun.ca/undergrad/events-and-information-sessions*
> *We will be visiting schools and communities for prospective student events and information sessions."*

The way that the subjects are walking along with the post's caption reinforces the message that Memorial University is on the way to visit communities in Bangladesh. The brightness of the image sends the message of friendliness and diversity.

The Image

The image has two graphics added to it; they are in the right top corner of the image. The graphics read: "*Meet Memorial, Bangladesh*". The image was cropped to fit the 1:1 ratio of Instagram as well and it was flipped from the original one.

Likes

This image received 99 likes which means that 0.37% of those who follow the account interacted with the post.

Comments

This image has 14 comments. Three comments are users asking for more information about specific programs, or seeking advice on what program they should apply to considering their background. In response to all three of these comments, Memorial University provides the commenters with a link to the program information.

> One commenter commented: *"I am waiting!!!! Please consider my application for Grad. Studies"*
> Another commenter commented: *"And I'm coming 😊 to be part of this great institute 😊"*
> Another comment: *" 🖤 🖤 hey memorial... i am just waiting for you... 😊...from : Bangladesh BD"*
> The last comment says: *"Good effort but The picture and the text does not match. 😄"*

Interpretation

This post received the most comments from the ten posts used in this study. It can be speculated that the reason why this post received the most comments is due to the message of the

post, in combination with that of which the image itself sends naturally of a friendly,

multicultural, and diverse university. This post is promotional in nature, specifically targeting

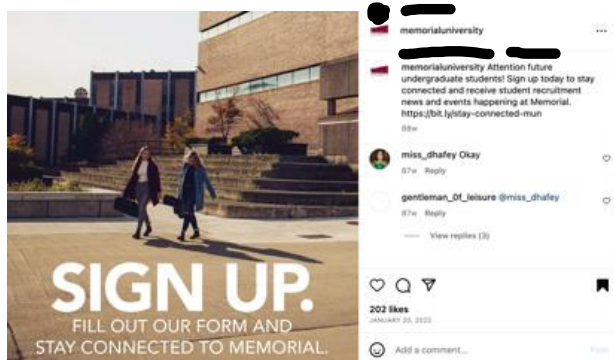international students from a specific country.

Instagram Post 8

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image #8	January 20, 2022	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	202 likes	2 comments and 3 replies

Image 22 Two Music Students by the Library Instagram Version;

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Caption

This post is targeting future undergraduate students. The post is encouraging students to sign up to stay connected and receive news and event invitations from the student recruitment team. A link is also provided in the caption.

> *"Attention future undergraduate students! Sign up today to stay connected and receive student recruitment news and events happening at Memorial. https://bit.ly/stay-connected-mun."*

The Image

The words "*SIGN UP. FILL OUT OUR FORM AND STAY CONNECTED TO MEMORIAL.*" These words were added on the bottom part of the image. The image was cropped to fit the 1:1 ratio of Instagram

Likes

This post received 202 likes, making this the post with the second most likes from those reviewed. This means that 0.76% of those who follow the *@MemorialUniversity* account engaged with the post.

Comments

One comment simply says "*Okay*". The other commenter is tagging a user, the replies are as follows:

> User A: *"they said undergraduate, so I don't think it applies for us"*
> User B: *"I sent u the link to follow the page"*
> User A: *"okay"*

Interpretation

The commenters of this post were the population that the post was targeted to. Regardless of whether they are not future undergraduate students, they are future students and a connection with the university has been created. This post uses emotional appeal as it shows two students going to class after leaving the library; this shows dedication. Feature students can picture themselves walking to class in that specific location. This is a promotional post.

Instagram Post 9

Table 21 *Table Instagram Post 9*

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image # 9	April 26, 2023	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	102 likes	2 comments and 8 replies

Image 23 *The Clock Tower Instagram Version;*

Source @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Caption

This post is informing students that grades for the winter 2023 will be available on April

26, 2023 at 5:00 pm, NST through the Memorial self-service platform.

> *"Winter semester grades will be available today, April 26 at 5 p.m. NST via*
> *Memorial Self-Service, my.mun.ca.*
> *Remember to show compassion and be kind with yourself as grades are released!*
> 🫶 😌 🫂"
> *You can find more information about your academic status at*
> *mun.ca/regoff/records/status.*

Interpretation

This post is interesting given that the image and the message are not connected. While it is a

picture of part of the Memorial University campus, this image does not align with its message

"*Remember to show compassion and be kind with yourself as grades are released*".

The Image

The image was cropped to fit the 1:1 ratio of Instagram.

Likes

This image received 102 likes meaning that 0.38% of those who follow the

@MemorialUniversity account interacted with the post.

Comments

There are two main comments, the first one the user says *"Good luck everyone!"* and the second

comment says: *"I wish I can come to this university* 🥺🥺*".* This comment has the following

replies:

> *"User A: nah stay away*
> *User B: why?*
> *User C: @originalposter same question*
> *User A: @userC admin that doesnt care, continually rising tuition costs, average or*
> *worse profs in most faculties and eternally shitty weather*
> *User D: @userC highest taxes in canada, absolute shitty quality of life, nothing fun to do*
> *here.*
> *User E: @originalposter   don't*
> *User F: @originalposter why do you wish apply for the university if you don't know how*
> *UserF: @userC why do you wish apply for the university if you don't know how"*

Interpretation

Compared to the posts that have been analyzed so far, this post is the most interesting due

to the comments the post received. The targeted population of the post was current students.

However, a potential future student commented on their intention to join the university only to

have another commenter suggest that some users have had a bad experience with the university

and the province, so much so that they are willing to let others know in a public way. This post

was originally an informational post but the comments converted it to a promotional post.

Instagram Post 10

Image Number	Date Posted on Instagram	Quality of Image	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
Image # 10	November 18, 2021	1080 x 1080 pixels 1:1 ratio	222 likes	1 comment

Image 24 Smiling at the Camera Instagram Version;

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Caption

The message of the post is the following:

> *"📢📢 #MUNStudents! The 3M National Student Fellowship award is for visionary student leaders from postsecondary institutions who demonstrate outstanding leadership and innovation through seeing current needs in higher education or society and implementing change. Up to 10 Fellowships are awarded each year to current full time undergraduate students at Canadian postsecondary institutions. For more information about the award and application process, visit www.stlhe.ca/awards/3m-national-student-fellowship/ and contact leadership@mun.ca."*

Interpretation

The image used for this post shows a happy student suggesting that the student may have been awarded the 3M National Student Fellowship; the fellowship that the post is advertising. Using this image encourages other students to apply for the fellowship as they could also be winners just like the student in the image.

The Image

Text has been added to the original image, the text added reads "*3M National Student Fellowship, Apply by Jan 31, 2022*" The graphics are added to the right of the subject of the image, and the image was cropped to fit the 1:1 ratio of Instagram.

Likes

This image received 222 likes meaning that 0.84% of those who follow the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account interacted with the post. This post has the most likes of those analyzed in this study.

Comments

There is only one comment and the user commented " 🖤 "

Interpretation

This post had the most likes of all ten used in this study. This suggests that those users who interact with the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account like seeing happy students as it sends the message that students are content and satisfied with their experience at the university. The only comment suggests that the person who commented might be the student in the image, and recipient of the fellowship the year prior. This is an informational post.

Conclusions

This chapter used Critical Visual Analysis to analyze the ten images selected through detailed descriptions, initial interpretations, comparison, and description within context of the Instagram account. From the analysis done, it can be concluded that firstly the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account is used for promotional and informational messages, and images can be used for both. Either way, whether the motivation is for promotion or information, the main purpose of the image is for the viewer to create a sense of place. Secondly, although Instagram is used to connect, the analysis here indicates public engagement through social media may not be effective. This can be seen throughout the ten selected images, as most of the engagement is low. The posts analyzed, did not have high interaction except for the seemingly neutral informational posts. This conclusion highlights the fluid nature of social media where outcomes are often difficult to manage. Finally, the analysis of these images shows an emphasis on the symbolic buildings landscape, snow, and wide, open spaces. This emphasis highlights a sense of place and as it has emerged as a significant theme, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Images and Sense of Place

Introduction

The ten images selected can be sorted into three groups: 1) images that create a sense of place and follow the Memorial University photo brand standards, 2) images that align with Memorial University's brand standards but do not entirely create a sense of place, and 3) images that create a sense of place but do not follow the brand standards.

Sense of Place

A sense of place is ever-changing as people evolve and the upkeep of the physical space. However, some characteristics can be used to define what a sense of place is. Those characteristics are the physicality of it the functionality of the space, the reciprocal influence of the area and the individual and the emotionality attached to the space (Darby & Ozata, 2017 and Gatti & Procentese, 2020). This means that for a space to become meaningful to someone, all of the characteristics mentioned above need to be present, however, with social media, an attachment can be formed without having the physical experience (Gatti & Procentese 2020). This suggests that social media can influence how others experience space through visual representation. Adding to the sense of place, Nemet-Nejat (2003) indicates that the experience of looking at an image with text is enhanced as the text makes the image come to life and speaks to the viewer directly. According to Darby & Ozata (2017), place is the humanization of space; this means that space becomes a place once someone gives meaning. For example, a house will only become someone's home when memories, things, and activities are associated with it. In the context of university professor Gopalan's research, this shows that the student body's sense of belonging within an institution improves academic outcomes, increases continuing enrollment and it protects student's mental health (Gopalan, 2023).

MUN Brand Standards

The Marketing and Communication (2021) website states that a brand at its core is a promise based on a set of values…promotional materials and campaigns are manifestations of the promise – Memorial is the natural place for people and ideas to become. Their Brand Standards guidelines state that:

"*Photography plays a large role in continuing to build Memorial's brand, to tell the story of Memorial. When used for marketing materials, photographs should be carefully chosen to reflect the brand in composition, colour and tone. Memorial's brand photos have a raw intensity that captures the Newfoundland light and environment — subdued, moody, ethereal, intense, and dramatic. Shadows are cool and deep, while highlights are bold and punchy. The bright colours in the colour palette work well in contrast with the moodiness of these photos. When considering composition, angles and facial expressions should be unusual, unexpected, and candid. A shallow depth of field should be used when shooting a subject. Please refer to the samples for clarification.* (Memorial University Brand Standards Version II, 2017, pg. 84)".

The brand standards suggest that the images used need to help tell the story of Memorial University. The ten images used for this study are used to promote the university to potential new students and as informational posts. Both promotional and informational posts represent the university in a public forum.

Images that Influence a Sense of Place and Adhere to the MUN Brand Standards

Image #1

Image 25 Two Sitting Students

Source: Flickr

Image 26 Two Sitting Students Instagram Version;

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

This image presents students sitting inside a building. One of the students is shown with a computer, and the other has an open book. The students are talking about a project they are working on together. A physical sense of place is created through the location of the image. Even though the background is blurred, it suggests they are inside a library building, collaborating for their class assignment. A functional sense of place is created through conversation as the

students seem to be talking to each other. It can be assumed that they are working together as one has an open book and the other an open computer. A psychological sense of place is created by showing the two students working together on a project. Those who view the image through social media can picture themselves in a similar scenario.

When analyzing this image, it can be concluded that the image follows the Memorial University (MUN) brand standards. The subjects of this image are the main focus, suggesting that the image was shot using a shallow depth of field. The shadows in the picture are deep, while the highlights are bright and punchy. Even though this image is not shot outside, the brightness conveyed through the windows behind the subjects and the deep shadows on the bottom half of the picture make it intense and subdued. These elements are part of the MUN brand as it depicts a place with open spaces.

This post is a promotional post. This image was used in the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account to promote MUN 101, an early orientation and transition program for new students.

Image # 2

In this image, a group of what is perceived to be friends is shown. These friends seem to be conversing while they walk. The group appears comfortable with each other, and their environment is emotionally warm despite being physical cold. A physical sense of space is created through the location where the image was captured; the blurred background shows a building with many windows, which might be a dormitory building, with the group of friends are walking away from it on a path surrounded by trees. A functional sense of space is created through the actions of the group of friends. It is perceived that the group of friends is talking and

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laughing with each other; a typical activity between friends. A psychological sense of space is created by showing people who seem comfortable and happy with each other. Together, the image's elements influence attachment to the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account.

According to MUN's brand standards, photos associated with the university should "capture the light and environment of Newfoundland and Labrador – subdued, moody, ethereal, intense, and dramatic. The composition of the images needs to be unusual in terms of angles and facial expressions" (Brand Standards Version 2, 2017). The MUN brand standards are applied to Image #2; not only is the background is moody and subdued, but because of the angle used to capture the subjects, they appear intense and dramatic. The brand standards help create a sense of space, reinforcing MUN's brand as a "natural place for people and ideas to become" (Marketing & Communications, Memorial University, 2021). This can mean that despite having a subdued and moody environment, the university provides a natural environment for people to become friends, colleagues, and experts and for ideas to become reality.

In the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account, this image was used to recruit parents and supporters of new students to attend a virtual questions and answers session. Making this post a promotional post. The choice of the image might help reinforce to parents and supporters that their student is going to a unique and friendly university. Image #2 is an example of an experience of a place that elicits a sense of space through social media.
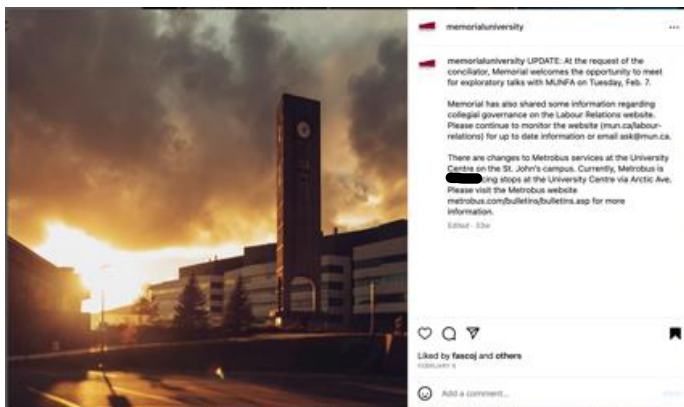
Image #3

Image #3 is a photograph of the Memorial University campus. It showcases three buildings: the iconic clock tower, the Queen Elizabeth II library's silhouette, and the new Core Science building. The Clock Tower and the Queen Elizabeth II library are buildings that old and new MUN stakeholders recognize, alike. Paul Johnson paid for the construction of the Clock Tower in the 1990s; it was meant to commemorate Newfoundland soldiers who fought during World War I and to provide a visual focus for the university (Howells, 2016). The tower has become an icon to the university as it appears in many of the images taken of the campus, and the courtyard where it sits, provides a venue for activities to take place. More recent stakeholders

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would recognize the new Core Science building, and may associate it instead as the focal point of the university. Kusumowldagdo et al. (2022) say that the physical characteristics of a space can create a relationship between place and people. This image makes and reinforces the three dimensions of a sense of place. The physical meaning of place is supported by having three recognizable buildings as the focus of the image, the functional significance of the place is created through the activities that take place in the library and the science building, and lastly, the psychological sense of place is created by the picture having no human subjects and instead allow viewers to place themselves in that exact spot on campus and watch a similar sunset. It provides the viewer with a connection to the university and can also remind them of evenings they experienced back home with their family, when feeling homesick.

Image #3 is representative of Memorial University's brand standards as the photo captures the "raw intensity of the light and environment of Newfoundland and Labrador" through the image's subdued, moody, intense, and dramatic composition. This image reinforces that even though the university is situated in a place with moody and gloomy weather, there is space to be intense and let dreams become reality.

In the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account, Image #3 was used to provide an update about the Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty Association (MUNFA) strike during early 2023. In this strike, MUNFA members sought to improve working conditions and transparency regarding collegial governance (MUNFA, 2023). An image without people was chosen to go along with the message due to the high tensions between the university community and the administration group. By removing any subjects, the message the image provides is

calmness and openness. The image has one hundred likes and zero comments. Despite the lack of comments, the high count of likes shows that the image still captured the public's attention.

Image #5

This image shows what is perceived to be a student walking through campus on a crisp autumn day. The student's direction is towards a building carrying a backpack, so it can be assumed that they are heading to class. The physical sense of place is communicated through this

image by the nature surrounding the student, as the photo captures the quintessence of the season. The sense of functional place is communicated by the student walking towards a building with a backpack as it shows the activity of going to class. The emotional sense of place is expressed through this image as the viewers of the post on social media can picture themselves on that same path on a similar day going to class, creating a mental connection to the campus of the university.

Image #5 follows the MUN brand standards for images, showing one of the four seasons that can be experienced while students are on campus. The image is subdued, moody, ethereal and dramatic. The student walking towards class as the trees change colour emphasizes the action of going to class as dramatic and unique. This image has cool and deep shadows with bright highlights, and the contrast between the deep shadows and bright leaves creates an eye-catching composition.

The *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account used this image to promote the start of the registration process for the Fall 2022 semester, meaning that this a promotional post. It also provides new students tips on how to have a successful registration process. This post had the lowest amount of likes and comments from the images used in this study, with 99 likes and zero comments. This is interesting as the post is informative and may be helpful for new students.

Image #7

Image 33 *Three Friends:*

Source: Flickr

Image 34 *Three Friends Instagram Version;*

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

The subjects in this image are all that can be perceived as female. Two of them have light

skin, while one of them has a darker skin tone. The subjects appear to be walking up a set of

stairs together in mid-conversation. This image embodies all three dimensions included in a

sense of place. First, the physical sense of place is created by the location where the photo was

captured and the buildings in the background. The functional sense of place is created through

the actions of the group; they are talking, an activity, in a friendly way. Finally, the psychological sense of place is created by the idea that the group is made up of three friends laughing with the well-recognized buildings in the background. The laughing of students creates a connection between the viewer and the post as it is playing on the viewer's emotions. Potential students can picture themselves laughing with friends while walking through campus.

Image #7 shows a different type of image as it is not subdued or moody per the MUN brand standards. However, this photograph captures other aspects of what the university considers branded photography, such as "the composition of the images, angles, and facial expressions should be unusual, unexpected and candid" (Brand Standards Version 2, 2017). Image #7 is the contrary of subdued and moody, but the colour palette chosen contrasts and works well with the moodier images. The brand standards also note how pictures contrast with one another. If the physical characteristics of MUN were not showcased in this image, it might not be easy to associate this image with Memorial University.

This image was used in the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account to amplify Memorial's student recruiter's promotional visit to Bangladesh. This image was used to advertise recruitment activities in Bangladesh due to the student of colour being shown in this image. This represents the different cultures and countries from which students come to the university. Compared to the other images used in this study, this image has the least number of likes but the greatest number of comments, summing 21 comments in total. Many comments are about people being excited to learn more about Memorial University. However, the last comment says, *"Good effort, but The picture and the text do not match.* 😄*."* This comment suggests that the

commenter has already made a connection with MUN via social media, that they were captivated by the image but noticed the discrepancy between the image post and the caption. This indicates that the user had humanized MUN as a space and felt a sense of place.
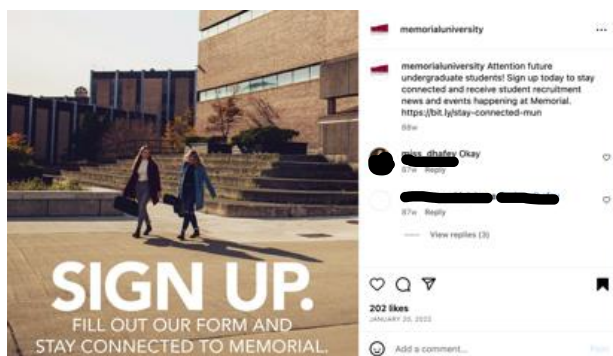
Image #8

Image 35 Two Music Students by the Library;

Source: Flickr

Image 36 Two Music Students by the Library Instagram Version;

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

This image shows two friends, which can be perceived as females walking away from a building. They seem to be conversing and carrying what appear to be musical instrument cases. The building they are walking away from is the Queen Elizabeth II (QEII) Library. A physical sense of place is created in this image through the location of the picture. The sense of space is

created through the subjects facing away from the QEII Library building carrying musical instruments. One other structure can also be seen in the background, and the weather seems more moderate. A functional sense of place is created by walking away from the library. It can be assumed that they are leaving the library after a study or practice session. The psychological sense of place is created by having two friends talking to each other and walking away from studying; it would be easy for someone to picture themselves in the same situation.

When analyzing this picture, it can be concluded that this image follows the MUN brand standards. This image captures the light and environment of Newfoundland and Labrador uniquely. The image has punchy and bold highlights and cool, deep shadows. Looking at the promise that "Memorial is the natural place for people and ideas to become," it can be said that this image is helping promote this, as it can be deduced that the subjects are students looking at a future in the music industry.

In the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account, this image was used to target future undergraduate students, making this a promotional post. The choice of image suggests that the university is showing students and what they can become if they enroll at MUN. This image has 202 likes, the second most out of the 10 pictures used in this study and has a total of five comments. The commenters are users who may be interested in continuing their studies at Memorial University, which shows that the image and the caption have caught their attention and, therefore, a connection with the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account. Kusumowidagdo et al., 2022 state that experiences in a place may be found both in a physical space and in social media, which this image is an example of.
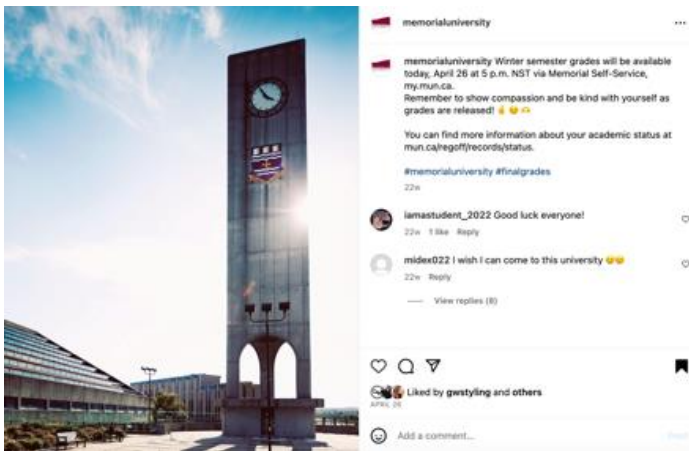
Image #9

Image 37 *The Clock Tower;*

Source: Flickr

Image 38 *The Clock Tower Instagram Version;*

Source @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

The MUN Clock Tower and the Queen Elizabeth II Library are the focal points of this image. These buildings are recognized by many who are familiar with Memorial University. Looking closely at the photo, a person can be spotted sitting on the benches to the left of the clock tower. A sense of physical place is communicated through this image by the physical characteristics of the image. The crest of the university can be seen on the clock tower, portraying themes of fraternity. The person sitting on the bench communicates a functional sense

of place; prospective students can picture themselves sitting and enjoying the fresh air. A psychological sense of place is expressed by presenting the iconic, physical characteristics of MUN within the image.

Image #9 follows the Memorial University brand standards for images, depicting the intense light and characteristic environment found in Newfoundland and Labrador. The shadows of the image are deep, while the highlights are punchy. These characteristics help this image represent the university in the social media environment.

In the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account, this image was used to inform the community about the release of grades for the Winter 2023 semester. This post is an informational post. The post received 102 likes and a total of 10 comments. The comments in this image are interesting, as one user comments on their desire to enroll at Memorial University. At the same time, the commenters discourage the original user from enrolling, as they note that the weather in the city could be better and there is nothing fun to do. This is interesting as one aspect that MUN looks at when posting images is that the photo showcases the uniqueness of the Newfoundland and Labrador weather and nature in a positive light. Even though the comments do not relate to the image's message, the post can be seen as successful as it is getting Instagram users to interact about the characteristics that make the university's location unique.

Images that Only Adhere to the MUN Brand Standards

Image #10

Image 39 *Smiling at the Camera;*

Source: Flickr.

Image 40 *Smiling at the Camera Instagram Version;*

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Image #10 is a portrait image of what appears to be a female smiling at the camera. This image reflects the shallow depth of field when shooting a subject. The subject's facial expression is one of happiness compared to the rest of the images used in this study. This composition is unique; the subject's choice of outfit colour scheme and the way shadows and highlights are used

represent the light and environment of Newfoundland and Labrador. They also make the image moody, intense and dramatic.

This image does not create a three-dimensional sense of place as the shallow depth of field blurs the background, making it impossible for social media viewers to connect to a physical characteristic. A functional sense of place is not communicated as this image is a portrait type. However, the subject's intense smile shares the emotional sense of place. Viewers can relate that the subject's smiles, meaning that they are happy with their experience at Memorial University.

In the *@MemorialUniversity* account, this image was used to inform the student population about the 3M National Student Fellowship. This is an informational post. This image received 222 likes, which is the highest number of likes a photo received in this study, but the engagement in comments was low, with only one comment. From the number of likes, it can be deduced that the image was attention-grabbing to like but could have performed better in engagement from comments.

Images that Influence a Sense of Place but do not Adhere to the MUN Brand Standards

Image #4

Image 41 Two Students Between Trees;

Source: Flickr

Image 42 Two Students Between Trees Instagram Version;

Source: @MemorialUniversity Instagram account

Two subjects can be seen in this image: one that can be perceived as female and one that can be perceived as male. The subjects are conversing while walking away from what can be interpreted as a building on campus. Both subjects are wearing backpacks, suggesting that they are leaving or going to class. A physical sense of place is created by the building in the background and the students' backpacks. The activity of the subjects walking and conversing communicates a functional sense of place. An emotional sense of place is expressed since the subjects are friends and walking together. This image conveys that friends go to class together

and helps prospective students picture themselves with friends, which is a common concern when leaving home.

While the image is subdued, it has a cool undertone. This image is not representative of the Memorial University brand standards. This image does not have the "raw intensity that captures the Newfoundland light and environment" (Brand Standards Version 2, 2017). The light and colours are not bright to contrast the deep shadows. The angle and composition are unique and candid; however, compared to the reference images within the MUN Brand Standards document and the other eight images used in this study, Image #4 feels out of place.

In the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account, this image was used to announce that course offerings for the Winter 2023 semester can be found online and to inform students of their registration dates, making this is an informational post. This image received 97 likes and one comment. The only comment on this image is about reinstating the remote delivery fee. This comment is related to the post but not the idea.

Image #6

Image 43 *Snowy Walk;*

Source: Flickr

Image 44 *Snowy Walk Instagram Version; Source:*

@MemorialUniversity Instagram account

This image shows a person walking through a snow-covered path toward a building. The subject looks like they are wearing a winter coat and a backpack, therefore, it can be deduced that the subject of this image is a student. This image creates a sense of physical place through the snow that is on the ground and the buildings that frame the picture. A sense of functional place is communicated through the students walking towards the buildings with a backpack, as it can be assumed they are going to class. An emotional sense of place is present in this image as

those viewing this post on social media can picture themselves walking to class through a snow-covered campus. Those potential students who have not experienced winter might find this image intriguing.

Image #6 does not adhere to the Memorial University standards as this image is bright; there is an absence of deep shadows or punchy highlights. It captures and conveys the intensity of a Newfoundland winter; however, the image must be subdued, moody, ethereal, intense, or dramatic to better reflect the Memorial's brand. The composition of this image is not unusual or unexpected.

In the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account, this image was used to inform the university community that the campuses on the east side of Newfoundland will be closed due to a snowstorm. This is an informational post. The image received 99 likes and two comments. The comments on this image are not related to the post's picture or message but instead users commenting on the MUNFA strike that occurred in early 2023.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the theme of a sense of place in each image. As well as I also studied the Memorial University Brand Standards documented and analyzed whether the images selected adhered to the standards. The findings show that 1) the images try to create a unique sense of place through light, atmosphere nature and symbols. Potential students can picture themselves in that picture, creating a connection with the university. The analysis of the images

shows diversity, inclusion, and belonging. Through the portrayal of groups, people of colour, and a calm atmosphere, diversity, inclusion and belonging are present in the pictures.

 2) In line with brand standards, this research showcases the alignment between what marketing aims and what is communicated. 3) It is quite difficult to create a sense of place. Creating a sense of place through social media is challenging, but the images chosen to represent Memorial University have aspects that potential students can connect with when viewed online. The uniqueness of Newfoundland and Labrador lies within its climate, vast, rugged expanses, and its picturesque landscapes. A sense of place is created through a combination of physical, functional, and psychological characteristics. Memorial University uses its natural surroundings to create a unique brand; a brand that promotes ideas to become reality.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Discussion

Introduction

The island of Newfoundland is part of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the "most easterly province in Canada" (Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism, 2022) and home to Memorial University (MUN). MUN is the only university in the province. Given its isolated geographical location and the declining number of local students, Memorial University (MUN) has sought to take advantage of new technologies, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, to promote its brand and attract students across the world. This study aims to explore Memorial University's (MUN) use of its official Instagram account *@MemorialUniversity*, particularly the use of images to promote MUN to attract students. This account promotes the university, reminds students of deadlines, and connects with the public. Its broad reach and purposes make this account ideal for this study. During this study, I have reviewed the literature on university advertising, university branding, the use of social media, and critical visual analysis. After crafting the methodology, the data collection phase started, where ten images were collected described in detail and analyzed in various ways. This chapter will discuss close findings, the research questions, meta-conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study.

Revisiting the Literature

Chapter 4 of this research focused on a critical visual analysis of the ten images selected. From the analysis conducted I concluded that the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account is used for both promotional and informational posts. Although images can create a sense of connection, my analysis shows that images used in social media posts do not always generate

engagement. The analysis also shows that when choosing images for social media, the university focuses on and emphasizes buildings, the landscape and the Newfoundland and Labrador weather.

Using the same account to both promote and inform speaks to the notion that social media creates endless opportunities for engagement, as both types of posts had some type of engagement. However, the study also showed that even though the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account is used to connect, it does not have high interaction except for informational posts which perform well by this metric. This suggests that any type of post will create interaction and act as marketing material on a platform such as Instagram.

As mentioned in the literature, universities and colleges have become more interested in advertising campaigns. Their interest in advertising is motivated by changes in their student demographics; more and more students are coming from outside the provinces and internationally, which also causes more competition between post-secondary institutions. Davis and Piven (2014) note that social media is vital to the advertising and branding of post-secondary institutions as it creates endless opportunities for engagement. The results from this study suggest that the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account is used for promotional and informational posts.

In the studies by Stuart et al. (2017) and Blanco-Sanchez & Moreno-Albarracin's (2022), universities generally post pictures of nature around campus, campus life, students and other university community members. This study shows that such posts are what Memorial University

mostly posts about, staying consistent with the literature. Instagram images can be taken at face value but the hidden messages that students are receiving are those of diversity, inclusion, and belonging, therefore creating a virtual sense of place between the viewer and the university account.

In the literature, branding as stated by Moore (2004) is the promise of an experience. The promise of an experience is the idea of branding for the institution, of in other words it is the expectation of what reality will be like. This study shows that Memorial University (MUN) emphasizes landscape, big open spaces, light and environment to establish its branding. The promise that MUN is making is that "Memorial University is the natural place for people and ideas to become," (Marketing & Communications, Memorial's brand, 2023) the emphasis on landscapes, big open spaces, light, and environment suggests that students have a place that will allow them to grow and achieve their dreams.

In the literature, it is noted that Instagram is a method to connect physical and digital spaces while enhancing online presence and identity (Abbott et al. 2013). The results of this study show that overall, by adhering to the Memorial University brand standards, these photos focus on creating a sense of place. Memorial University is using Instagram to connect their physical campus and community through a digital medium, to those that cannot be physically present. The more they post and adhere to their brand standards, the greater MUN will continue to enhance their online presence and identity.

In chapter 5, sense of place, I explored how sense of place is present in each of the selected images, as well I explored if the university adheres to its photographic brand standards. The results showed that the images selected overall align with the Memorial Brand Standards; most images focus on creating a sense of place. The research also explains how the images show diversity, inclusion and belonging.

Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) has used Instagram to attract students. It uses emotional appeal primarily through images to attract new students on Instagram. However, MUN is also using text that uses the emotional appeal component. The Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), under their Academic Recruitment tab, has the following statement: "Memorial provides a distinctive and stimulating environment for learning in St. John's, a safe, friendly city with great historic charm, vibrant cultural life and easy access to a wide range of outdoor activities" (Recruitment, 2021). The above quote sets a clear mental image of what prospective stakeholders will encounter if they join MUN as their institution. As well as it is the identity of those who have chosen MUN.

The Memorial University brand focuses on creating images that depict large, open spaces and showcase the uniqueness of the Newfoundland and Labrador weather. The uniqueness that the university is portraying sends the message that each student's individuality is what makes them special. This is playing with the emotional appeal of the viewer. The literature suggests that emotional appeal is present in photographs allowing viewers to picture themselves in that scenario by simply looking at an image. The uniqueness that the images create touches on the emotional appeal of students as the images make it easy for students to picture themselves in

such a unique and beautiful place. This creates a sense of place for viewers, demonstrating that the emotional appeal of the image was successful.

The images also show the diversity, inclusion, and sense of belonging present in Memorial University. By showcasing these characteristics, the image again touches the viewer's emotions but also reinforces the idea that Canada is a safe and welcoming place. The literature shows that international students seek a safe, tolerant, diverse, and multicultural university, free of discrimination and tolerance (Chen, 2006). The images show this through the representation of students of different skin tones, cultures, and backgrounds interacting and being friendly with the predominantly white student population.

In the literature it is noted that creating a community feeling is important as it allows potential students to picture themselves in that space before starting their journey, creating stronger ties with the university. My research shows that the images posted by the university in order to attract students create a sense of community as students can picture themselves in specific scenarios, as well as in different parts of campus. All of this is done through the emotional appeal that the images have, which in turn creates stronger ties with the university. Once the students arrive in the physical location, they will feel as if they belong and they are familiar with the campus.

The university adheres to its brand standards, which is important. As noted in the literature, having a strong brand helps the institution differentiate itself from the competition; a strong brand sparks curiosity, provides enjoyment through the presented experiences, and creates

a sense of fantasy in the form of escapism (Davis and Diver, 2014). The way that the university uses the landscape, weather elements and the big open spaces as part of its brand is helpful in creating curiosity in the minds of the viewers of the Instagram images. The images present demonstrate that there is enjoyment in the experience that the university is presenting, and due to the way light is used, the Memorial University brand creates a fantasy in the form of escapism; when viewing an image, one can escape to a calm, open, and accepting place.

As mentioned in the literature, the most common images posted by universities in the United Kingdom are those images of university mascots, logos, pictures of staff and students at events, and images of nature around campus, all equating to images that provide positive sentiments towards the institution. My research is in accordance with this statement as the images posted by Memorial University on its Instagram account are images that spark positive sentiments towards the university, such as inclusion, diversity, and community, and elicit a sense of place.

Research Questions

1) How are these images used to promote Memorial University? The images selected for this study rely on emotional appeal to promote Memorial University. Emotional appeal sets out to create a connection with the consumer by targeting their emotions (Lee & Hong, 2016, Davis & Piven, 2014, and Hand & Ling, 2016). Emotional appeal is used in these images by creating a sense of place for the viewer. A sense of place is created through the humanization of a space (Darby and Ozata, 2017). The humanization of space through Instagram is created when the viewer can picture themselves in the physical place doing the action shown in the image and can

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relate emotionally to one or more of the elements of the image. Following then, they have created a sense of place such that the emotional appeal tactic has been successful.

Emotional appeal can also be seen in these images through the themes of diversity, inclusion, and belonging. The images that show people of colour on campus will cause a positive reaction to potential new students of minority groups. The functions of a photograph are to inform, represent, surprise, cause, signify and provoke desire (Roland, 1981, pg. 28). These functions help the images used in the *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account connect with potential new students.

2) How are the images selected used to define Memorial University's brand? Moore (2004) suggests that a brand is a promise of an experience. The experience promised by the Memorial University is that "Memorial is the natural place for people and ideas to become" (Marketing & Communications, Memorial's brand, 2023). The images used in this study help define MUN's brand because the images show elements such as light, environment, landscape and big open spaces.

MUN's promise begins by stating "Memorial is the natural space…" (Marketing & Communications, Memorial's brand, 2023), and the portrayal of big open spaces, landscape and the environment suggests that students will be in a place where they have enough space to grow, experience, and fulfil their dreams. At the end of their journey through Memorial University, students would have become what they sought out to accomplish. In most of the images, the

students are the focal point, suggesting that the university, even though it is a big place, is student focused, and that is how students will be able to become whatever they desire.

What conclusions can be drawn from this study?

This study aimed to investigate how Memorial University is using the social media platform Instagram to promote the university to potential students. Three key conclusions can be drawn: First, *a university for students* - the images focused on students at the university learning and having fun, which creates a sense of belonging as a student. A sense of place is created when someone attaches meaning to a place or location, this study shows that a sense of place can be created through social media by presenting a reality that a potential student can connect to. The sense of place is created by using emotional appeal through the composition of an image. Secondly, *promotion or information* - Instagram is used by the university to promote itself to potential students as well as to provide information to the current student and university communities. The *@MemorialUniversity* Instagram account does not have one use only, it has many uses such as promoting the university to new potential students and keeping the current university community informed all while reinforcing the Memorial University brand. Even though the account targets many different communities within the university all the posts can be used to create a sense of place and establish the notion that Memorial University is big enough for everyone's ideas to become reality. Thirdly, *brand standards* - the images studied in this research show that the university adheres to its brand standards and Instagram posts are shaped by the brand standards. The university brand standards state that photography must capture the raw intensity of Newfoundland's light and environment through subdued, moody, ethereal, intense and dramatic elements, most of the images used in this study adhere to these

specifications. By adhering to the specifications, the *@MemorialUniveristy* Instagram account is cohesive and the brand can be easily recognized when an image is a standalone image. Adhering to the brand specification also helps strengthen the sense of place that is created as the community will think about the uniqueness of the university and what their time at the university could be like. This study shows that the type of images used in social media posts, if created by following the institution's brand standards, can be both promotional or informational, and they can still help reinforce the promise that Memorial University is a place where ideas and students become reality.

The use of social media is an evolving way to recruit new students by having images that create a sense of place. As noted by Darby and Ozata (2017), a sense of place is created by a combination of physical (form), functional (actions), and psychological (emotion). MUN's Instagram images primarily employed psychological/emotional appeal and the physical form of the sense of place secondarily. Most images in this study used psychological/emotional appeal to try to create a sense of place in the viewers of the images. This was done through the light, portrayal of vast open spaces and the portrayal of diversity and inclusion in the images.

Instagram is becoming a place for those entering the post-secondary education system to shop around. As mentioned in the Education Advisory Report (2019), the generation entering the post-secondary education system is the generation that has grown up with digital technologies at their fingertips. This has allowed them to filter the information they see on social media sites, such as Instagram, into either their note-worthy or not-useful categories. When it comes time for them to decide what university or college to attend, what youth in generation Z do is open a

social media app and follow the institutions that they are interested in. Due to the high competition post-secondary institutions face, the institutions need to start thinking about reaching the generation Z through platforms they are familiar with and interact with them through the platform. As shown in this study, the images and posts that had the most interaction were informational posts. Promotional posts in this study did not receive as much interaction. This shows that prospective students will interact with the institution with whom they have created a connection with in their own terms. Despite Instagram's potential to reach large audiences, this is not always the case. As the platform is open for people to comment, and they could comment negatively, as in the case of the strike, this could work against what the brand and marketing are trying to do. The dangers of social media can damage the brand.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this study that are worth noting. Interviews with staff working directly with the Instagram account would have provided additional depth to the study. In-depth interviews provide access to rich information and the ability to understand motivations and context, and they allow the interviewee to tell their side of the story (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). However, as Schroeder (2006) notes, images always need to be viewed within the context from which they emerged. Contextual issues often shape not only the image but the interpretation of the image by the intended receiver, as well as the scholar. In February 2023, Memorial experienced labour action and the university came under a critical public gaze. Unfortunately, my formal invitations to do an interview were met with silence.

Another limitation of this study is the use of only one of the many Instagram accounts associated with Memorial University. Given the size of this project, the decision was made to conduct a thorough analysis of one account. While a larger sample and more current images would have possibly produced more detailed results, the data analysis was thorough, rich and thought-provoking.

Critical Visual Analysis

This study used Critical Visual Analysis as a conceptual framework and a methodology (Schoeder, 2006). Conceptually, this framework suggests that marketing images are culturally and contextually encoded and have become a form of visual consumption. Marketing images become infused with rhetorical and visual presence that are tied historically to contexts. Schroeder (2006) argues that the method (description, comparison, interpretation and evaluation) provides a mechanism for critically engaging with these representations. As an analytical method, Critical Visual Analysis was invaluable for looking beyond surface level marketing.

Conclusion

This study focused on how Memorial University uses the social media platform Instagram to promote the university to prospective students. The results show that images can help define an institution's brand, as the use of images helps to promote the university by creating a sense of place. It is essential for Memorial University and other post-secondary institutions to compare their produced images against their brand standards every couple of years to ensure they are still representative of the brand.

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Figure 2

App

EXHIBIT 9.1. CHALLENGING THE TRUSTWORTHINESS
OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.

1. What can you possibly tell from an *n* of 1 (3, 15, 29, and so on)?
2. What is it worth just to get the researcher's interpretation of the participant's interpretation of what is going on?
3. How can you generalize from a small, nonrandom sample?
4. If the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, how can we be sure the researcher is a valid and reliable instrument?
5. How will you know when to stop collecting data?
6. Isn't the researcher biased and just finding out what he or she expects to find?
7. Without hypotheses, how will you know what you're looking for?
8. Doesn't the researcher's presence result in a change in participants' normal behavior, thus contaminating the data?
9. Don't people often lie to field researchers?
10. If somebody else did this study, would they get the same results?

TableData

Table 8.1 Profile of older renters interviewed

Name of interviewee	Date of the interview	Location	Quality of interview out of 10	Any other comments
Michael Smith	23/11/2012	Surry Hills	5	Very ordinary interview. Interviewee had little to say.
Paul Fielding	01/03/2014	Waterloo	8	Very good interview. Has been in the private renter sector (PRS) since his divorce in 1993.
Francis Roux	28/09/2013	Kingsford	8	Very good interview. Became a private renter after business went into liquidation.
Mary King	04/08/2013	Orange	9	A lot of detail given about what it's like living on the age pension and being a private renter.
Susan Miller	12/09/2013	Penrith	6	Generally a very ordinary interview. A couple of interesting points.

Appendix B:

image #4   image # 1

Differences:
image # 4 female and made, image #1 two females.
Image # 4 background outside; image #1 background inside.
Image # 1 subject.

→ subjects walk/ sitting.

Similarities: Two subjects in each of the pictures both sets of subjects are main focus of image. background is blurred.

One subject in each image are wearing a dark outfit.

Both sets seem to be talking w/ each other.

---

image #4   image # 8

close in

Differences
→ buildings can be seen
- out
- The subjects on image are both female while the subjects on image 4 are female & male.
- prospective

Not → blurry background

Similarities
- Both images # 4 & # 8 have two subjects as the focal point.
- all four subjects are wearing what appears to be warmer clothes
- all four subjects are walking away from a building

Image # 1   image # 2

Differences → #2
- Image ~~too~~ is
darker and moodier

- Image # 1 bright

- Image # 1 side
profile.

- Image # 2 two
male subjects.

Similarities:
- More than 1 subject
- Not all subjects are fully visible
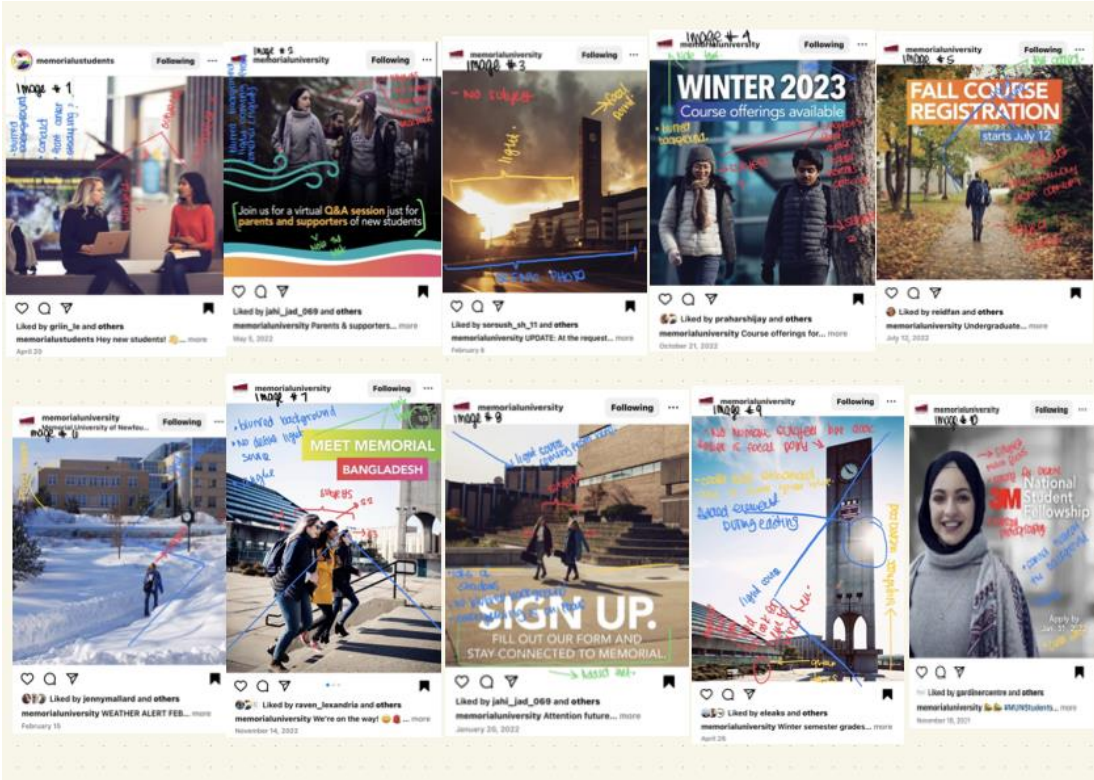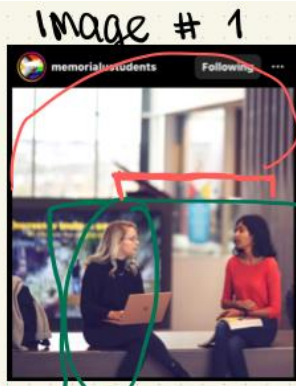- prominent student looking into.
- Time of year.

Appendix A:

Differences
- image six's building is on two backgr.
- image five's background consists of trees

Similarities:
- one subject facing away from the photographer subject walking down a path
- subjects are both wearing backpacks, jeans and jackets.

Image # 4   Image # 1

Differences:
image #4 female
and male, image #1
two females.
image #4 background
outside; image #1
background inside.
image #1 subject

→ subjects walk+ sitting.

Similarities: Two subjects in each of the pictures
both sets of subjects are main focus of image,
background is blurred.

One subject in each image are wearing a dark
outfit.

Both sets seem to be talking w/ each other.

Image # 4   Image # 8

close
in →
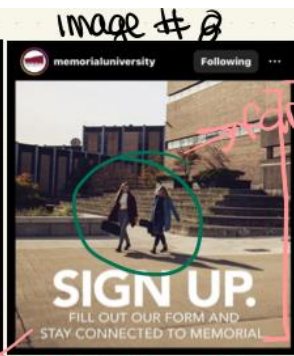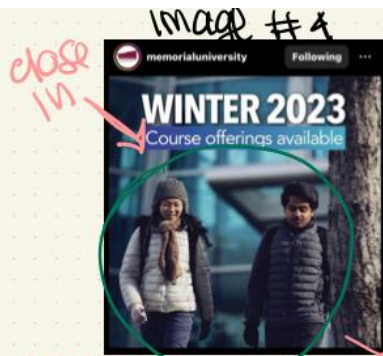
Differences
→ buildings can
be seen
far out
- the subjects on image
are both female
while the subjects
on image 4 are
female & male.
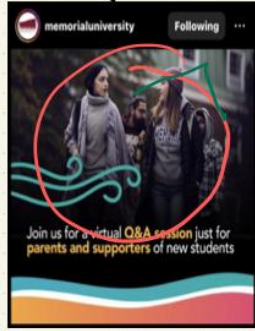perspective

Similarities   Not → blurry background
- Both images #4 & #8 have two subjects as the
focal point.
- all four subjects are wearing what appears to be
warmer clothes
- all four subjects are walking away from a building

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Image #1   Image #2

Differences → #2
- Image two is
  darker and moodier
- Image #1 bright
- Image #1 side
  profile.
- Image #2 two
  male subjects.

Similarities:
- more than 1 subject
- Not all subjects are fully visible
- prominent student looking intl.
- Time of year

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