iPhoneography and Contemporary Image-making: Examining a New Form of Visual Communication in the Age of Social Media

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Abstract

New digital imaging practices have risen with the emergence of image-based social media. iPhoneography as a contemporary imaging making practice is altering how we make and read images. What is also unprecedented is the emergence of aesthetics that are both visual and social in their nature, which both are clearly manifested on the user-friendly platform Instagram. While new visual aesthetics are rooted in the new attraction to vintage filters, social aesthetics manifest in embracing the mundane of human life as a source for visual communication. This qualitative dissertation attempts to further investigate how using a smartphone as the sole device for image-making and dissemination has encouraged experimental image-making and influenced the field of visual communication.

Note: To know more about the smartphone applications referenced in this research, please refer to the appendix.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction Overview

What does it mean to have the capability to create artistic images wherever you are and whenever desired? And what does it mean for our daily lives to drive that creative production and to be source material for new work? The experience I'm talking about here is beyond owning an accessible studio space and creating art about one's personal life, but it is about the ability to constantly create artistic images as you live your daily life. It is about the ability to create on a whim, because your tools are always with you and you've trained your mind to identify opportunities to photograph aesthetically pleasing views while on a morning jog, having meals, on the job or even on vacation.

In the following pages, you'll read about iPhoneography, a digital imaging practice that has emerged in the past few years with the rise of smartphones and changed how we create and consume images. Berry & Schleser (2014) refer to it as "mobile media making". You will also read about how I have examined this new practice by talking to a number of image makers that work with it, observing and analyzing images created by it, and performing this practice myself. The practice of iPhoneography takes place on smartphone devices and its products are mainly shared on image-based social media.

I do say image-makers here and not artists because, while for some being called an artist is a comfortable label, for others it is an elitist term that signifies formal training and showcasing work at art galleries. Interestingly some of the image-makers I will talk about here, while they do not have agents and do not display their work in art galleries, do showcase their work for hundreds of thousands of viewers and display their images neatly on a digital white wall with written captions. These image-makers on-the-go share digitally generated and enhanced images on the social media platform Instagram.

iPhoneography (an uncommon term coined only 10 years ago) has changed us and changed the world of images around us. It is the practice of utilizing any smartphone's built-in camera and photo enhancing applications to create images and its connectivity to the web and through it social media platforms to share them. Realizing the popularity of the iPhone, the term was first introduced in 2008 by Glen Evans, a photography blogger whose blog no longer exists (Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012).

The popularity of iPhoneography is seen in the number of applications that have arisen to fulfill the needs of the people who "snap, edit, and share. "Platforms like Instagram, Hipstamatic, Snapchat, and others are widely used and often talked about in the news. Part of this popularity might come from iPhonegraphy's requiring neither technical nor artistic training. And while several scholars are now talking about the impact of image-based social media platforms (McNealy, 2012), the contemporary meaning of digital images and how we can understand people better through the massive number of images shared today on a daily basis (Garde-Hansen, Larsen, & Sandbye, 2014; Larsen & Sandbye, 2014b), few have talked about iPhoneography as a practice.

My interest in this practice resulted from a personal encounter with Instagram in 2012 and my use of the platform since. I have a background in digital arts and graphic design, and a strong interest in Photography which the platform encouraged. I therefore, became fascinated by how images which were publicly shared talked about the mundane aspects of human life, generated human connections and expressed new visual ideas and trends. There were so many images of everyday things like coffee, food, children, flowers, gadgets, makeup, fashion, sunset, and more. In my first few months using Instagram, posts looked a certain way: they were heavily filtered and saturated and mostly had black or white borders. Then they started changing; and while still filtered, their colors were muted and soft, and several posts were shot with a bird's-eye-view camera angle. Later, other changes happened and iPhoneography continued to evolve as a creative practice.

Instagram, the popular image-based social media platform, just like iPhoneography has also changed us. Not only has it popularized iPhoneography, with its capability to facilitate the three steps of iPhoneography in one application, it has also served as an environment that both triggers and documents new visual trends in photography and digital imaging. Anyone active during the early days of Instagram recalls how photographs were heavily saturated, with faded corners using Instagram's vignette option and/or had a black or white border due to Instagram's built in filters. Many trends and movements emerged afterwards to coexist and never entirely erase others. A few examples of trends in no chronological order are: the use of filters that desaturate photographs to create an image nostalgic of older photography and Polaroid cameras, the use of a bird eye camera angle to photograph objects and subjects, the use of mirroring effects mostly in portraits or selfies and collaging images together in what is known as tiling by third party applications.

Two questions that come to mind when thinking about the iPhoneography that takes place on Instagram are: **(1)** What does it mean to practice iPhoneography on Instagram using one device which is the iPhone? **(2)** How does the practice of iPhoneography shape new visual trends like the minimalist and candy minimalist movements seen on Instagram?

While these questions were both examined qualitatively, each required a different mindset. The first question stirred a journey of inquiry with ethnographic characteristics where a number of iPhoneographers, were observed and interviewed. I asked them about their experience and how the use of one device influenced their creative process. The second question was examined with characteristics borrowed from phenomenologically using post-intentional phenomenology to investigate the experience of practicing iPhoneography myself and my observations of a popular visual trend known on Instagram as Candy Minimalism.

Candy minimalism can be seen as an Image-world, a concept I borrow from the work of Ron Burnett (2004). In his book, *How Images think*, he talks about the power of images in generating other images and therefore becoming immersive experiences. I use Burnett's concept of images-worlds here to describe a large group of images sharing visual qualities, like candy colored images, and as a theory to think with.

In addition to image-worlds, another conceptual construct helpful for understanding iPhoneography is *practice theory* by Pierre Bourdieu. It was introduced in the 1970s and 80s about how social beings are capable of using their human agency to channel their experience in the world (Grenfell, 2008; Walther, 2014). Bourdieu's work is important here because it considers practice in relation to its context, which he refers to as the *field*.

Since iPhoneography can take place on different platforms and is capable of rapidly changing, examining it required an understanding of the context or field where it takes place. Instagram was selected as the field or context here for a variety of reasons which will be discussed in this dissertation. Camera phone applications provide "social, creative, and emotional cartographies," which have established image-making practices in the past ten years, and while much has been written about mobile media, less has been written about the aspect of making it (Berry & Schleser, 2014).

iPhoneography is a new form of visual communication, which is why the following pages will not examine iPhoneography solely as photography. The fluid nature of this practice allows photographs captured on a smartphone to become many things. Therefore, the field of visual communication, discussed here, has been considered to encompass all forms of visual artifacts whether they are fine art in the form of digital imaging or graphic design based. In their *History of Graphic Design*, Meggs & Purvis (2006) reflect on examples identical to Janson & Janson's (2004) *History of Art: The Western Tradition*. Both books discuss cave paintings, ancient script, and the progression of decorative Bibles, printmaking, and graphic art. We cannot ignore that there have been several historical overlaps between the two disciplines of art and design; and for this specific academic inquiry, the philosophical, conceptual, functional, and technical differences between these two fields are not under examination.

1.2 Why examine image-based social media

One cannot deny that Image-based social media is changing how people connect with each other and the world. With the increased accessibility of computers and smartphones, much more image-based visual communication is being received and sent. New ideas, thoughts, stories and images are being created every day and posted on social media. We can perform a virtual "like," a digital based action that reflects liking an image by clicking the like button or tapping an image in a social-media platform, which shows our support for the image and the image-maker. We can also be more supportive or analytical by choosing to post a comment or a question and start a conversation, all based on the experience of viewing an image.

This study examines iPhoneography, digital imaging which takes place on social platforms using smartphones and imaging applications on those phones. iPhoneography is the practice of creating, processing, and sharing images via digital technology specific to smartphones and their applications. This process will also be referred to here as *Snap, Edit, and Share,* a term derived from image-based research published after the birth of camera phones. The creation of any digital image, which we will refer to here as digital imaging, differs in experience when performed on a smartphone rather than a desktop or laptop computer, because when the process takes place on one device, its results can be shared instantly.

iPhonographs, are the products of iPhoneography; they are digital two-dimensional artifacts generated by snapping, editing and sharing images using a smartphone. The social process-based nature gives them a different value than traditional photographs. The availability of camera phones enables people to share their experiences instantly, providing their images with a sense of immediacy. iPhoneography also differs from traditional photography in terms of how images are created and edited on one smartphone device and then shared on image-based platforms through that same device rather than using a darkroom and an exhibition space. Because of the accessibility of smartphones and their applications today, people can reflect on any moment in their lives, and are increasingly doing so (N Hochman & Schwartz, 2012). iPhoneography has also encouraged the involvement of novice image-makers (Halpern & Humphreys, 2014), and tempted businesses to promote themselves where everybody is virtually "hanging out" (McNely, 2012).

As more people become involved in image-based social media, a wide range of concepts and contexts have emerged. Many image-based social media platforms are available for free or for a fairly small price (between $3 and $8 USD) on the application stores of smartphone. These platforms compete by having different editing capabilities, which in turn give some platforms distinct aesthetics. For example Hipstamatic, a community-based smartphone application created in 2012, enables users to control aperture and shutter speed and focuses on simulating the capabilities of SLR and D-SLR cameras such as controlling focus, aperture, shutter speed, ISO, and white balance. Another smartphone application, Phhhoto, captures a few sequenced shots and is focused on turning images into animated GIFs which users can share. Snapchat, in turn, targeted younger smartphone users and is dedicated to applying text and drawing to images that disappear the minute they are viewed. Finally, Instagram, an extremely popular image-based application, is based on cropping images into squares and adding filters. Each one of these applications provides its users with a unique way to visually communicate through the personalization of images.

Also, these applications provide users with different ways of engaging with others socially and visually. It is worthwhile to keep in mind that users can have personal or business goals for downloading these applications and signing up to their platforms. We must make a distinction between these applications as used by the masses and as used by commercial enterprises, which often imitate these smartphone image-making practices. Individuals

might intend to connect with family and friends or showcase a portfolio or talent, while businesses use them to advertise and connect with customers.

In addition to catering to users with different needs, Image-based social media has allowed the less formally trained image-makers and image making enthusiasts to experiment, grow, and publicly share. Because image-based social media can function like a virtual gallery, a space where one displays a selection of their visual work, it provides an opportunity for exposure regardless of what critics, professional curators, and agents think. Since such media have become extremely popular, people are getting involved as image-makers, visual bloggers of various interests, and viewers of shared content. Individuals are forming personal relationships with their smartphones.

With these opportunities, visual communication has become a social and aesthetic practice not limited to experts but available to anyone with a smartphone and image enhancing applications that allow cropping, tiling, color enhancing, overlaying text and shapes, or other ways to modify an image so it expresses what they want. This democratization of visual communication comes from including all individuals who want to create visual content by providing them with platforms to share images and editing software which are user friendly, inexpensive, and easily accessible. No longer are imaging practices performed and publicly displayed only by experts in museums, galleries, books, magazines, or professional websites; they are also performed and shared online by digital imaging enthusiasts who post their created images on their online social media profiles.

In turn, the wide spread of iPhoneography has raised several concerns about images and image-makers today. Scholars are concerned with how this practice is altering the meaning of photography in many ways, including: encouraging more amateurs to contribute to image making, competing with conventional advertising, and overexposing human behavior. However, the focus of this dissertation is not on the discontent of experts with the growing number of amateurs, the approval of anthropologists of practices that better reflect humans in their "natural habitat," or the enthusiasm of marketers in what is known as WOM (word of mouth advertising). Rather this dissertation focuses on the idea that exposure to and engagement with such platforms presents new dynamics to the field of visual communication, where **we are presented with the immediacy of expression and new aesthetic values.**

1.3 The beginning of iPhoneography as snap, edit and share

Before the emergence of such online and mobile platforms, digital images were created using digital cameras and computer photo-editing software like Adobe's Photoshop. Now smartphones provide us with a snap, edit and share process where one device is used to deliver digital images (Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Gye, 2007; Keep, 2014b). The term *Snap* is used to refer to the creation of snapshots using a smartphone's camera. *Edit* refers to the process of selecting, deleting, enhancing and altering those snapshots, and *Share* refers to sharing those edited snapshots with others, particularly when that is done through image-based platforms. This snap, edit, and share phenomenon, which takes place on Instagram and other image-based smartphone applications, has interested several authors such as Favero (2014),Gómez Cruz (2012), Gómez Cruz & Meyer (2012), Gye (2007), Halpern & Humphreys (2014), Hochman & Schwartz (2012), and Hochman & Manovich (2013) for its ability to transform our personal experience with images.

Today, several platforms for visual communication are popular, yet do not provide the ease of use, immediacy, and the focus on images that Instagram does. For example, Facebook has been fostering social connections and allowing users to upload digital images from their computers and more recently from their smartphones. Users can give captions to images, tag people who appear in each image, and group images into albums. However, sharing images on Facebook only involves the sharing step of *snap, edit, share* as it provides very limited functionality for editing or snapping images. Thus, it provides only a social experience where people share their family vacations, get-togethers with friends, and personal achievements, like graduations or marathons. Images shared on Facebook receive equal value to text-based posts, since they all appear on the same feed on a person's account. Facebook is, however, not focused on illustrating how images influence our perception and social interaction since it is not image-focused.

Other image-based social media also serve specific social and creative roles, but are still not reflective of iPhoneography. An example of that is Flicker, the image-based online platform, which has been well recognized as the first online platform to serve photographers and photography enthusiasts. However, in its early years, images uploaded to Flicker had to be captured on a digital camera and then transferred to a computer prior to being uploaded and categorized, so it required multiple devices and the snap and edit processes had to be done outside of Flicker. YouTube is another successful image-based based online platform.

While it allows people to create their own channels, share videos, and more recently edit their videos online through YouTube's website, it is dedicated to sharing personal or commercial videos. YouTube is not designed specifically to enhance social interactions but is instead more of a sharing platform.

Instagram has been selected in this study as the application to examine current forms of visual communication for various reasons. It has swiftly grown in popularity in its short life span of seven years and is currently used by a variety of individuals from across the world with a great range of interests. Expert and amateur photographers use Instagram and regardless of their credentials, real world connections and backgrounds all receive opportunities for exposure to small businesses and large corporations. Instagram has become known for its ease of use and greatly encouraged iPhoneography to grow as a practice.

As an image-based social platform, Instagram has succeeded as an application by enhancing the social experience while maintaining strong and identifiable visual characteristics. In addition to being one of the first applications to promote cropping images into a square format, it introduced filters that simulate "vintage" aesthetics. By saturating or de-saturating colors these filters can simulate older analog cameras. More smartphone-based applications emerged to complement Instagram and work with it, allowing mirroring images, tiling a combination of still image and video into one composition, turning still images into video, overlaying text, overlaying graphics and geometric shapes, merging images as one, and a lot more. The iPhoneography that takes place on Instagram is a strong example of snap, edit and share, because Instagram allows for the three steps to occur smoothly in one smartphone application on one smartphone.

Instagram became the subject of scholarly research in 2012 with papers like McNely's (2012) work on Instagram and organizational power, Hochman & Schwartz's (2012) attempt to understand cities and the interactions of their dwellers in real time through Instagram, and Gómez Cruz & Meyer's (2012) piece on the progression of photography and the birth of iPhoneography. Now a breadth of articles about Instagram exist, from business studies (Abidin, 2014) to art and photography (Berry, 2014; Halpern & Humphreys, 2014; Keep, 2014a, 2014b), and examinations of how it is used in expressing oneself, making connections, and understanding time (Villi, 2014).

While art and photography theory illuminates some aspects of iPhoneography, they run into problems, because so much of that theory is based around professional users, which is one reason why this study focuses on the amateur professional. This academic inquiry is an attempt to contribute to new approaches to studying images in the age of new technology. To highlight the emergence of new visual paradigms, both iPhoneography and Instagram are valuable to examining the creative agency of individuals who use image-based social platforms.

1.4 A short history of Instagram

The popular smartphone application Instagram, which started as a platform for documenting daily life as it happened, is now allowing Instagrammers, both as individuals and corporations, to publicly and instantly share images shot and processed on mobile phones. Instagram was first released to the public in 2010, and by the end of 2017 was noted to have 700 million users dedicated to sharing photos and short videos. This user-friendly free application is an image-based social platform where users rely on visual means to communicate, express, connect, engage, and advertise. Whether smartphone owners are tech savvy and visually creative or not, they are able to use image-based applications and experiment. Popular image-based social platforms like Instagram, Hipstamatic, VscoCam, Snapchat, Phhhhoto, and others vary in terms of difficulty of use and their ability to connect users with one another, yet all focus on one end product: the image, still or moving.

Instagram has distinguished itself by being the first popular application recognized for a defined visual aesthetic: a visual uniformity created by its form which crops every image into a square and filters images to simulate the work of older cameras like the Polaroid. With a quick survey of images posted on Instagram, one can see the repetition of several visual themes: filter-enhanced images reminiscent of the past, poetry and quotes added on images through image-editing applications, and frequently a bird's-eye view where objects are shot from the top. Instagram provides its users with a range of creative choices, yet its basic visual qualities—the squared filtered image—makes Instagram recognizable.

A change in Instagram's visual aesthetic took place with its announcement that in August of 2015 it would start allowing other ratios to be used for cropping images. While several articles were posted online about how non-squared ratios would allow more creative opportunity, a quick survey of images on Instagram shows that people still frequently crop

their photos into squares. What many missed in this announcement was that the space an image would occupy would remain a square with rectangles adding white space at the top and bottom. Instagram's main user feed still would show three squares next to each other by cropping only the preview of a non-squared image so that it would appear to be uniform with the rest of the feed and look like a square.
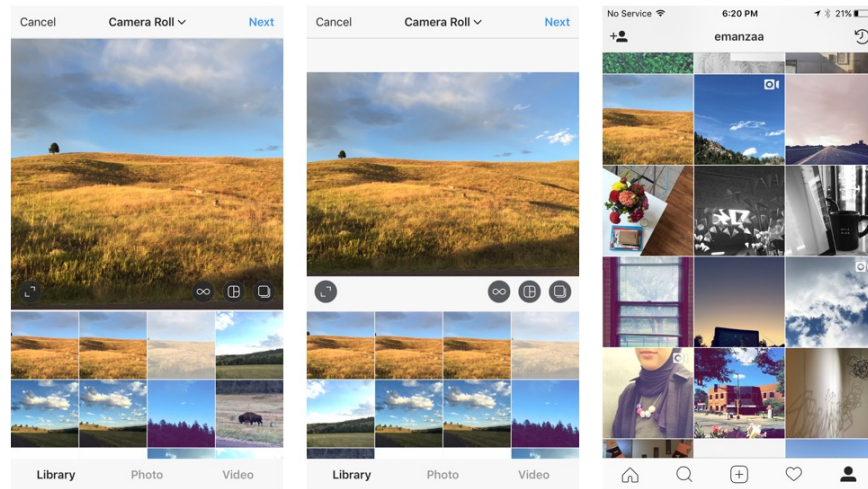
Illustration 1: screenshot of an image cropped in square format via Instagram versus it's original format and later shared on my personal Instagram account.

Despite some professional image-makers regarding its visual aesthetic as limiting, Instagram succeeded in enhancing the social aspect of image sharing by providing all Instagrammers with the opportunity to generate their own content. Two major types of Instagram accounts exist: the commercial and the personal. Commercial accounts are owned by businesses and corporations and attempt to maintain or promote their images and advertise their products. Some have also used Instagram as a platform to sell goods by simply posting images of products and providing an email or a phone number that helps consumers contact them about purchasing goods.

As for personal users, Instagram and other image-based social platforms are dominated by two types of users, aside from paid professionals, that use their personal lives as content: the professional amateurs and the producing users (Hjorth & Sharp, 2014). Professional amateurs are individuals who actively participate in image-based social platforms and have creative and artistic intentions. From an aesthetic and/or conceptual standpoint, they produce high quality visual posts. What sets a professional amateur apart from

professionals is that, while they might produce interesting work, they do not derive their income from doing so.

A producing user, on the other hand, participates in an image-based social platform, not for creative and aesthetic reasons, but for personal, social, educational, or commercial purposes. While they are definitely concerned with sharing what they like, they are not committed to maintaining a creative agenda throughout their posts. Also, some also repost images generated by others rather than generating their own content. An example of these producing users would be celebrities such as Barak Obama who as of mid-2015 had 4 million Instagram followers and Miley Cyrus with 21 million. Instagram provides them with a virtual space to connect with their fans. Actors and actresses, highly recognized TV presenters, chefs, food critics, fashion designers, fashion models, and even religious figures all attract attention on Instagram.

Instagram has also played a role in the emergence of public figures or mavens who were not recognized prior to existing on Instagram. Social media mavens, individuals with expertise in a specific field, have gained popularity on social media and have become valued by individuals—and valuable to marketers (Janssen, n.d.). These mavens can be professionals, professional amateurs, and even producing users on Instagram.

As part of this social phenomenon, popular Instagrammers – social media mavens– played a role in adding an economic value to Instagram by advertising products and services through their personal life. They focused on learning how to create "aesthetically pleasing images" while trying to obscure from followers that they are working to produce a personal income (Abidin, 2014, p. 123). The audience of a social media maven on Instagram is fascinated with the portrayal of a glamorous lifestyle when the maven purchases expensive items and visits exotic locations (Abidin, 2014).

According to the pricelist of a social media company that manages social media mavens and connects them with corporations, the starting price for a maven to post about a product on Instagram is $700. And of course prices rise in relation to the popularity of the maven and can reach $3000 (Ghalia staff, n.d.). Social media mavens are hence seen as important in spreading new trends and ideas.

As social media mavens became key figures in disseminating new information, Instagram became a key vehicle in what is known as the Diffusion of Innovation. In the 1960s Everett Rogers saw innovation as not only a new product but also as change. He saw diffusion as "a process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Rogers, 2003, p. 5). Rogers (2003) refers to opinion leaders or mavens who deliver ideas but do not show a direct material gain from sharing that innovation to appear authentic. This has slightly shifted today in the sense that we do see the material gain and still value the opinions of these mavens.

Social media mavens are valuable in an economic sense through what is now known as "consumer-to-consumer" communication. When consumers who had first-hand exposure review products and services, their opinions appear as more genuine and valued. Even before social media, these mavens were seen as "part-time marketers" (Johnson & Grier, 2013). To gain power and objectivity today, social media mavens hide their economic agenda and integrate their work with their personal life (Abidin, 2014).

This is made easier, because the mundane of life is now a hot topic in mobile media research since many personal images are produced to reflect daily practices (Garde-Hansen et al., 2014; Kalin, 2013; Keep, 2014a, 2014b). Discussions about documenting everyday life can be traced back to the earlier use of cameras by amateur photographers in the work of the French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu in the 60s, when he investigated how the middle class used photographic practices to document personal memories (Bourdieu, 1965).

Bourdieu's work also addressed the reasons behind capturing images. He identified five: to preserve memories; to communicate with others and express feelings; to relive memories and therefore realize oneself; to document personal achievements; to escape the world. The form of images have changed with iPhoneography motivations, but the core remains, since several image-makers today document their lives, express themselves, and communicate with others (Gye, 2007; G. C. van der Van House, SIGCHI (Group: U.S.), & Association for Computing Machinery, 2005).

What have iPhoneography and image-based social media presented us? There is a distinguishable difference between analog photography and new imaging practices in that the first is based on not knowing how images would turn out until they were developed.

Now, new forms of image making can happen in real time. They can also become moments that disappear after being viewed—literally in the case of Snapchat, the smartphone application where images disappear after being viewed, and metaphorically when images are posted on social media and hardly viewed again. An abundance of images are shared and saved on private devices, such as camera phones, smartphones, computers, and tablets as well as public platforms such as Flickr and Instagram. These digital images are rarely revisited (Larsen & Sandbye, 2014b).

What is also different today is that mobile phone cameras are portable, available when needed, capable of processing and editing both still and moving images, and also connected to the Internet (Favero, 2014; Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Gye, 2007; Halpern & Humphreys, 2014; N Hochman & Schwartz, 2012). Mobile phones can take much of the credit for facilitating the move of current personal forms of visual communication away from the conventional family photo-album. In *Digital Snaps: The New Face of Photography,* Larsen & Sandbye (2014) confirm what other authors (Garde-Hansen et al., 2014; Kalin, 2013; Keep, 2014a, 2014b) have stated: the personal photo album, which was once private has become a public window into the personal lives of individuals with the help of mobile phones. New image-making practices produce Snapshots: artifacts that visually communicate new personal practices (Larsen & Sandbye, 2014).

This phenomenon is what Dean Keep (2014a, 2014b) refers to as "liquid aesthetics." The mobile quality of camera phones allows images to be created whenever desired. They also, at the beginning, defied high quality, because the images on these early camera phones were highly pixelated, often lacked focus or had a soft focus and were unable to control for light saturation. These social and visual qualities presented by early camera phones are still embraced by several image-makers today regardless of technological advancements in mobile cameras; while the camera improves, applications that simulate older analog and digital photos—like Instagram—continue to be widespread (Keep, 2014a, 2014b). Some photographic imaged created in 2016 look as if they were created in 2002.

Why study and examine Instagram? Looking again at the most distinguishable visual aspect of Instagram, the square, two interesting implications or interpretations arise since linguistically a square can mean two different things. As a geometric shape, squares are two dimensional shapes with four equal sides and four right angles. But a square can also refer to a public place surrounded by buildings within a city, which becomes a known physical

space for gathering such as a town's square. These two definitions co-exist on Instagram, where visually all images are cropped into squares that virtually allow people to connect on a social level. Instagrammers have become attached to the geometry of the square as evidenced by the release of several mobile phone applications that accommodate the square and cater to it as an end product.

Instagram was also able to highlight the context of an image by presenting it in a feed that shows what was posted before and after in an individual's feed, while also showing what was posted by a group on a common hashtag (Kelly, 2014). Hence, Instagram becomes a rich source of information in relation to current visual communication through image-based platforms. It therefore is a great tool for examining iPhoneography.

Instagram as a successful innovation fits Roger's criteria of relativity, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. They manifest in the following: Instagram shows **(1)** relative advantage where Instagram appears to be useful for its users by allowing them to generate visual diaries and connect with others. Instagram is **(2)** compatible with contemporary beliefs since it is consistent with current values of sharing and connectivity on social media. Instagram is also of **(3)** low complexity by allowing all its members to be active in a visual sharing community regardless of their image-making expertise. In addition, Instagram is **(4)** trialable in nature because it allows users to test it and delete their accounts and images if they wish. Lastly, Instagram as an innovation is based on **(5)** observation where users can witness how others use this innovation by simply following other users. Yet, since the focus here is not Instagram, but the practices that take place through it, Diffusion of Innovation theory will not be used.

Embracing two ideas of the word square—the recognized aesthetic based on the geometry of the square and the social experience based on connectivity—this paper is about iPhoneographic practices that take place on Instagram and enhance the visual and social communication of everyday users and amateur image-makers. It is important to keep in mind that iPhoneography as referred to in the paper is not photography, digital or mobile, but an image-making practice that involves the notion of shooting, editing, and sharing on image-based platforms (Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Halpern & Humphreys, 2014; Keep, 2014a, 2014b). While several authors have written about such practices but referred to them as mobile photography and imaging (Favero, 2014; Garde-Hansen, 2014; Gye, 2007), this paper bridges the gap by examining them all as iPhoneography.

Hjorth & Sharp (2014) present three possible categories to examine image-based social platforms. They are: the relationship of "iPhoneography" to cultural politics, the common language of image-based social media, and the mundane image-based social media. As we place value on image-making and creative agency, the focus here becomes examining how an image-based application like Instagram has enhanced the creative agency of its users while popularizing everyday life, the mundane, as a key subject.

1.5 Research Questions

The following pages discuss iPhoneography as a process-based democratic visual practice: anyone with access to a smartphone and Internet connection can create images, edit them, and use them to communicate on image-based social platforms. The focus of this paper, however, is on the ability of such platforms to enhance creative agency and awareness of creative practice from the perspective of individuals who have not self-identified as experts.

The specific questions to be explored in this dissertation are: **(1)** What does it mean to practice iPhoneography on Instagram using a single smartphone device which is the iPhone? **(2)** How does the practice of iPhoneography shape new visual trends like the Minimalist and Candy Minimalist movements seen on Instagram?

As mentioned earlier both questions were examined qualitatively. Qualitative research is based on utilizing philosophical constructs alongside different methods for collecting and interpreting data (Creswell, 2013). The first question was investigated qualitatively with the practice of ethnography in mind and the experience of practicing iPhoneography was studied by observing and examining iPhoneographers who practiced Minimalism on Instagram. Ethnography, which historically was derived from anthropology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), is the study of lived experience by specific communities (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012), and the group examined here is iPhoneographers whose work exists on Instagram. The second question was examined using protocols borrowed from post-intentional phenomenology. Post-intentional Phenomenology is a method of examining a phenomenon by the what shapes it, be it the context or the history or something else (Vagle, 2014). The focus for this section of the research is the Candy Minimalism movement, popular on Instagram, which was studied through self-reflexivity and creative practice.

While these are new questions when applied to Instagram, research looking into practices and images can guide our way. Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory is a place to start when considering what has changed with Instagram, because the elements he outlines can suggest where to look for places where innovations or cultural changes will have important impacts on practice. Ron Burnett's (2004) work on imagescapes and image-worlds looks at how images should be understood in relation to the other images out there which is an essential component of understanding Instagram.

1.6 Dissertation overview
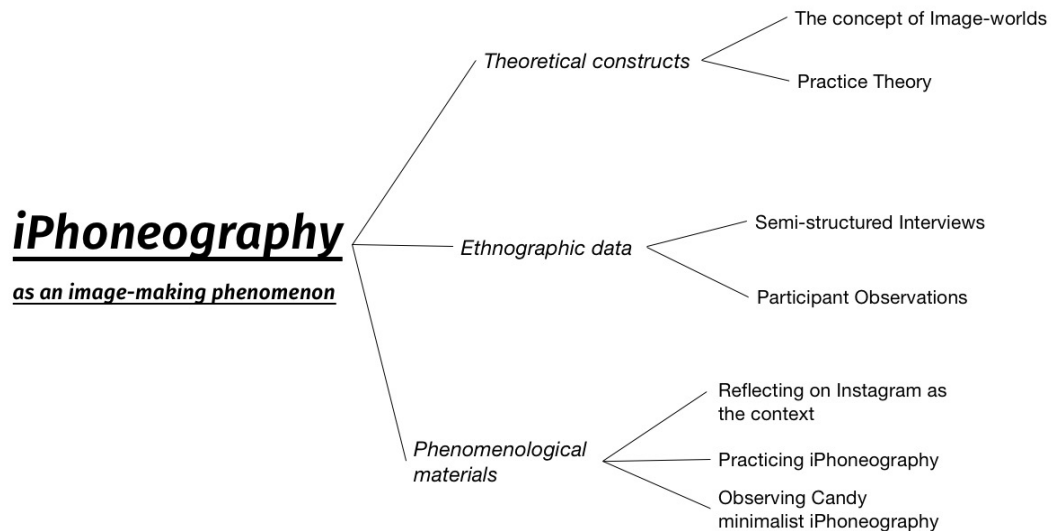
Illustration 2: Research/Dissertation plan

iPhoneography as a creative practice is different from conventional image-making practices. While there are clear processes, like the snap, edit, and share phenomenon discussed in this dissertation, iPhoneography can't properly be understood without acknowledging it is still in flux. Based on user-friendly smartphone technology, it allows users with various creative expertise and intentions to visually communicate with ease on image-based social platforms. Image making has been known to adapt to change; with recent technological advancement, old and new questions about images are re-introduced (Halpern & Humphreys, 2014).

To examine these questions, this dissertation will consist of five chapters. This first chapter, has presented a list of major ideas that will emerge in the work, the research questions, the scope of the study, and a short overview of methodology.

The second chapter will present a review of literature that constructs an understanding of what images are, what the social and technical value of images is, who today's image-makers are, and the current visual aesthetic state of images found in image-based social media.

The third chapter will discuss the methodology. An overview of the model derived from Bourdieu's Practice Theory and Burnett's image-worlds will be presented first, followed by presenting how the two qualitative approaches, ethnography and phenomenology, were utilized. Twelve global image-makers who work with iPhoneography were interviewed in a semi-structured interview manner to better understand their practice. Also, a set of observations were made about the Candy Minimalism trend alongside practicing it myself; this enabled me to use my personal reflexive material as data.

Findings and results will be in chapter four, which will be followed by the last and fifth chapter that discusses conclusions and ends with an overview of potential future research opportunities derived from this topic.

2 Literature review

2.1 Literature overview

This research examines the contemporary image-making practice of iPhoneography, the practice of snapping, editing and sharing images, and how has that changed the fields of visual communication and digital imaging. Central to understanding iPhoneography is understanding the image, and our concept of image has adapted to the changes in how images are used and presented. In the past photographic images were considered artistic, in the case of art photography; documentary, in the case of photo-journalism; commercial, in the case of editorial and product photography; and personal, in the case of the family album. Their role as visual artifacts has undergone social and visual transformations with the emergence of image-based social media, as photos can now play all those previous roles at once.

An image posted on image-based social media can document personal life yet reflect a commercial or artistic or journalistic aspect at the same time Visual communication has therefore evolved too. The fields of graphic design, journalism, and media production always overlapped some, but now it is becoming harder to see any distinction. Visual communication has welcomed a new concept where our personal lives generate content that holds a financial value. Image-based social media has also welcomed amateur image-makers by providing them with equal opportunities to create and share images, which has significantly influenced how we visually communicate.

With this different influence, it becomes of importance to re-examine the definition of the word "image" and how the term functions today. The image here is a two-dimensional visual artifact with a virtual and an artificial nature, and today it has brought forth new social and visual aesthetics where both content and visual qualities of images, seen on image-based social media, have changed. This new potential for images has been referred to as the sociotechnical state of images, and has triggered discussion of how aesthetics are evaluated when image-making has become a popular democratic practice.

Images created and shared through digital means can become stimulators of connections and immersive experiences, which Ron Burnett (2004) refers to as "Image-Worlds." The term describes the ability of images to trigger conceptual, intellectual and

emotional responses generating immersive connected virtual experiences. Although Burnett's work spoke about earlier days of video and online gaming in the 90s and early 2000s and how these platforms were considered immersive and attracted many loyal fans, his Image-Worlds are manifesting on image-based social media platforms like Instagram and therefore this concept is worthy of re-examining is relation to this dissertation.

Clearly, iPhoneography as a practice has introduced old and new questions about images and image-making such as: is the photographic image a form of art now that it has a strong social content? Can amateur image-makers create visual work worthy of being exhibited and examined? Is it the image-maker or the tools that they use that determines the quality of the work produced? To answer these questions we will look at how iPhoneography consists of the snapping, editing, and sharing of images and since those three steps constitute a practice, we can use Pierre Bourdieu's Practice Theory to understand it still better.

It is of value to understand the history that lead to the popularity of iPhoneography and having it highly practiced by image-makers of various levels of expertise. The following pages examine what the image is, the social, technical, and visual nature of images, the aesthetic nature of images, and the role of amateur image-makers.

2.2 The image

An image is a visual artifact. It has the ability to compress knowledge into a two dimensional space and aesthetically transmit meaning. To some like Mark Roxburgh (2013), images are artificial artifacts since generating them is based on the abstraction of ideas and emotions (2013). To others like Ron Burnett (2004), images are virtual due to several interactions that take place between image-maker and viewer on intellectual and emotional (beyond the physical) levels.

The history of the image dates back to prehistoric cave paintings, where early man documented rituals on walls. Today the image is a visual artifact that comes from a variety of mediums and fields. As a man-made product, it can be drawn, photographed, visualized, projected, and performed through various tools such as pencil, paint, camera, and computer software code.

The increase of image-making practices in the last few years has made it possible for images to be a new form of "oral culture" with their ability to preserve memories (Burnett, 2004, p.13). Instead of written manuscripts or painted and sculptural art, details of how people lived could be easily accessed by future generations where public images can speak of the community at large and family photos could tell the stories of individuals. This paper therefore examines how contemporary digital images play a social role as a tool for visual communication. Scholars have caught on to this idea of communication:

"In the past the role of a camera was to [make images] but today it is to communicate" (Villi, 2014, p.60).

Even though the image can reach multiple dimensions, as in the case of sculpture or moving images, it remains generally viewed and archived as a flat image. Throughout this paper, the term "image" is used to represent all visual two-dimensional artifacts just as in quote mentioned above the term "make images" was used to replace "take photographs" in in Villi's text. When the terms photography and photograph are used it is with caution in order to remind the reader that although the camera plays a major role in producing two-dimensional visual artifacts, images have evolved beyond the use of light on a light sensitive material. To the surrealist painters of the early 20th century, Photography was a practice for personal expression, yet to architects and graphic designers it was an honest "creative but impersonal" practice (Sontag, 1973, p. 68). However, as chemicals or ink on paper and as binary code, an image is a representation of something that appears to be physically with us but exists somewhere else while also representing a singular moment of reality: a virtual and an artificial object.

Another advantage of viewing visual artifacts such as iPhonegraphs as images rather than photographs is the concept of remediation, to use the term from Halpern and Humphreys (2014) who refer to Bolten's and Grusin's (1999) concept of "remediation", is when new technologies build on the old, while old technologies amend and adapt to the new in order to remain legitimate. Halpern and Humphreys see iPhoneography as a remediation to photography similar to how art has gone through various phases of remediation (Halpern & Humphreys, 2014). Design is also known for remediating, not only itself, but also what is around it by enforcing the notion of "possibility" (Folkmann, 2013, p.18). Remediation, therefore, takes place in various fields relevant to the production of visual artifacts. iPhoneographs have remediated photographs by becoming a new form of visual artifact

which utilizes new technology and plays roles relevant to the various fields that fall under visual communication. So when photographs and graphic design pieces refer here to old artifacts, iPhoneographs and images refer to contemporary artifacts.

The concept of images as virtual artifacts used here is based on the work of Ron Burnett. In his *How Images Think,* published in 2004, it is not the consciousness of images that was discussed but their transformation from an idea to an artifact through the minds of both image-maker and viewer. He also establishes the idea that the study of images is not the study of photography since, "Photographs becomes an image the minute they are seen" (2004, p. 28). To Burnett (2004) images are an integrated aspect of our "visual, linguistic, and perceptual processes" (p. 32), and viewing them generates an experience of creative engagement, which starts the instant they are viewed (p. 32). Where older images are photographs that had a physical presence on walls or in phot albums, with remediation newer images are iPhoneographs that have a digital presence and are viewed through the screen of a smartphone. The term image is therefore more inclusive of visual artifacts in any stage of making and of any form.

Burnett introduced a theoretical framework to study images and how they are viewed through the following three terms: Imagescapes, Vantage Points, and Image-worlds. These three terms explain phenomena that have occurred in the field of visual communication and image-making prior to the rise of smartphone technology and image-based social media.

The following definitions are derived from reading Burnett's work and will help understand how digital images are framed:

Photo: a physical or digital artifact.

Image: any visual artifact that communicates a personal, artistic, or commercial content with the appearance of the photo or a designed piece.

Imagescape: a powerful image that draws people in.

Vantage point: the view point of an individual in relation to the image. The first vantage point is of the image-maker when they create the work and later it's the viewer's. These two vantage points change an image into an imagescape.

Image-world: a term referring to a cohesive group of images where their connectivity to each other makes the experience of viewing them immersive to their viewers.

A good example of the notion of Imagescapes would be artwork titled *Tents aflame in Pearl Roundabout - March 15,* 2011, exhibited at Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis in the summer of 2014 (see Fig.1). The show titled *Creative Dissent* visually discussed the aftermath of the Arab Spring in the Middle East. The exhibited image did not intend to serve as an artistic artifact when it was created. Its creator wanted it to be visual evidence of the human rights violations in Bahrain, hence it was shared first on Wikimedia. The photograph became an image and then an imagescape: while it had an aesthetic quality evident by showing it in an exhibition, it also generated meaning for its viewers.

Figure 1: Tents aflame in Pearl Roundabout - March 15, 2011, photo courtesy of Mohamed CJ, Wikimedia Commons, exhibited in 2014

Another example would be On Kawara's series known as *Today* or *Date Painting(s)* where the artist's life became dates painted onto canvas (see Fig.2). Considering Burnett's Imagescapes, they perform beyond their conventional role as paintings since since meaning

goes beyond the predictable expectations of that medium. On Kawara's work carries both an aesthetic and a conceptual quality. Such images are also therefore Imagescapes: "stimulators of an experience" (Burnett, 2004, p. 49).

Figure 2: Today, On Kawara, 1966-2013, oil paint on canvas

Moving on to Burnett's Vantage Point, it goes beyond the dictionary definition of being the viewpoint from which something is considered. He introduced image-based Vantage Point as the physical, emotional, and intellectual point that a viewer stand when viewing an image (2004). A Vantage Point is also based on engagement. Burnett saw them to be created through a temporary connection a viewer makes with the viewed image (Burnett, 2004). Kawara's work is great in enforcing Vantage Points here (Figure 2). While the painted dates had their own personal meaning to Kawara, a viewer can relate to a certain date differently based on their personal life.

Images do exist and make connections with the world even when they are not viewed and this is the basis for Burnett's third term, Image-worlds. For that he referenced how electricity exists even when not in use; images become several connected ideas and media that still exist when an image is not physically viewed, hence Image-worlds (2004, p. 2,3). An example would be seen on image-based social media where images are generated and archived on huge hidden servers somewhere in the world. An image posted on Instagram can belong to a group of images, be it a topic, a filter, a hashtag, or a GPS detected location. A collection of Imagescapes, powerful images, each reflecting its creators Vantage Point will make connections with each other and form an Image-World. making interesting connections merely by existing as part of that group.
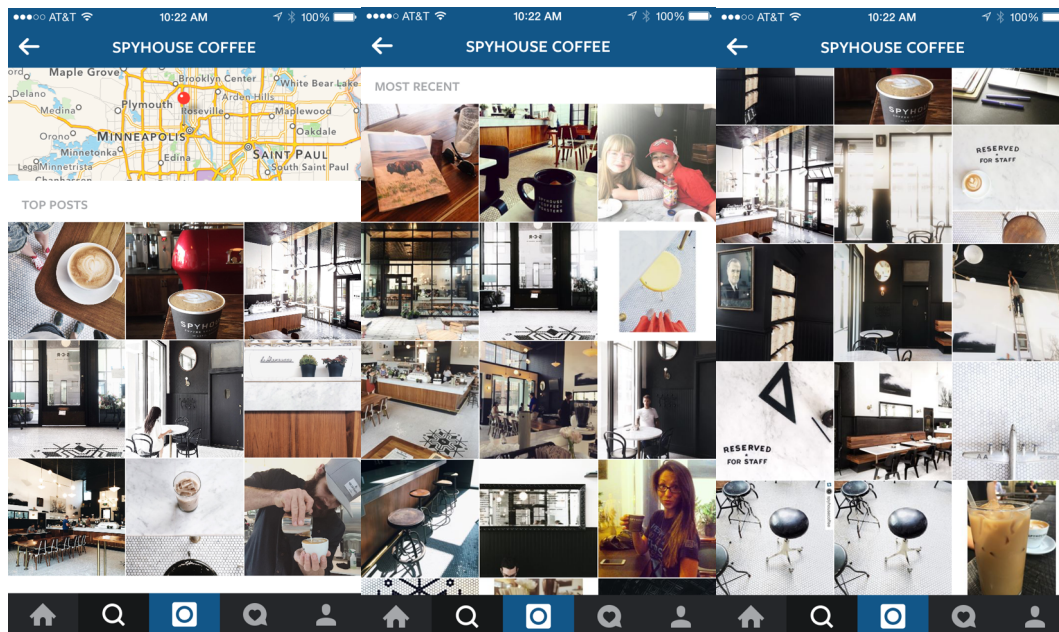
Figure 3: iPhone screenshot taken on August 15 of images shared under the GPS coordinates of Spyhouse Warehouse District

A real-world example will help better explain Image-worlds. On a Friday in the middle of August 2015, a friend invited me to a study session somewhere new. The location she selected had just opened that day in the Warehouse District and belonged to the Minneapolis-based coffee chain Spyhouse. She had found out about it through a post by a mutual Instagram friend of ours. As the day continued, several other people had visited that location and shared their experience on Instagram. Not all image-makers involved in this event had their images viewed and interacted with by many; however, images started an interest in the location that will continue even after the buzz of newness disappears (Fig. 3).

That group of images of the new Spyhouse Coffee Roasters location on Instagram shows how images, can become Image-worlds by creating connections, making them more powerful than images that function as singular images and not part of a group, movement, or multiple party experience. The idea behind images as facilitators of connections stems not only from notions of engagement but also notions of participation, where Burnett reminds us that viewers of a story on a screen desire to be part of it. That engagement and desire were evidently seen in a desire to visit a physical location after viewing part of this image-world posted on Instagram, which became more than an Imagescape simply emitting a story. It became an Image-world. We visited that coffee shop that day because an appealing Image-world was constructed and we desired to be part of it. This example shows how Burnett's conception of an Image-World is based on creating meaningful immersive experiences.

However, the relationship Burnett talks about when an image is viewed is different from Ronald Barthes's (1977) view in his essay "The Death of the Author." Barthes believes that although an image represents the intellect and personal background of the image-maker, the image-maker cannot "assign" the meaning of the work, which he considered to be liberating (p.5). While both see the value of an image as coming from the viewer, the image-maker in Barthes' view completes his work and then the image enters the world and is experienced by the audience in a way very different from the image-maker, who at that point is removed from the experience of viewing. It is the audience that brings meaning to images by using its past experiences and personal knowledge to critique and analyze. The image-creator therefore cannot control how images are understood at that point and the meaning the audience brings does not impact the author in any way.

Burnett, on the other hand, looks into the role of the audience as an interactive element, where when the image loses some control over the meaning of the images the audience *adds* to the meaning the image-maker brings in the first place. The image-maker is never completely detached from the created image, because they will always exist within it through their vantage point. The difference between the two is not in the depth of connection between viewer and image-maker, but in how to Barthes the relationship is between the image-maker and viewers is cut off after the image is introduced to the world, to Burnett the relationship is always alive.

Understanding Burnett's Image-worlds is key to comprehending the idea of images as virtual artifacts. He gives us the following example: a news presenter comments on images of an event; the presenter refers to the images as "the event" and not "the documentation" of the event (2004, p. 6). Watching the documentation of a plane crash on the flat screen of the television means I am removed from the news presenters who themselves are removed from the image they talk about. Yet, when the presenter brings him or herself closer to the event, by talking about it in real time and placing themselves within it, viewers sense intimacy. That sensation might be of less intensity were the images seen in a book and spoken of as documentation of something that no longer exists. Image-worlds have therefore become a powerful integrated aspect of how we read and perceive images.

Mark Roxburgh's work on images as artificial artifacts complements Burnett's notion of images as virtual artifacts. Derived from Herbert Simon's (1969/1996) book *The Science of the Artificial*, Roxburgh's definition of artificial is based on the idea that images are concrete in that they reflect a piece of reality, and they are abstract in the sense that they transform life, text, and traditional images into something else (Roxburgh, 2013). To Roxburgh the artificialness of images is a crisis as image-based fields like visual communication neglect the close examination of how images as technological advancements introduce less experienced image-makers to the world of image making.

Roxburgh's "crisis of the artificial," presented in various writings (2005, 2006, and 2013) clearly references Vilém Flusser's "crisis of texts" mentioned in the book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. In the book, first published in the 1980s in German then translated to English in 2000, Flusser spoke of how written texts became "incomprehensible" in the 19th century and of how a crisis arose when the text was idolized for its words rather than its concepts.

Vilém Flusser (2000) refers to images produced using machine, be they cameras or computer, as "technical images". To him reading an image is a complex process between the image and the viewer that happens through the imagination. When a flat surface is analyzed and then thrown back into the world, imagination takes place. Making an image, however, is an even more complex process. It is an abstraction where the real concrete four-dimensional world is compressed as a two-dimensional surface and the abstraction process varies between traditional and technical images. The traditional image goes

through one degree of abstraction where the concrete world is painted onto a flat surface; mechanical images, on the contrary, go through three degrees of abstraction.

Flusser's work tells us that technical images are products of experiencing the world. They are abstractions of text (3rd degree) which are abstractions of traditional images (2nd degree) that are in the first place abstractions of the concrete world (1st degree) (2000, p.14). The concrete world refers to the physical world we live in. Flusser (2000) admitted that novice image making practices jeopardized the value of images but saw in technical images and their abstractions a solution to the "crisis of the text" (p. 57). They were able to spark imagination again.

Roxburgh critiqued how this abstraction, which leads to the technical image, is seen as a representation of the natural world when it should not be. The democratization of the camera, when it became cheap, accessible, and easy to use, enabled everybody to use it and thereby encouraged "Photo-mania," where similar images are thoughtlessly reproduced over and over again (Flusser, 2000, p. 57,58). Today digital means and participatory platforms provide more opportunities to reproduce similar images just because it's possible, hence Roxburgh's "crisis of the artificial" (2013).

Roxburgh saw that images have lost their role in representing the concrete world; they however attempt to "mirror who we imagine we can be" (Roxburgh, 2013. p. 4). This is very different from what Bourdieu and his sociological driven work told us many years earlier. When an easy to use image making device—the camera—became popular, decisions about what was worthy of being "captured, stored, communicated, shown and admired" became reflective of an image-maker's background and community (Bourdieu, 1965, P. 6). Since it symbolized an "age, class, or artistic group" (Bourdieu, 1965, p. 7), this meant that in addition to the meaning an image carried, it was able to provide valuable information about the image maker.

While Roxburgh's idea disagrees with Flusser about the source of images, Burnett also contradicts Flusser in examining the making of images versus viewing images. Roxburgh saw that people project their desired lives through profusion of images we see today, and didn't see images not product of our human reality as Flusser did. And while Flusser (2000) considered reading and making images to be separate matters that took place independently, Burnett (2004) saw them as one continuous process. Images engage image-

maker and viewer in various interactions: "If to see is to create, then images are never 'just' the product of one or many internal or external processes" (p. 13). A visual artifact is given meaning by its creator and later by its viewer. The process continues through various steps and brings into the world virtual images or Imagescapes as Burnett refers to them: "purveyors of meaning and aesthetic objects" that generate an experience (see Fig. 4) (Burnett, 2004, p. 36).

EVENTS ⟷ PHOTOGRAPHS

PHOTOGRAPHS ⟷ HISTORY/REPRESENTATION

REPRESENTATION ⟷ IMAGE

IMAGE ⟷ ARCHIVE

ARCHIVE ⟷ METAPHOR

METAPHOR ⟷ VISUALIZATION

VISUALIZATION ⟷ VIRTUAL
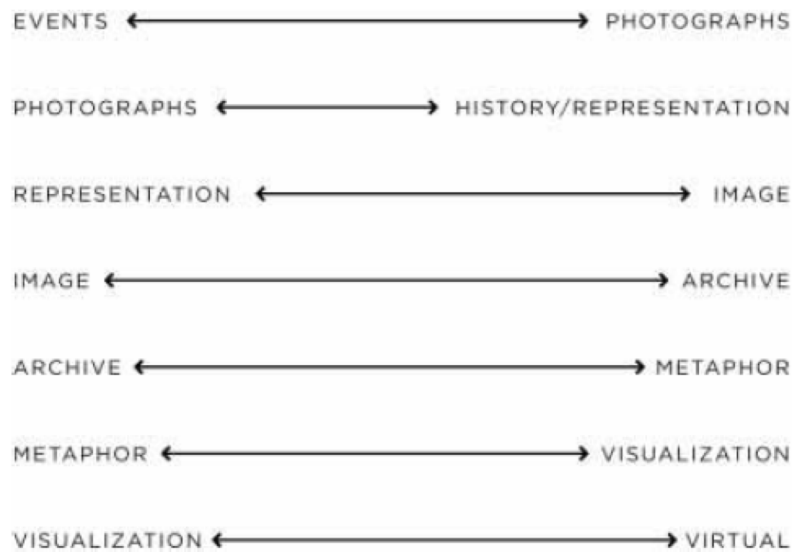
Figure 4: Burnett (2004, p.36), the process of becoming a virtual image

Looking at images as artificial and virtual objects highlights their ability to stir an interactive experience that starts with the conceptualization of the image in the mind of the creator(s) and finishes with the interpretation of the image in mind(s) of the observer(s). Yet, we must keep in mind that this interactive nature of images will always be debatable. While Flusser (Flusser, 2000) studied images as fluid, Barthes (Barthes, 1977) analyzed them as frozen and suspended in time. The inevitable interactive nature of image-based social media, where individuals learn by continuously observing and making, limits this type of inquiry for Barthes and authors who share similar views.

The conventional virtual and artificial image is challenged even more today. The artificialness of Roxburgh, derived from Flusser's work, is seen in how iPhoneographic

images are generated by abstracting ideas and experiences. Yet, according to Roxburgh (2013) they suffer from a repetition where many images, similar in subject, content, and aesthetics, claim to represent the real world when in fact they do not, therefore, creating a crisis where the artificialness of images is misleading.

The virtual nature of images, on the other hand, while also a form of abstraction, does not only consider image making but also how images are read. It values the process where an emotional and/or conceptual dialogue is made between image-maker and viewer. The process of an event or location becoming an image, and later a virtual artifact (see fig. 1), stimulates such conversations.

These two terms, artificial and virtual, can maybe help us understand other image-related phenomena. Villi (2014) discusses whether modern digital technology allows us to compress time and space, to create an abundance of images, and to dispose of images when they no longer feel relevant. The artificial image was once seen as a form of "presence in space and absence in time," and that was the basis for forming a relationship between the image-maker and receiver (Villi, 2014, p. 50-53). Viewers could feel they were in a moment which passed, as they could see the old reality.

The connection Villi (2014) spoke about is not Burnett's, but rather one based on the formation of social relationships, where the viewer longs to be part of the image—be it the image of a family member or a familiar location. Looking at images has provided a reminder that there is a separation in physical location and time; however, sharing images through emails, messages, and social media platforms where "temporal immediacy" is provided has removed this notion of separation (Villi, 2014, p. 50). This has also added a social value to images today; therefore, the next section will discuss in greater detail the social aspect of images seen today, such as iPhoneographs.

2.3 The image as a sociotechnical artifact communicating the mundane

The amateur image-makers of today seem to be driven by digital and portable technology. Yet, we forget that amateur practices seen today do echo ones seen in the early days of cheaper analog cameras like the Kodak Brownie. The amateur culture was based on two things that still exist today: first, the notion of sharing and second the use of everyday life as

a topic (Pink, 2011). Bourdieu (1965) reported that amateur photographers in the 1950s did participate in photography clubs and group exhibitions because they enjoyed sharing their work. He also witnessed how personal topics found acceptance in the amateur community. So we now ask: How have amateur image-makers and amateur culture changed?

The answer is connectivity. It has allowed amateurs to be more involved in generating media—at times overpowering mass media (Larsen & Sandbye, 2014b). Accessible technology allows image-makers to be connected with the world and also with each other. With the emergence of web 2.0, which is based on participation and connectivity, today is seen as the true age of the amateur (Larsen & Sandbye, 2014b), and images shared on image-based platforms are now of highly social and technical natures. Keep (2014b) refers to this trend as techno-social, while Gómez Cruz (2013), Gómez Cruz and Meyer (2012), and Kalin (2013) refer to it as sociotechnical.

This sociotechnical aspect is based on the notion of using images to create, document, and build relationships while relying on technology to produce these images. Gye (2007) and Van House et al. (2005) both wrote about the reasons behind the massive use of mobile phone cameras as social tools. Van House and his co-authors (2007) saw in their work that camera phones enhanced current imaging practices and were used as vehicles for communication. They concluded the goals behind using camera phones were self-expression, preserving memory, and sustaining relationships. Gye (2007) discussed similar goals; people used camera phones as a means to construct personal and group memory, to maintain social relationships, and for self-expression (Gye, 2007).

This work was anticipated by Bourdieu, who, decades earlier, talked about similar goals behind the use of affordable cameras by the masses. In his book *Photography: Middle Brow-Art* (1965), he discussed how amateurs worked with photography to communicate. He wrote that people used cameras in order to preserve memory, to communicate feelings with others through sharing memories, to re-experience memories, to document personal achievements, and to escape the world.

The low cost of image making tools and the ease of use of such tools (Keep, 2014a; N. Van House et al., 2005) provides an opportunity to reflect on every possible moment in our human lives (Hochman & Schwartz, 2012). Image-based social media presented a sharp social turn for digital imaging practices. While there has always been a social aspect to

amateur photographic practices as Bourdieu wrote in the 60s, where personal, everyday life became the topic, today we see it as a common social theme presented by image makers: both professional-amateurs and producing users. The focus on the everyday or what is referred to as the mundane has become very visible through image-based social media (Garde-Hansen et al., 2014; Halpern & Humphreys, 2014; Kalin, 2013; Keep, 2014b; Murray, 2008; Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011).

The mundane is represented in personal pictures of family, friends, hobbies, travel, food and other random objects and activities, all reflecting the humanness of people. Such images posted on image-based social media have gained popularity. An example is Adam Goldberg's social media identity known as "alifewortheating." As a food Instagrammer and blogger, he is well known for documenting his journeys of travel and food around the world, and his Instagram account has been recognized as an inspirational "must follow" food diary (Menza, 2015). He has become known for exploring and reviewing cafés in various major cities.

Several other mundane topics exist on image-based social media, all reflective of the sociotechnical capabilities of iPhoneography. Technology drives this abundance of mundane images (Lister, 2014), and while not everyone has new and interesting content to share, just as concerned Roxburgh (2013) in the "crisis of the artificial", people are creating images that reflect their present. Image-based social platforms might preserve everything uploaded, yet—with the immediacy of new technology—image-makers do not always have the intention to archive their work (Larsen & Sandbye, 2014a).

But in the past people never had to face the following problem: an abundance of images created and stored on digital devices, difficult to organize, and sometimes never viewed again (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011). This abundance also jeopardizes the quality of publicly shared images, since not everyone has something interesting to say (Roxburgh, 2013). While some, like moms of newborns, save and organize all possible images taken of their children digitally or by printing them from electronic devices (Rose, 2014), teenagers are known to delete images that no longer reflect their current state (Garde-Hansen et al., 2014). Digital Images are hence seen both as disposable (Murray, 2008; Villi, 2014), easy to erase and forget when not needed, and also considered archival with their ability to survive time through digitizing (Lister, 2014).

Observing sociotechnical practices that take place on image-based social media platforms, one cannot help but think of such platforms as ecosystems, where systems are based on user-generated content focused on oneself with a strong connection to connectivity and technology (Lister, 2014). Such ecosystems are driving a focus on the image as a cultural artifact and the emergence of new aesthetics, which will be discussed in the coming section, "The image and the new aesthetics."

2.4   The image and new aesthetics

Artificial two-dimensional digital images are fascinating scholars with their new visual and social aesthetics (Murray, 2008). The term aesthetics from a visual sense refers to emotional and intellectual stimuli that bring up questions of beauty, delight, and pleasure. The social aesthetics are based on how images are encouraging connections. Both play roles in understanding images produced through iPhoneography.

It is also important to keep in mind that the use of the term aesthetics to refer to visuals here goes beyond Kantian aesthetics, where formal qualities of beauty make objects induce pleasure and make beauty a "universal" and "necessary" value (Burnham, n.d.). Aesthetics in this paper are on the other hand inclusive of not only formal analytics of beauty but also of Dean Keep's (2014a, 2014b) "liquid aesthetics": images created on camera-phones are "binary code and therefore may be easily deconstructed, re-constructed, and re-imagined." (2014b, Para. 9). According to Keep (2014b), this current technology is responsible for the virtual presence of images that reside on digital platforms and can be revisited anywhere and at all times once they are uploaded to an image-based social platform

Some believe the untrained masses lack an understanding of aesthetics and that amateur practices are of lower quality. While it is true that amateur image-makers thrived because they felt less criticized and judged as creative individuals (Bourdieu, 1965, p. 6), we must keep in mind that humans naturally cannot be excluded from the "Universe of aesthetics" (Bourdieu, 1965, p. 7). As Bourdieu (1965, p. 7, 8) has noted, amateur photographers were recognized as an organized group that understood its norms and trends.

According to Folkmann (2013), the idea that aesthetics are based on "good taste" is derived from the belief that aesthetics are beautiful visual qualities reflective of higher social standards. Yet, he argues that taste is not aesthetics. Taste is a subjective opinion that

determines the likability of something or not while aesthetics goes beyond personal subjectivity. All variations of taste are of "equal value", therefore all objects can reflect aesthetic values and their good or bad nature is determined by our personal taste (P.29). Also, in order to discuss physical objects in relation to aesthetics we must first detach them from the fields of fine art and design, since aesthetics are crucial aspects of art work and design work. We must then understand that the aesthetic messages which emerge from such objects are closely connected to the context where they will be delivered and the message they communicate (Folkmann, 2013). Although Folkmann's argument resounds when examining iPhoneographs, since images receive likability according to the taste of their viewers, we must not neglect that there are social aesthetics that take place as well.

The social aesthetics of images today are based on the connections users of image-based social platforms make among themselves and with various images and activities. Arthur (2009) argues that the social aspect found in image-based social media is also based on ones ability to write their own story. With image-based social media people are gives the chance to become their personal biographers and determine how their lives are documented. Digital images shared today on image-based social platforms are therefore complex artifacts of both social and visual aesthetic value.

Before delving deeper into the distinction between visual and social aesthetics, one must not neglect the progression of images in terms of visual quality. Technological advancements enabled digital cameras, which could produce high quality photographs, to become smaller in size and affordable. Snap-and-shoot cameras now compete with D-SLRs, while camera phones are able to capture extremely high-resolution images. Yet, like the camera phone, did not go through the same linear progression as other digital cameras.

The first camera phones produced low quality pixelated images, which surprisingly was very welcomed and embraced as an identified aesthetic quality of digital images (Keep, 2014a). Camera phones, however, did not stop there. Away from the rough quality of the first camera phone technology evolved two aesthetic directions with one direction mimicking professional contemporary photography and the other older cameras. We have reached a point where camera phones compete with professional cameras. Images produced on smartphones today can be sharp, detailed, and of vivid colors.

Two aesthetic directions, the high quality and the vintage, co-exist and continue to grow via image-based platforms. Digital images are also going through a current visual trend where vintage aesthetics are valued. There is a tendency to mimic the quality of older cameras with the use of smartphone filters and applied effects (Halpern & Humphreys, 2014). An obsession with faded colors and soft focus is frequently seen in smartphone image editing applications and image-based platforms.

Users of image-based social media found the use of these filters an attractive way to create a defined aesthetic. They desaturate images in a way similar to photography produced with simple analogue cameras like the Polaroid. When Berry (2014) studied the use of what she called "faux-filters," she referred to them in connection to "huantology"; filtered images are "visual expressions" reminiscent of the past (para. 4) . Berry argues that Walter Benjamin's predictions in his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* essay are true; mechanical images could never emit the aura older forms of art do. Therefore, people are expressing an alternative reality more poetic than what they actually experience, maybe in the search for Walter Benjamin's "aura" (para 11).

Filters were also found to generate an engagement with making and viewing images. According to Bakhshi, Shamma, Kennedy, and Gilbert (2015), professional image-makers use filters to enhance their work, while amateur image-makers use them to add character to the images they create by dramatically changing their visual appearance. Their study also concluded that filtered images receive more attention, via likes and comments, on image-based social media. Since nostalgic and filtered visual aesthetic found on image-based social media were found to be generators of social engagement (Bakhshi et al., 2015), one could not help but see visual and social aesthetics as intertwined.

2.5 The image maker

Regardless of popular image media today—photographic, graphic, painterly, or other— image making is inseparable from the image-maker. In the past, the core of amateur image making practices was photography, because it was an accessible form of self-expression different from other forms of art like painting or music, which could not be viewed unless produced to the highest standards (Bourdieu, 1965, p. 7). Modern photographic technology, earlier in the form of an analogue camera and now in the form of a built-in smartphone camera, allows the masses to take part in image making beyond just photography. Amateur

creative visual practices are not new, yet are highlighted today through the use of smartphone cameras and smartphone imaging applications.

Yet, when we think of image-makers, pre- and post-digital era, two key players come to mind: the professionals who have studied their trade in educational institutions and the amateurs who have not been formally trained but work hard to practice and produce nonetheless. This section will discuss image making as a practice and the growth of amateur image-makers with the rise of image-based social media and iPhoneography.

The professionals and amateurs can be differentiated in ways other than expertise. Zimmermann (1995), in her book about the history of amateur filmmakers, argues that professionalism is tied to profit. Self-taught amateurs produce visual work in their time of leisure and do not expect financial benefits. Another way to distinguish amateur work was its focus on mundane objects and activities, and the past tense is used here in "was" because this has definitely changed today. In an article by *Outing Magazine* published in 1889, right after roll-out-film cameras were first produced, everyday images were considered amateur in nature, because they overexposed daily life (Zimmermann, 1995). Today, the mundane has emerged again in both amateur and professional photography.

However, before we move on to understand the progression of amateur image makers over time, we must not ignore that there is a third key player in image making: the producing user. Gómez Cruz and Meyer (2012) mention them in passing when discussing amateur practices in the early 20th century, while Hjorth and Sharp (2014) refer to them as "producing users" who in the digital era produce images for purposes other than mimicking professionalism. If a hierarchy were implemented, they would rank third in expertise. They are the focus of anthropology and social studies as domestic image-makers who use images to construct and preserve memory. "Producing users" are highly visible today with their use of portable image-making devices like camera phones and image-based social platforms like Instagram. We could recognize them as image-makers who are not dedicated to the aesthetic conventions or quality of current image making-practices; yet they use images to visually communicate.

Early forms of photography in the 19th century, which Gómez Cruz and Meyer (2012) call the "first moment of photography," were based on science. A photographer needed an intensive knowledge of chemistry prior to making a photographic image. This limited

photographic production in two ways: first, only the knowledgeable fortunate had access to cameras and tools; second, experimentation had its constraints. A photograph could only be taken of well-lit spaces and of objects or subjects that did not move for a few seconds. Only the experts in the science of photography could practice it.

In 1888, with the appearance of the Kodak brownie camera for as low as $1, amateur image-makers had their first opportunity to contribute to imaging practice. Their practice was based on spontaneity and, while some used the camera "for fun," many attempted to mimic professionals and reflect artistic intentions (Murray, 2008). Photographic practices at that time were struggling to find acceptance in the field of fine arts, since some at the time of its commercialization in the 1880s saw all forms of photographic images, even artistic, simply as hobbies (Zimmermann, 1995).

Yet, as Gómez Cruz and Meyer (2012) tell us, Kodak had an interesting advantage. With photographs, everyone was able to take pictures and choose how to represent their lives. Kodak's slogan was based on the idea that people would use the camera and Kodak would "do the rest." Of course that situation had its own limitations because people could not control the settings of their cameras and could not be in control of how their images would be developed. However, people were excited to use these simple cameras, which were later on shipped to be developed (Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012).

Kodak continued in the early 1900s to introduce their cameras as a tool for both artistic expression and the documentation of personal events. As the camera progressed in two different directions, one as a professional image-making tool and the other as a simple snapshot device, it became easier to distinguish professional and amateur image-makers from snapshooters. According to Gómez Cruz and Meyer (2012) this separation between professional and amateur photographers and the producing users also became evident in the years between the 1930s and 1990s. The use of the camera by amateurs to produce images became even more popular in the post-war 1950s with the integration of photographic practices as daily practices due to their role of documenting memories (Murray, 2008).

As camera technology advanced, professional photographers used their scientific knowledge and ability to purchase high-end equipment to distinguish themselves from amateurs by establishing hard-to-replicate aesthetic styles. And while snapshooters, as

Gómez Cruz and Meyer (2012) called them, stored their printed images in photo albums and shoeboxes, professionals and amateurs displayed them in magazines and galleries. The separation was between the elite and the common. Gómez Cruz and Meyer tell us more when they cite Schwartz (1986, p.190), who said this was done through, "limiting widespread participation through the creation and maintenance of social and aesthetic boundaries."

As reported by Pierre Bourdieu in his published work during the 1960s, photographic practices were middle-brow practices that allowed the working class the chance to document memories and become involved in criticizing images. While the upper class saw photography as a means to start intellectual conversations, the middle class found it as an opportunity to create bonds and relationships (Bourdieu, 1965). Regardless of different perceptions, amateur photographers who complained that their cheap cameras and equipment did not produce the best quality, still produced images and shared them in group exhibits (Bourdieu, 1965). A photograph of a women nursing her child or the portrait of a stranger might not sound like the most intriguing image to visit an exhibit for (Bourdieu, 1965), yet such personal images produced by amateurs did indeed stir something different.

It is at the same time, the 1960s, that Bourdieu introduced the sociological concept of Practice Theory as he attempted to analyze various human practices, including photography. Bourdieu's work stemmed directly from observing humans and their imaging practices to understand human agency, structure, and the relationships between actions and structures (Grenfell, 2008). The making aspect of images is very important in understanding the image itself, and Bourdieu's work will be discussed later on in greater detail.

Moving back to how current amateur image-makers came to be, the history of the photographic image continued to progress after the 1960s with the emergence of digital technology two decades later. Sony designed the first digital camera in 1981, which was not a real digital camera but a prototype that could record 25 images on a floppy disk by freezing video. It was followed by an initiative by Kodak in the mid-80s to develop the technology that could read pixels and was followed a few years later by the production of consumer level digital cameras (Tolmachev, 2010). Point-and-shoot and D-SLR cameras, which became more accessible and affordable, did not require rolls of film and dark rooms.

Something else evolved during the 20th century that is closely related to imaging practices, which is computer software. Computer graphics were produced on big machines in the 1940s, using code that required a knowledge of mathematics and engineering to write (Ryan, 2011). The turning point was Ivan Sutherland's sketchpad software, which marked the true beginning of computer graphics software where one could create and manipulate vector shapes with a pen ("A Critical History of Computer Graphics and Animation," n.d.; Ryan, 2011).

Fast forward several years and Adobe systems emerged to introduce a variety of applications, which changed how visual information was designed. The key player for editing images without having to visit a dark room is what we now know as Photoshop. Developed in the late 1980s and later added to the Adobe family, it was and remains a valuable application, which contributes to the creation and alteration of digital images.

Thomas Knoll programmed Photoshop, known in its early years as Display, in the late 1980s. It caught the attention of Adobe, changed its name, and evolved into a major photo-editing application that functioned on desktop and laptop computers. The ideas behind computer graphics software and photo-editing software are now simplified and portable through smartphone applications. Smartphones, as smaller computer devices with affordable applications, available for free or for a few dollars on the Apple store or Google play store, cater to personal imaging practices away from professional environments.

What is different today is that two devices are merged into one: the camera and the computer. Camera phone photography, which was introduced in 1997 by mathematician and software developer Philip Kahn (Keep, 2014b), was based on the digital technology of pixels and was at a very rough stage when it was actually pixelated. Early camera phones were not smartphones; they were released in the early 2000s and had basic camera features and little capability to share photos. With time, their quality improved and camera phones had better pixel quality and were gaining popularity. They did not, however, have the photo-editing capabilities or the computer graphic software capabilities of smartphones today.

The iPhone was the first to establish the idea that there are greater possibilities to expect than just a high quality portable camera (Hill, 2013). As more products and services were produced to function on smartphones, three steps–which we will refer to as snap, edit, and

share–started to take place. These three steps are derived from scholarly writings by Favero (2014), Gómez Cruz (2012), Gómez Cruz and Meyer (2012), Gye (2007), Halpern and Humphreys (2014), Hochman and Schwartz (2012), and others. They summarize a new experience in image making.

The first step, which we refer to as Snap, takes place when a smartphone's built-in camera is used to create a digital image in the form of a photograph. The image is then edited using editing and enhancement software downloaded via a smartphone's application store, hence the second phase, Edit. Lastly, digitally produced images are shared on image-based social platforms that also live on smartphones. Some image-based platforms like Instagram attempt to remove the middleman, the editing applications, by introducing image-editing features through their social platform. Regardless of that, these three steps—snap, edit, and share—mark how image-making practices by amateurs and producing users takes place today. Never before were these three steps available on one device (Favero, 2014; Gómez Cruz, 2012; Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Gye, 2007; Halpern & Humphreys, 2014; N Hochman & Schwartz, 2012) that is easy to use, portable, and hence always available when desired (Halpern & Humphreys, 2014; Keep, 2014b).

Professional image-makers exist on image-based social platforms but might not always follow the dynamics of snap, edit, and share. They would utilize these platforms as a space to disseminate their portfolio and share professional work they've created not on a smartphone. An example would be the photographer Murad Osmman, famous for an ongoing photographic series of him holding the extended hand of his fiancee's Natalia Zakharova as she gives her back to the camera. *The Daily Mail* mentions him as "the man whose girlfriend leads him around the world by the hand" (Pemberton, 2015), and as they travel the world the same exact pose repeats in various locations. The hashtag #followmeto has named them the "Instagram couple'" and attracted global attention (Pemberton, 2015). Osmman has risen to popularity through the use of Instagram as a platform for sharing photographs he has taken on a professional camera then transferred to a mobile device and later to Instagram.

Unlike Osmman and Zakharova, who have recently received an award for their #follwmetohongkong mini-series, other professional and professional amateur photographers insist on keeping the use of Instagram smartphone-based. Some write in their Instagram bio the phrase "iPhone only" and others use the #VSCOcam in reference to

a smartphone app that works like a camera to produce natural filter-free images only via smartphones. This shows a commitment to depend solely on the smartphone to produce images.

The gap between professional and amateur image-makers, which in the 20th century was obvious (Bourdieu, 1965; Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Murray, 2008), is becoming more subtle now. The conventions that once saw visual artifacts as the products of skilled experts are being changed today through participatory platforms, which allow everyone to take part in making images. With a growing number of image-based social platforms on smartphones—like Hipstamatic, VscoCam, Snapchat, Instagram, and others—environments emerge that encourage the co-existence of the experienced artists and designers alongside amateurs.

This new co-existence could be a result of new standards for image making that embrace smartphone technology with its lesser quality and flaws (Keep, 2014b). On the other hand, the rise of amateur image-makers could be driven by the other factors, such as the current low cost of image making devices and software, the availability of professional knowledge and training almost free of cost on the web, and the mild criticism amateur visual work receives in comparison to professional work.

There is also an increase in the number of smartphone applications that are easy to use (Berry, 2014), offer simple graphics and text overlay capabilities, and provide a range of built in filters that alter saturation (Keep, 2014b), among other editing features. To a professionally trained eye, amateur image-based work produced through smartphones is filled with clichés. Yet, as amateurs gain popularity on image-based social platforms and professionals embrace the "clichés," everything becomes a blur.

2.6 Discussion of literature

This research is focused on examining iPhoneography as a current popular form of image-making. It is enriching the experience of two categories of images makers: the professional amateurs, those who do not work professionally but strive to produce visual work of the same quality professionals produce, and the producing users, who are individuals without a creative agenda, yet still produce images through the process of snap, edit, and share mentioned earlier. The question here is how the practice of iPhoneography and the use of

image-based social media have altered the experience of image making, and shifted conventional social and visual beliefs in regards to the role images play.

In this context, the term photography is no longer relevant since the current practice goes beyond the use of the camera to extend on the definition of iPhoneography. With Apple's iPhone gaining the most popularity among current smartphones, iPhoneography refers to all digital imaging practices that take place on any smartphone. As a revolutionary device, smartphones have provided an environment for image-based applications to grow. While some applications only provide a means to edit images, others are based on sharing images and interacting with them. They later transformed interaction-based applications to image-based platforms that play a role in generating new forms of visual communication.

Applications turned into image-based social platforms are now highly accessible in that they can be accessed from anywhere. They also have built in editing features, which introduce the most novice image-maker to how images can be altered. These platforms, along with the connectivity of smartphones to the internet, allow users of such devices and platforms to feel connected to the world at all times. This has encouraged both professional and amateur image-makers to take an active role in making the visual culture of today and therefore started more discussions about imaging-making practices.

iPhoneography has contributed to generating what Ron Burnett (2004) refers to as Image-Worlds. Image-Worlds are images capable of creating meaningful connections even if they do not intend to and establish immersive experiences. They are of a higher level than Imagescapes, which Burnett defines as images that create emotional and intellectual responses in both the image-maker and the viewer. Imagescapes in this research are iPhoneographs, process-based images that successfully generate a response seen through "likes" and "comments" made on social media. These two virtual actions, "Likes" and "comments," identify that there is a Vantage Point: each viewer brings their personal interpretation to iPhoneographs/Imagescapes.

Images are now very worthy of being studied because they are going through change from a technical, an aesthetic and a social sense (Favero, 2014); they can help scholars understand cultural patterns (Hochman & Swartz 2012) and can explain how people perceive themselves in the world (Gye, 2007). Therefore, examining iPhoneography and iPhoneographs can contribute to understanding current visual and social practices.

3   Methodology

3.1 Methodology overview

Smartphones are transforming how digital images are created and consumed today. For example, the film *Tangerine*, which was a hit at Sundance film festival, was shot using an iPhone 5, a camera enhancing smartphone application, and an iPhone adapter lens (Newton, 2015). Videos of police misconduct in the US shot by bystanders are becoming what CNN called "game changers" in reference to the case of Philando Castile whose fiancé broadcasted his shooting using a smartphone and Facebook live (Shoichet, 2016). Finally, Damon Winter, an award winning photographer, received the Photographer of the Year Award International for an image of American soldiers in Afghanistan taken using his iPhone and the image-based social media application Hipstamatic.

This research aims to use qualitative methods to understand how digital images are created and read today. iPhoneography—the practice of using smartphones alongside mobile applications and social platforms to snap, edit and share images—is the main practice to be explored, specifically that which takes place on the social media platform Instagram. The value of examining iPhoneography comes from the necessity of understanding contemporary image-making practices. The field of visual communication, in the form of digital art, advertising, visual media, film, graphic design, and visual literacy, has changed with the introduction of mobile-based practices and image-based social media platforms.

I ask in this research about the transformation of contemporary image-making practices now that iPhoneography has become a mainstream form of visual communication. Scholars have talked about iPhoneography as a new phase in the history of photography (Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012) , an unconventional experience to memory making (Garde-Hansen et al., 2014) , and as a practice capable of introducing new visual aesthetics (Bakhshi et al., 2015; Berry, 2014; Keep, 2014b). Instagram makes image processing and sharing with a smartphone easier, which in turn leads to more images being shared, and to more people being connected through visual communication.

Yet, while these new images are worthy of studying, we cannot fully understand an image without understanding who the image maker is. Previous quantifications of Instagram posts focused on how mundane images inform us about the behaviors of people while not providing interpretation of the content or purpose of these images (Manovich, 2016). Today

image-makers are empowered by ubiquitous smartphones and receive plenty of exposure and recognition on social media.

Again, what does it mean to use a single device to practice iPhoneography? And how does this practice shape new visual trends like Candy Minimalism? To answer the first question and understand how iPhoneography shaped image-making, I borrowed methods from ethnography and used longitudinal observations of Instagram posts and qualitative interviews with iPhoneographers.

Ethnography, which originated from anthropology, is a qualitative approach that seeks to "describe and interpret" shared values and behaviors of a "culture-sharing" community (Creswell, 2013, p.90). While ethnography should not have a single definition due to its complex nature, it has guided attempts in social sciences to understand human activities by getting involved with a community (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The goal with ethnography is for the researcher to become immersed in an entire community in order to bring a complete description of the social behaviors of the group rather than understand their culture.

And to answer the second question and examine how iPhoneography enabled the birth of Candy Minimalism, I analyzed Candy Minimalist posts and practiced iPhoneography to create similar images myself through post-intentional phenomenology. These two approaches helped in understanding both the image and the image-maker.

Phenomenology in the broader sense is concerned with the lived experience of individuals, with the belief that the core of understanding a phenomenon is understanding its "essence" (Creswell, 2013). However, more recent interpretations of phenomenology attempt to understand a phenomenon beyond its essence. In post-intentional phenomenology established by Mark Vagle, a phenomenon is considered in-flux and therefore should be examined through various viewpoints. This approach also sees the notion of intentionality in phenomenology, which refers to the interconnectedness of things, as "constantly being constructed, deconstructed, blurred and disrupted" (Vagle, 2014, p. 113). Therefore, the term "post" as used by Vagle refers to the need to go beyond intentionality to understand a phenomenon and to incorporate history, theory and/or context.

Reflexivity in the form of writing was utilized as a method for documenting and analyzing qualitative observations. Reflexivity has become an integrated aspect of qualitative research in the social sciences since the 80s. Scholars questioned the role of the researcher in shaping and analyzing their data, and reflexivity provided better transparency (O'Reilly, n.d.). Both ethnography and phenomenology work with reflexivity to understand how beliefs are formed and assumptions are placed; for the ethnographic approach it was more descriptive and for the phenomenological it was more interpretive.

To narrow down the group of potential participants, an image-world had to be identified in order to find image-makers with common aesthetic standards. Minimalist photography was selected as an image-world because it grew through Instagram and currently has a strong presence. Minimalist iPhoneographers focus on reducing visual chaos in an image by using a solid background like an empty wall or the sky. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: **(1)** They used a minimalist photographic approach, and **(2)** they stated in their Instagram profile that they use their smartphones as their main image-making tool. With the exception of one participants who works solely with a D-SLR camera, all other image-makers worked mainly with iPhoneography or alternated between smartphone and professional camera.

Observing the work participants have shared on Instagram was key to understanding their practice and the evolution of their iPhoneographic work. For each participant, their Instagram feed was examined from its early days up until the time of the interview. The information collected about the subjects they worked with and their stylistic decisions became conversation starters for each interview. Observing and analyzing the visual content posted by the participants allowed me as the researcher to become more familiar with the participants' creative thought processes.

iPhoneographers from various parts of the world were interviewed and asked about their training and background, how they defined their work, and how using Instagram has influenced their creative practices. The questions were designed with a conceptual framework in mind that emerged from examining Burnett's (2004) concept of Image-Worlds and Bourdieu's practice theory (1977).

Therefore, this methodology section will discuss the following in more detail: how Burnett's and Bourdieu's work led me to build a new conceptual model (3.2), how image-worlds are

identified, who the interviewed participants were, the interview questions used to understand iPhoneography, and how practicing iPhoneography myself became a way of understanding the practice and the candy minimalist movement.

3.2 Conceptual inspirations: Burnett and Bourdieu

With so many changes occurring now in visual communication, understanding them requires a narrowing of focus. In this dissertation, the focus is iPhoneography, because it is a new form of visual communication that can give us clues as to the abundance of visually interesting images produced using smartphone devices. To understand iPhoneography, we must first understand how images respond to each other, and this is where Burnett's concept of Image-worlds comes in. And because iPhoneography is practiced by many people in many places, we must secondly examine how and why it is performed – this is where Practice Theory works as a conceptual lens.

Ron Burnett's (2004) work focuses on a phenomenon where emotionally and intellectually stimulating images, referred to as Imagescapes, not only respond and communicate with each other but also create immersive experiences for their viewers. These engaging images grow in number to produce image-worlds—large groups of images that go beyond triggering thoughts and emotions in their viewers by inviting them to become lost within the images. Burnett's idea was introduced in the early 2000s and referred to all images found in the media, on the internet, and through video games as participatory platforms. At that time, digital images were rapidly growing in number.

In his 2004 book, *How Images Think*, Ron Burnett discussed the role images play in how we view the past, present, and future. A photograph of an event can become a representation of it in the present and also in the future; it therefore, in the process of sharing it, becomes a visual artifact, an image. It is then layered with more meaning and begins to visualize a virtual experience. We do not exist in the same time as the past event, but we might still intellectually and emotionally connect with the event through the image. If the topic is of relevance to us, our emotions may be strongly triggered. (See Fig 5 for an example of an image that triggers emotions even though we were not present when it was created, what Burnett refers to as imagescapes. This is a photograph shared in the media on the day of the US presidential inauguration.)

Figure 5: A cardboard cutout of Donald J. Trump smiled in Scott Hayes's rearview mirror. Credit George Etheredge for The New York Times, 01/18/17.

Figure 6: Jan Rose Kasmir confronts the American National Guard outside the Pentagon in Washington during the 1967 anti-Vietnam march. Marc Riboud—Magnum.

Figure 7: Jan Rose Kasmir, 67, was the subject of a famous photograph by Mark Riboud taken at an anti-Vietnam War rally in 1967. Times magazine, 01/21/17

These powerful images that move our thoughts and sentiments are Imagescapes, and they are a result of two layers of interpretation – what Burnett refers to as Vantage Points. They were interpreted the first time by their creators, who transformed an event, location, person, or object into a visual artifact. They are interpreted again when they are viewed; the viewers add meaning by bringing their beliefs, education, and memories to the experience of viewing the image/visual artifact. If these images succeed during their second vantage point, which means they were recognized by an audience, they are Imagescapes. (Figures 6 and 7 are additional examples of imagescapes. The first is an iconic photograph taken in the US during the 60s and the second is of the woman in the original photograph holding a print of it in 2017 during a woman's march in the US).

When several Imagescapes have been generated and begin to make connections with each other, we see Image-Worlds emerge. We become immersed in the viewing experience, just as we might binge-watch a TV show or play a videogame so intently that we lose track of time. A contemporary example is reviewing an Instagram feed when consulting a hashtag. We mindlessly scroll through independently created images which have been threaded together because of their content and/or aesthetic quality. The concept of Image-world can

help us better define what takes place on social media. (See illustration 3 for an example of an image-world, resulting from a number of images portraying the women's march of 2017).
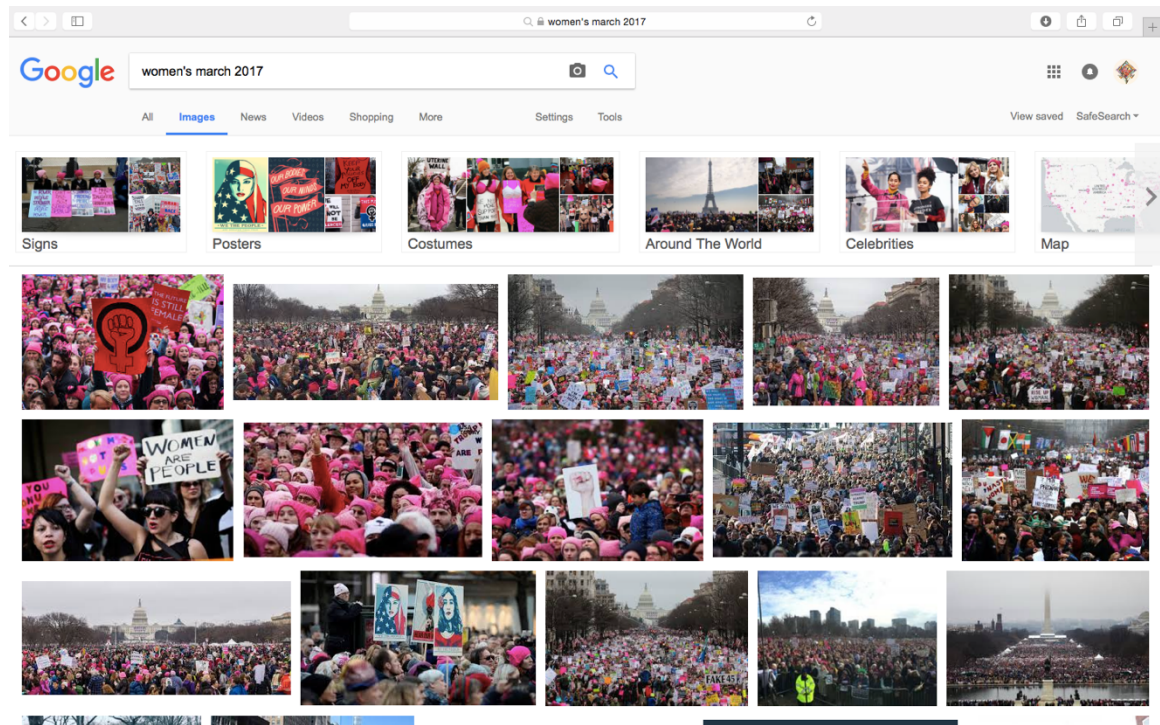

Illustration 3: A Screenshot of a google search on Woman's March in 2017 which took place in the USA post the presidential elections.

Instagram users are generators of Image-Worlds; they produce collections of immersive visuals that draw viewers in, stimulate them, and inspire them to generate more images feeding into that world. With millions of active users on Instagram, many are snapping, editing, and sharing on a regular basis. Many of the shared images are Imagescapes that stimulate the creation of more images.

We can in this second decade of the 21st century see that several Image-worlds have become manifest on image-based social media, helping to form what scholars refer to as the "abundance of images" (Roxburgh, 2013). With so many platforms that cater to snapping, editing, and sharing images, it is clear that generating image-worlds has become a common behavior. Several visual trends like minimalist photography and filtered images, exploring tourism through the eyes of tourists rather than citizens, and coffee photography and "outfit of the day" photography have triggered flows of Image-worlds with where each

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world consists of relevant intellectual, emotional, and/or visual content. As images become more connected they become more immersive; Burnett's framework can assist in beginning a dialogue with Instagrammers about the value of their images.

In addition to role images play in understanding this moment in history, the contemporary practice of iPhoneography raises important questions about human practices in general. The work of Pierre Bourdieu establishes an important conceptual framework from which to understand digital imaging in the form of iPhoneography. In two of his books, *The Outline of Practice Theory* (1977) and *The Logic of Practice* (1980), he refers to three concepts valuable for understanding all human practices: *capital, habitus, and field*. While Bourdieu's work has introduced several concepts such as the "Doxa" and "illusio" into his model of practice theory, the three concepts of capital, habitus and field are the core of practice theory as examined here.

To Bourdieu, status and recognition is determined by what he refers to as "capital": a profit or benefit that may go beyond financial capital to comprise academic, intellectual, social, cultural, or forms of gain other than financial wealth. Being an expert in a field, recognized and highly esteemed because of certain practices or achievements, means that a person has accumulated a lot of capital. This argument is key in studying images. Scholars are recognized for their research and academic capital, writers are known for their intellectual capital gained by the recognition of their literary work, musicians or artists gain creative capital, and all these figures can gain social and cultural capital when they become recognized for their skills. To understand a practice, we must acknowledge the capital a person generates by doing it. In the case of Instagrammers, their capital as recognition can be initially measured through the number of followers they have and the likes and comments their posts receive. Their creative capital is measured by how their audience responds to them, which means they are creating work that engages their audience.

Whereas the concept of capital looks at how to measure the non-monetary value of things, "habitus" refers to "the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences" ("Habitus," 2016). While it is acquired by a person's being exposed to a certain culture, its significance is that it captures how individuals carry their culture, experience, and history within themselves, and how they make choices to act in certain ways rather than in others (Mu, 2015). It leads a person to follow his/her intuition about how to perform, as is the case for

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sports figures having a "feel of the game" ("Habitus," 2016), or when someone behaves in an "effortless manner." This concept is sensitive to the idea that human behaviors and tastes are determined by individuals' exposure to specific kinds of capital. An experienced designer might use his/her familiarity with current trends in the field to determine what is best for a client without having to do extensive research. A successful businessman makes financial moves that feel right only because he has embodied the market through education and practice. In the case of Instagrammers snapping, editing, and sharing, they generate work that receives popular approval because they are very familiar with what succeeds on Instagram, making their behaviors more "intuitive."

"Field" is Bourdieu's third concept relevant to examining iPhoneography on Instagram. To understand a practice, we must understand where it takes place, but "field" doesn't only refer to physical locations – it also refers to intellectual, social, and cultural paradigms. Bourdieu considered society to be not a singular entity but rather as composed of smaller units with their own rules, regulations, and customs (Toft-Nielsen & Krogager, 2015). While fields could be cities and buildings, they might also refer to the "fields" of education, politics, literature, sports, and so forth. Determining the field in Practice Theory is equivalent to understanding the physical and intellectual parameters bounding a practice. In the context of this research, Instagram is a virtual image-based field, and to perform successfully within it a user must understand its parameters, including what images are and how they can create an impact.

Instagrammers accumulate capital in the form of followers and "Likes" by intuitively embodying the trends and flow of the platform — the habitus. They must also be very familiar with the field, which is both the field of contemporary image-making in the form of iPhoneography and Instagram as a platform. Bourdieu's practice theory is fitting for understanding how iPhoneography is practiced and was a key factor in designing the measurement tools for this research.

Although Bourdieu referred to his work as a theory, scholars refer to it as theoretical framework only. That is because Bourdieu's work is complex and rarely operationalized. This research does not attempt to directly operationalize Bourdieu's work but to use it as a framework for understanding practice.

Although several scholars have written about the value of new technology in terms of enhancing the imaging experience (Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Gye, 2007; Keep, 2014b) and many others have looked into how Bourdieu's practice theory can help us better understand how iPhoneography shapes image-based practices (Gómez Cruz, 2012; Gómez Cruz & Ardèvol, 2013; Kalin, 2013; Pink, 2011), it is not yet common (the exception being Gómez Cruz and Ardèvol's (2013) work on Flickr) to attempt to use practice theory as both a theoretical and an operational framework. This could be because some consider his work a conceptual framework (Postil, 2008) or a theoretical approach rather than a "cohesive theory" (Walther, 2014); another reason could be the complexity and non-linearity of his work (Sullivan, 2002).

The following model was generated as an attempt to merge the two concepts of practice theory and image-worlds. VP refers to Burnett's Vantage Point, which takes place the first time while making an image, and is experienced by the image-maker; then takes place a second time while viewing and interpreting the image by both the image-maker and their audience. The occurrence of these two vantage points generates Image-Worlds. And iPhoneography is the practice/phenomenon which leads to the generation of imagescapes and hence image-worlds

Illustration 4: Research model designed for the study

All viewers hold their personal Vantage Point when viewing an iPhoneograph on Instagram and they share their views by using various comments. Viewers engage with what they see and attach a personal interpretation to it. Lastly, the term Image-worlds is evidently seen on Instagram. iPhoneography takes place on image-based social platforms where viewers can create connections and engage with the use of visuals. Posted iPhoneographs, seen as imagescapes, build connections even when there is no intention to or they are not always viewed like when a user is not followed by other users and their image doesn't receive any

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likes. An example of Image-Worlds is when posts identify a topic, an event, or an aesthetic, and generate many relevant visuals spontaneously.

3.3 The Ethnographic approach

The ethnographic approach used here framed the design of the semi-structured interviews and how Photographs shared on Instagram can be observed as meaningful data. According to Schwartz, visual ethnography is based on the use of visuals as vital data to the research in order to understand image-maker and images (1989). Yet, while a photograph is seen to embody its creator's intentions, we cannot deny that visuals are complicated entities and the viewer plays a major role in how they are read and placed in the world (Schwartz, 1989).

I talk about ethnography with caution, because while I have immersed myself in Instagram for several years and closely followed the work of various Instagrammers, I have interacted with the community in person prior to the interviews. The dynamics of image-based social media and the fact that the image-world of Minimalism has a global presence, made it impossible to practice ethnography from within the community.

An established approach to ethnography which tackles dealing with web-based experiences is virtual ethnography. It is based on a researcher's engagement on a nontangible platform. Such engagement is established by the researcher's participation in a video game, a virtual environment, a social networking site or other platforms where potential participants perform activities. Virtual ethnographers should create genuine bonds with participants in such virtual environments (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, Taylor, & Marcus, 2012). While I am active on Instagram and I do practice iPhoneography, my Instagram account is private. I chose to observe my fellow Instagrammers rather that produce publicly alongside them which made the formation of bonds difficult.

3.3.1 Participants

The participants were 12 international Instagram users who produced iPhoneographic work on Instagram. While they had the option to remain anonymous, they all felt comfortable publicly sharing their actual names and Instagram handles. The main selection criterion was that they practiced iPhoneography on Instagram and were involved by producing work relevant to Minimalism and Candy Minimalism.

Selected Instagrammers showed an interest in using their smartphones as image-making tools. Some mentioned that at some point on their Instagram profile with phrases like iPhoneographer, iPhone only, or Samsung only ; others used hashtags like #shotoniPhone, #iPhoneography, #iPhoneOnly, #smartphone. Except for one participant who uses a professional DSLR, all the participants mentioned or implied that they use they practice iPhoneography using a smartphone. And while not all participants personally defined their entire work as minimalist, candy minimalist, visual characteristics of these trends were evident in their work.

Both email and Instagram's "Direct Message" feature were used to contact participants. Interviews were then conducted through Email, Google Chat, Google Hangout, or Skype. Video interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and a half, while email interviews took one month to three months going back and forth between interviewee and myself. The selected image-makers shared their definition of their practice, their thoughts on iPhoneography as a creative practice, and their views on image-based social media and new creative practices.

Prior to contacting each participant, their Instagram account was closely examined for visual aesthetics and creative growth. The results of these observations helped understand the participants better and were used as conversation starters in the interview. All selected participants showed creative growth through their Instagram feed, meaning their recent posts were more professional and visually successful in terms of composition, camera angle, contrast, and the use of light and color than their first few posts. Regardless of the possibility of intrinsic factors influencing the growth of these iPhoneographers, it was clear that as they spend more time on Instagram their work goes through visual transitions.

3.3.2 Interview Questions

The following questions were asked but were modified depending on the work of the interviewed image-maker; Interviewees were asked to also contribute beyond these questions and share any ideas or stories they thought of as valuable:

1. Do you have a creative background or training? What is your life beyond Instagram?

2.   How do you define your work? Is it photography, iPhoneography, experimental images, or something else?

3.   From your perspective what is so special about using Instagram to share your creative work? How has its use contributed to your personal work?

4.   What do you think of Instagram's square? Is it a positive or negative feature?

5.   For users who have used Instagram for longer than 6 months and whose work has gone through stylistic changes: Your work on Instagram reflects a distinctive style yet goes through creative transitions every once in a while. Would you agree? And if so, what is the reason behind creative transitions in your work?

6.   Has following other creative people on Instagram influenced your work? If yes, how so?

7.   How do you think image-based social media platforms like Instagram have changed the definition of images and their function?

8.   Has iPhoneography changed the definition of beauty?

3.3.3 Ethnographic Observations

Two types of observational work were conducted, the first was general of Instagram trends and the second was done for each participant. They both took the form of handwritten and digital notes. The first was done on multiple sessions during this research and involved identifying change in visual characteristics of images posted on Instagram and also of how an Instagram account is used over time. This was done to understand the evolution of creative visual trends and also in how image-makers are taking different roles.

The first type of observation was specific to each participant and focused on how they grew and changed as image-makers over time. Prior to interviewing a participant, I would examine their entire Instagram feed and focus on comparing very early post to current ones. Some participants have used Instagram for over six years and others for a year. That meant a tedious effort in overviewing each year a participant was active for on Instagram.

3.4 Phenomenological approach

Phenomenology, broadly conceived, can be described as a reflexive process that examines the lived experience by cultivating an interest in the true meaning of things (Van Manen, 2007) . Phenomenology is focused on how we "are" in the world or what Martin Heidegger calls "in-being". It stems from the belief that our experience and understanding of the world is enriched when we become aware of this state of being (Van Manen, 2007). Based on the notion of reflexivity, as a form of inquiry it is mindful of how prejudice and assumptions can alter how a phenomenon is perceived. Van Manen, a leading phenomenologist, talks about this idea when he writes: "reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications" (Van Manen, 2007, Para 1). It is important to keep in mind that Van Manen's views are specific to one approach in phenomenology, and that other scholars would agree on reflecting but see theory and assumption not as "intoxications" but valuable insights.

While the origins of phenomenology are rooted in philosophy and have been practiced within it, it became a field of its own in the 20. century when philosophers and theorists such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre and others started writing about phenomenology as an identifiable field and an applied practice. It is now seen as a practice or a protocol where the "first person" takes the lead in understanding how something is experienced ("Phenomenology," 2013).

As Mark Vagle (Vagle, 2014) describes in his book *Crafting Phenomenological Research*, there are three popular approaches to phenomenology. Early research on phenomenology, practiced by the likes of Edmund Husserl and Amedeo Giorgi, followed a descriptive approach that challenges conventional approaches to social sciences. The focus in descriptive phenomenology is understanding the phenomenon by only describing the experiences of those who have encountered it. This approach also talked about understanding the phenomenon by examining its essence (Vagle, 2014).

The second well recognized approach to phenomenology is interpretive or Hermeneutic which was led by Martin Heidegger and now Max Van Manen. Scholars who practice interpretive phenomenology disagree with the focus on essence and see phenomenology as a way of understanding being in the world. In this approach the phenomenon is always in a state of transience, being shaped and reshaped.

The third approach to phenomenology, which is used in this research is post-intentional. Established by Vagle himself, it is revolutionary in looking at the phenomenon and everything that could influence it our influence understanding it. Vagle believes meaning in the world to be multiple, partial and in flux and that phenomenology is about understanding what frames our view of the world. In the post-intentional approach to phenomenology several factors are considered such as philosophical or theoretical constructs which can frame the phenomenon, and the parameters of the phenomenon, be it the context where the phenomenon takes place or policies and regulations that impact the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014).

Post-Intentional phenomenology as a research method was important in filling this gap since it allowed me to use my personal work with iPhoneography as an element in understanding what shapes iPhoneography. Practicing phenomenology in general, means a hyper-awareness of personal assumptions brought forth by the researcher. Yet, in post-intentional phenomenology, these assumptions are not seen as a weakness but a form of understating how the research is framed. This is reason behind utilizing post-reflexivity here to analyze my observation of the Candy Minimalism movement and analyze my personal attempts to practice iPhoneography and Candy Minimalism. Regardless of how images could carry valuable meaning, we must accept that they are complex artifacts that could not be entirely understood (Schwartz, 1989)., which is why taking the role of the image-maker myself allowed for a deeper understanding to take place.

The following section is dedicated to understanding iPhoneography as a modern day phenomenon that shapes digital imaging and visual communication, based on the knowledge I gained from that class.

3.4.1 Collection of empirical phenomenological materials

In phenomenological research, there are various ways to ensure validity and credibility. Bracketing, which emerged from the works of Husserl, is a very common method in descriptive phenomenology, where knowledge of the research is objectively stated and set aside. This method was extended and revised by Dahlberg to become bridling: the intention of not just stating that assumptions exist but articulating their role in influencing the work and acknowledging where they come from. Vagle (2014) emphasized the role of bridling

when he mentions that "When bridling we try to cull our agency so that our agency alone does not determine the phenomenon" (p 69).

In post-intentional phenomenology, that which acknowledges not only the mindset of the researcher taken from descriptive or interpretive phenomenology but also any other factors that influence the phenomenon, it is crucial to understand iPhoneography as a phenomenon. In post-intentional phenomenology, the context and history of a phenomenon are as important as the phenomenon itself because they play a role in shaping the phenomenon. And while examining a phenomenon we could use theory and post-reflexivity to better understand it (Vagle, 2014).

Thus, we cannot examine iPhoneography without examining the context, or "field" if aligning the work with Bourdieu's Practice Theory, where the phenomenon takes place. Instagram works for the purposes of this research as the context where iPhoneography is practiced, and it has specific parameters. Parameters relevant to sharing an image are: **(1)** images are displayed in either a square or a rectangular format (before 2015 it was square only), **(2)** posting an image always involves the option of adding a filter or not, **(3)** posting an image means adding textual captions with the ability to add hashtags, and **(4)** images will always be displayed on a user's feed in a grid like display. Parameters relevant to viewing images are that posts from various users are viewed together on one's feed and they are not in chronological order but arranged according to what seems to be a random order to viewers. Some claim is an algorithm designed by Instagram that determines the popularity of images and arranges them according to that.

Due to the need of understanding Instagram as the context in order to understand the phenomenon, to examine iPhoneography and the emergence of image worlds phenomenologically here a post intentional phenomenological approach was used. The main key to this approach is the use of reflexivity as a main element in data collection and analysis. Vagle (2014) encourages the use of post-reflexivity while examining a phenomenon in order to assure the credibility of the work but also as a form of examining and understanding the phenomenon. And since in phenomenological research it becomes hard to separate data collection from analysis, phenomenological researchers use the whole-part-whole method where post reflexivity takes the place of bracketing and bridling to generate a more holistic examination of the phenomenon.

Vagle explains the whole-part-whole approach: "We must always think about the focal meaning (e.g., moments) in relation to the whole (e.g., broader context from which they are situated" (Vagle, 2014 p.97).

For the purpose of this examination, iPhoneography and Instagram were both examined phenomenologically by using post-reflexivity as a collection and analysis method.

3.4.2 Identifying Image-worlds: Minimalism and Candy Minimalism as Examples

To examine iPhoneography as a form of practice that generates connected immersive images (Image-Worlds) is to analyze a set of human practices. Image-makers who use several smartphone applications to snap, edit and then share their work on image-based social media, like Instagram, work in a process-based manner to visually communicate personal experiences. An ethnographic qualitative method has therefore been selected to conduct this empirical research. The goal here is to understand what happens to the creative processes, creative agency and aesthetic perceptions when iPhoneographs are created and shared.

iPhoneography can be examined from various perspectives, therefore the selection of participants started with investigating visual trends and movements popularized via Instagram. Looking into accounts that promote artistic image making, the following movements stand out: grouping common or themed items, minimalism, candy minimalism, pantone themed photography, food and nature as representative elements, coffee culture, lines and geometry, surrealism, representing natural light, where I stand, roofline_envelope, and several others. Some are recognized by a #hashtag while other have Instagram accounts that promote these movement through their entire feed.
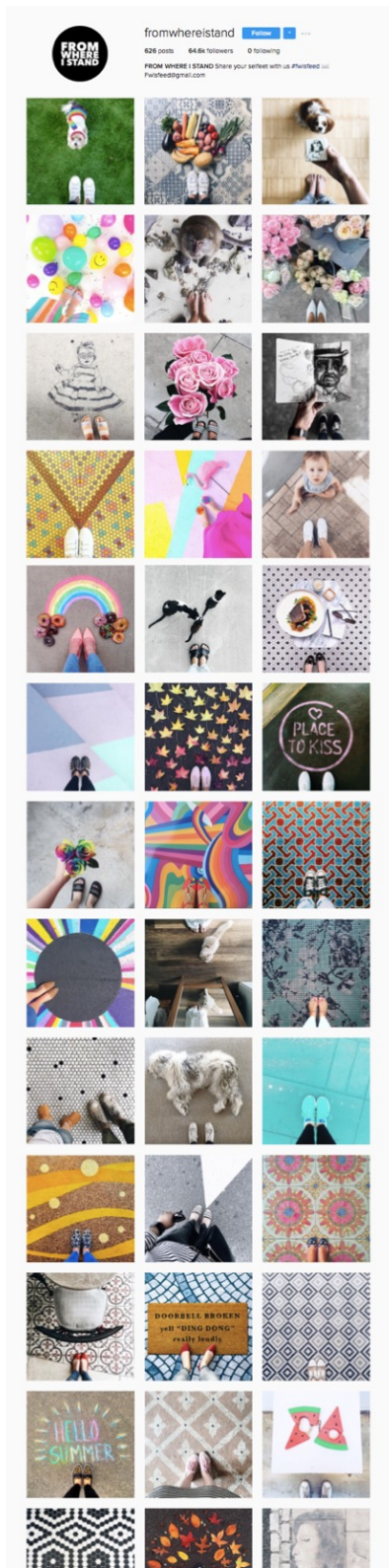
Figure 8: The Where I stand movement started was a hashtag and then became an Istagram account which show cases images posted using the #whereistand.

Minimalism and its sister movement candy minimalism, were selected as the main movements participants were identified through. Minimalism is a visual movement that is heavily participated in and viewed, where Image-makers attempt to eliminate visual clutter and produce images that focus on one element, color, texture, geometry, and/or negative space. Several communities emerged based on the notion of photographic minimalism and use some of the following hashtags to be recognized: #Rsa_minimal, which refers to Royal Snapping Artists Minimalists, #CandyMinimalists, and #Minimalism_world.

While the origin of the minimalist trend on Instagram had several contributors, the candy minimalism has a clear history. Matt Crump, a graphic designer, started this trend by using his smartphone to alter images. At the beginning of his popularity his blog included a "How To Guide" on how to use smartphone applications to achieve results similar to his. Now this informative page is unavailable and Crump has gained a lot of popularity and produced images for major corporations like Target, Google, MTV, and others.

We might not know if Crump is still committed to creating images only through his smartphone, yet he has established a new movement. While Crump is a professional, the people who follow him are professional amateurs. The amateur aspect that continues from Crump's work is the growth of image-makers who simulate his work by using his techniques or improvising their own. Crump also provides an opportunity on his Instagram account to showcase the best fan work. In addition to posting his work, he encourages an open, visually creative environment by allowing his fans to become part of his candy minimal experience. He has succeeded in generating an image-world, a group of images that forms connections. His work has reached an immersive level, where other image-makers attempt to replicate certain aesthetics using their smartphones only.

Also, while Instagram accounts are usually owned by a single user, these movements post their images to a community owned accounts where curators and moderators control the account and scout Instagram for content. Here are two examples of community accounts, the first works with Minimalism (see figure 9) and the second example with Candy Minimalism (see figure 10)
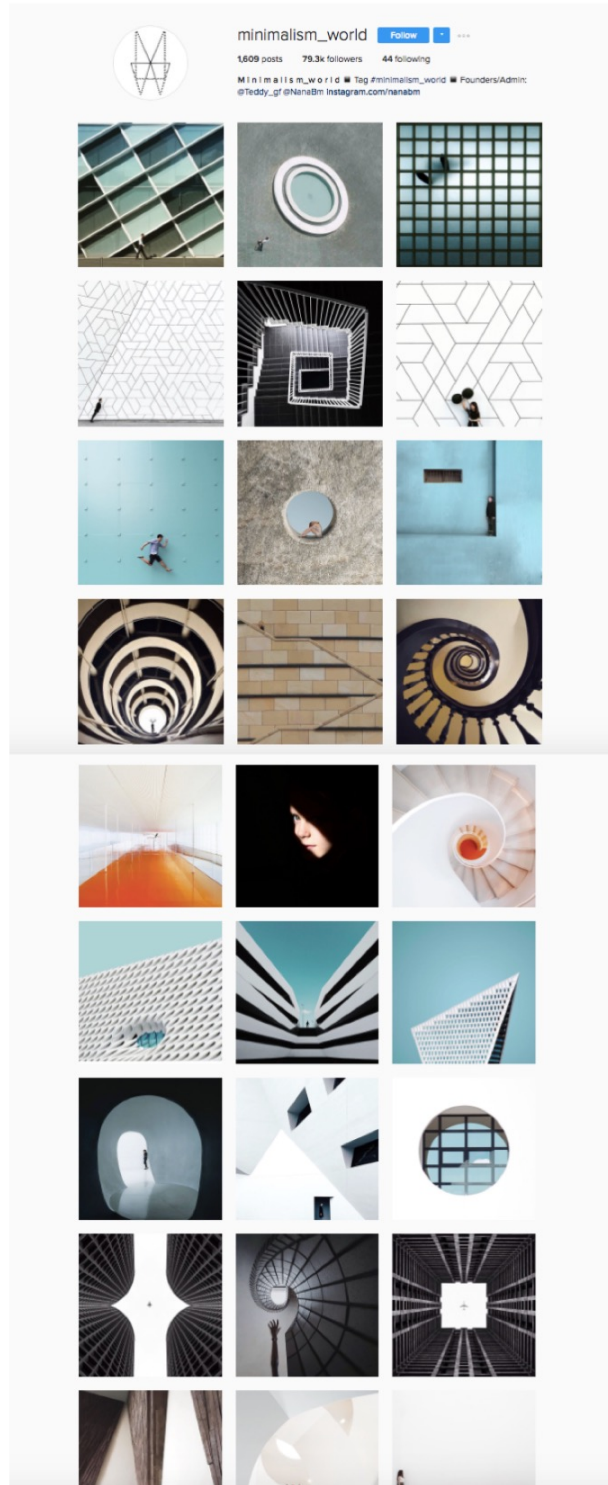
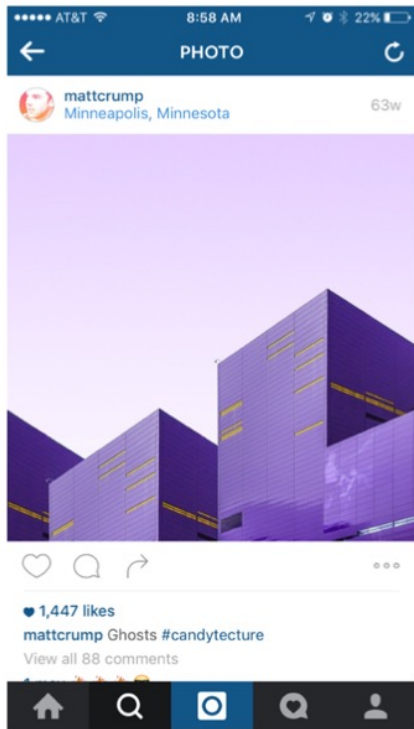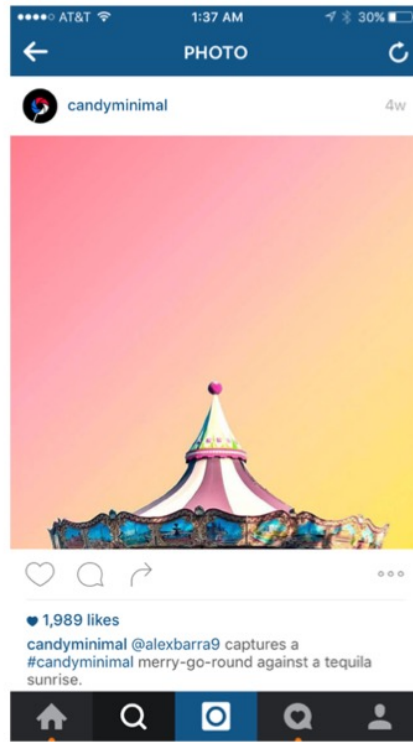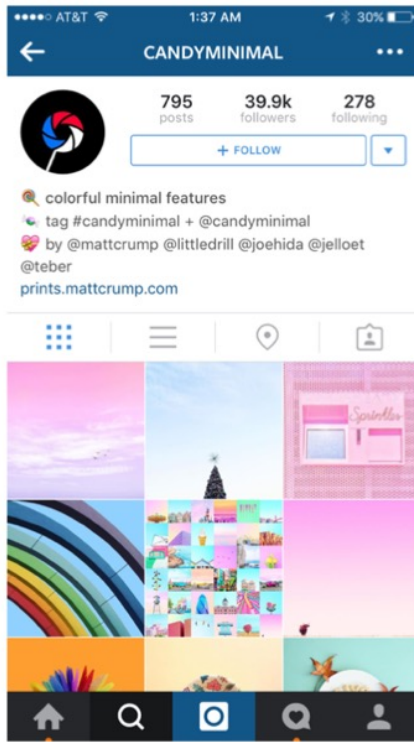*Figure 9: An example of an Instagram account that presents Minimalism*

Figure 10: An example of an Instagram account that presents Candy Minimalism

3.5 Discussion

The research presented here focuses on the global phenomenon of iPhoneography and the use of the image-based social media platform Instagram. Examining how images are generated and shared on social media today, one cannot ignore the fact that a common visual dialogue has surfaced from work shared by various Instagram users. The visual dialogue here refers to aesthetic choices, concepts, and the growing number of users who generate and share images on social media without prior experience in image making. The qualitative nature of this study does not intend to impose assumptions and hypotheses but introduces general observations, allowing participants to contribute to a better understanding of these observations.

However, **there are major limitations** that emerge when studying any form of social media. In the case of Instagram, it is impossible to know the process and applications used to create an image prior to being shared. Also, social media is changeable by nature. Not only do applications change and alter their features, just as Instagram converted its signified shape of the square into an option rather than a mandatory crop ratio, but also trends and forms of use evolve quickly over time. Another limitation is the inability to track all activities that happen on Instagram due to the large number of users and images shared.

Regardless of these challenges images can become data worthy of interpreting just as gestalt theorists used visual forms to generate theoretical frameworks (Koenderink 2015). Images snapped, edited, and shared on image-based social media provide valuable information on how people today express their creative agency, their aesthetic style and hence themselves. Speaking with iPhoneographers, observing images shared on Instagram and reflecting on the experience of practicing iPhoneography brought forth new perspectives on the phenomena of iPhoneography and the experience of using a smartphone aside from their transient nature.

4 Analysis and Results

4.1 Overview

"[Working with Instagram] is like this magic way of being able to get into someone else's head and really see the world through their lens, if only just temporarily." (Chris Le)

The following chapter will discuss the analysis of the collected data and their results. Two qualitative approaches, and ethnographic and a phenomenological were adapted to examine how iPhoneography and the use of smartphones has transformed the contemporary experience of visual communication and shaped new trends. The ethnographic data consisted of observations of images shared on Instagram that focus on creative expression between 2012 and 2016. They were followed by qualitative interviews conducted with iPhoneographers who contribute to Instagram's creative community. 12 Instagram users, whose real names are shared here, were interviewed and their Instagram profiles were assessed. At the time of the interviews, the participating image makers produced work that either belonged to a Minimalist, Candy minimalist or an experimental visual movement on Instagram.

The second analysis phase adapted procedures from post-intentional phenomenology, specifically post-reflexivity. I used written post-reflexivity to understand my assumptions and experience practicing iPhoneography myself. I observed and analyzed Candy Minimalist images shared on Instagram and later attempted to create ones of my own. I wrote extensively about what I saw and felt. Post-reflexivity was used here to analyze the meanings behind creating iPhoneographic work, specifically Candy Minimalism, known for its distinctive visual characteristics of vibrant colors and bold lines.

These two approaches, the ethnographic and phenomenological, were critical in the understanding of both Instagram as a space that allows the phenomenon of iPhoneography to take shape, and of the image-makers who generate these interesting images. It is clear that images are made and read differently today, and since images are changing they are therefore worthy of being re-examined.

A general reflexive statement that situates myself with in the research is presented first (4.2), followed by the analysis of the qualitative (4.3 from ethnographic analysis and 4.4 for phenomenological analysis). A discussion of overall results from both approaches is shared in the last section of this chapter (4.5).

4.2 Initial reflexivity statement: Who am I in relation to iPhoneography

I identify as a digital artist. My background is in Graphic Design with a passion for photography, and both fields shape the visual quality of my artwork. While my practice utilizes photography, video, text, and space, for the past seven years most of my work has been on my iPhone. I therefore consider myself an experimental and resourceful image-maker, because I work with any tools I find available even if it was just my mobile device.

I became interested in photography visiting the IKEA store as a 10 year old child, and was fascinated by how images became mass produced and collectible objects. What surprised me was how the same photograph could be owned by many. Each photograph had a story and a value to its maker, but lived a new life when someone took it home. In my teens, I asked my parents for an expensive camera, thinking that these amazing micro photographs of plants and flowers had to be produced with the best tools. Instead, I was given an old SLR that my dad used on family trips. A few years later when I started taking photography classes at the age of 18, I owned a snap-and-shoot Casio camera that looked cheap, at least to me, and felt lightweight. I took that camera everywhere and captured thousands of shots of food, flowers, scenery, and random objects.

An important point in my career was moving to the US in 2010 to start a graduate Digital Arts program; it was then that I owned my first iPhone. The transition to a new environment encouraged me to use creative work to reflect on my personal experiences. The first few pieces I produced during that time talked about my separation from loved ones, the political state of the world, and the impact digital technology on image-making. While I was not fully aware that I was carrying my image-making device in my purse, I was intrigued by how the iPhone allowed artistic expression to take place.

Driven by the separation from loved ones, and my passion for photography, in my early days in New York City, I would visit locations that reminded me of my family. With the intention to disguise the recognizable identity of the touristic locations, I produced a series of abstract photographs using my iPhone. I took advantage of the iPhone's inability to capture movement, and would move my hands vigorously so that the photograph was a blur. I used my iPhone to process emotions of homesickness in a new big city.
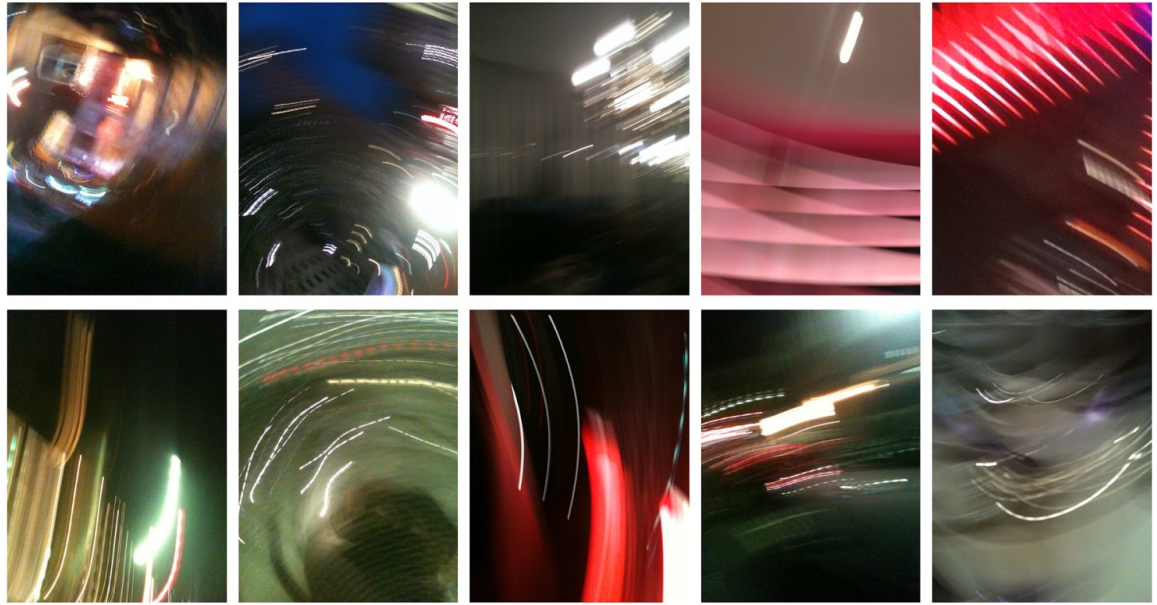
Illustration 5: an series of photographs I created using my iPhone titles "Playing with light", 2010, digital photographs

I continued to use my phone to either document what was around me or to create experimental images, and in 2016 I used it to reflect on the ownership of creative work in the age of social media. In the piece Repetitive Organic, I created a series of prints that questions ownership in the age of smartphones and speaks about how smartphone applications shaped new visual aesthetics. To combine my passion for iPhoneography, which is the core of this dissertation, with an initiative for some form of community engagement, I asked 6 of my colleagues to share the experience of their daily commute with a photograph.
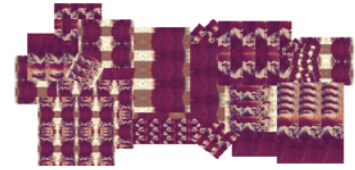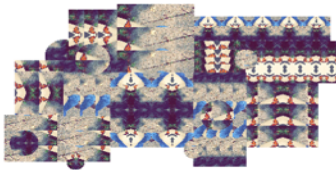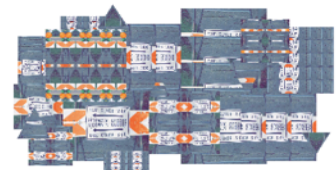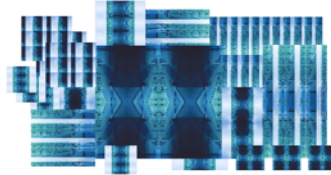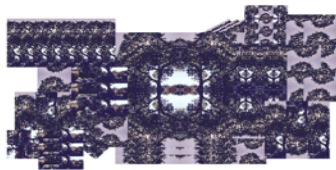
Illustration 6: Repetitive organic, 2016, Digital Prints

I transformed the photographs with my iPhone with the addition of filters and by using the smartphone application layout to crop and multiply images in various ways. The original photographs evolved to become fragmented images and in generating these new images, I had to ask myself several questions. While each person had a story about their photograph, what does it mean for me to remove that original meaning and add my own? Is this a collaborative work or am I the owner of these pieces? And have our smartphones made us closer somehow?

The start of my interest in iPhoneography was in 2012 when I signed up for an Instagram account to connect with family and friends. My impression of the image-based social media platform before joining was that it allows images to be enhanced through filters. Identifying as a visual artist and a photography enthusiast, I resisted the idea of having a smartphone application make my photos look "pretty". I even posted this photo on Facebook to show that the natural pink cast light was not created with a filter. I wrote "No Instagram".
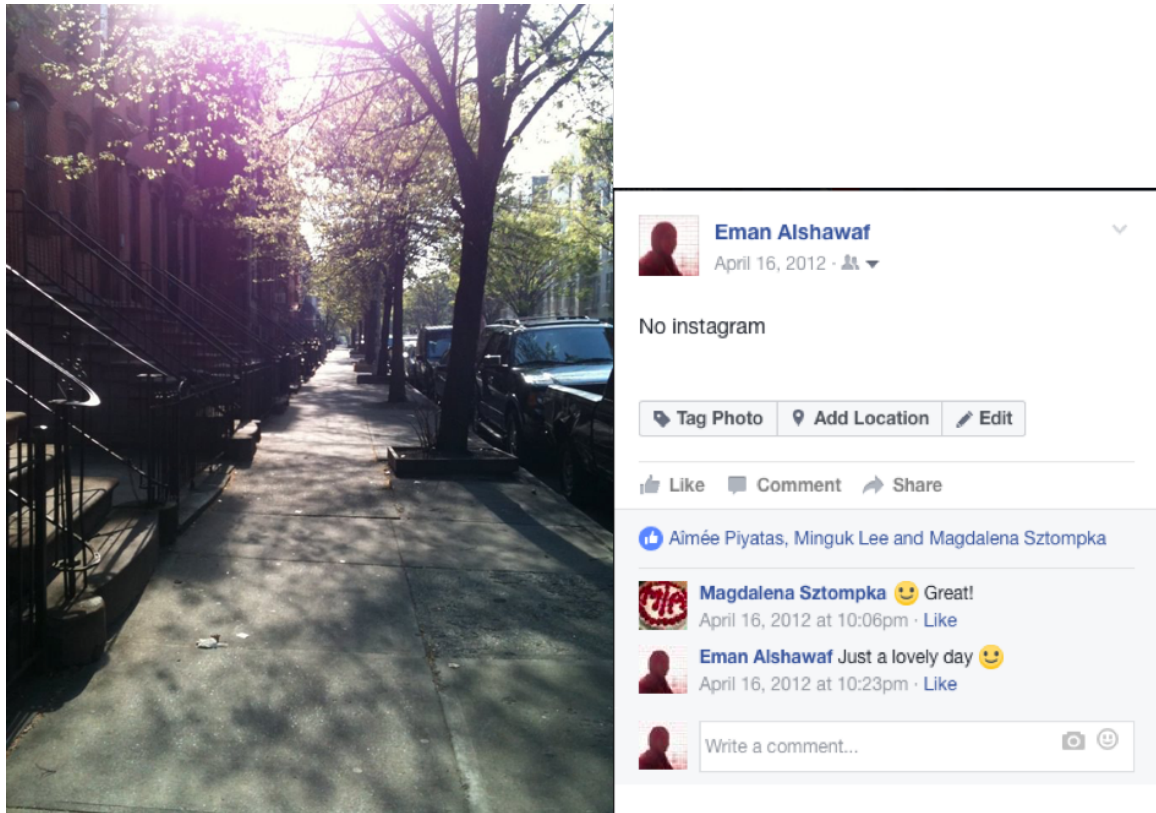
Figure 11: Screenshot of my facebook post criticizing Instagram in 2012

Peer pressure eventfully got to me and I explored Instagram. My first impression of the platform was that it allowed people to show a superficial version of themselves., specifically with the rise of the selfie and the over documentation of personal lives. Friends who were only on the platform for a year already had over a couple hundred filtered pictures of themselves, their family, and their food.

In one post, I reacted to the trend of mirroring a photograph of one's self, where the process involved editing a selfie in an application that would reverse a duplicate of the

photograph. The image would have an Instagram filter applied to it before it is uploaded. Here I chose to hide my face and wrote "I'm officially faceless like the rest of them…". To express my discontent with these interpretation, which I believed to be fake, I would mimic what others post. I then screen-printed my Instagram feed as a way to express my early, confused days on Instagram.
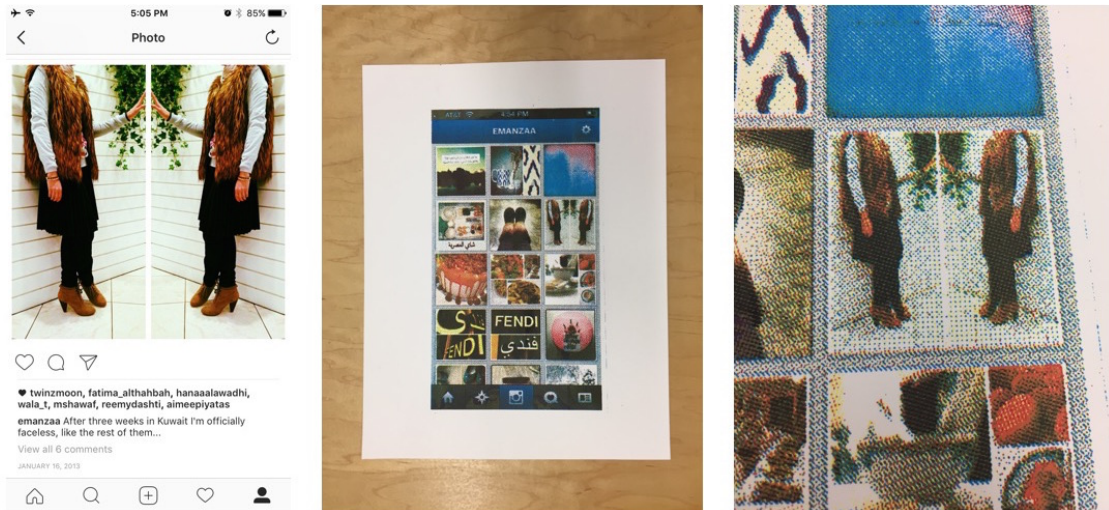

Illustration 7: My Instagram Post and a Screenprint of my account in early 2013

At that time, there was something on Instagram called the "popular page". If a post received a large number of "likes" in a short amount of time, that post would appear on the popular page for an entire day. It was through that page that I became obsessed with Instagram. I was fascinated by how posts would receive great popularity and good exposure in a short amount of time, and become viewed by a global audience.

Another feature of Instagram that fed my obsession was the "activity page" which allowed me to see the activities of the people I followed. If someone I followed liked a post, I would be notified of their "activity". And if two or more people I followed liked the same post, I also was able to see that. I became amazed by how people from various locations in the world, who did not know each other or even follow each other on Instagram, and with different interests, liked the same image and content on the same day it was posted. It felts as if Instagram was facilitating connectivity by tweaving invisible threads among its users.

The "popular" and the "Activity" pages both allowed me to explore new people on Instagram. Since then I couldn't stop my search for people who used the platform in ways other than what it was intended for. It was designed to allow us share our memories but I saw people use it to advertise themselves or explore creative practices.

Starting in the Spring of 2013, prior to planning this specific research journey, several hours every week were spent exploring Instagram. Users from various locations in the world, with various levels of expertise, with various creative agendas, and with both personal and commercial goals were followed and observed. Initial observations allowed the potential of this platform to be identified; it appeared to be a great tool for communication and connectivity.

Prior to this dissertation, I investigated Instagram's power as a personal marketing tool and its cultural impact. My first Instagram specific research project focused on social media mavens, charismatic people who became popular and wealthy through Instagram. Along with two other colleagues, Le Wen and Abdulrahman Albanna, I worked on analyzing around 3000 images posted on Instagram. We generated a model that explained how people could become recognized and maintain that recognition. I later on moved to explore the cultural impact of Instagram and interviewed hijabi women who used social media to reflect on their Muslim identity. I could not get over the fact the Instagram allowed communities to connect and define their visual identity.

It was in the spring of 2014 that I decided to give my attention to creative practices on Instagram. I dedicated more time to understanding creative communities and trends that manifested through the platform. It was very clear to me, through my observations, that what took place on Instagram was leaving our smartphones and the virtual world to become part of the physical world. Advertising and media took great inspiration from the creative decisions that Instagram users were making. It was clear to me that iPhoneography was an important practice to examine due to it newness and the lack of literature that tackled it.

Initially I thought my research on Instagram took me away from regularly producing artwork. My Instagram feed reflected a variety of trends which I chose to test out so I to understand how Instagrammers became iPhoneographers. What I realized several months after creating several iPhoneographs, that I was still productive as an image-maker yet relied on a different tool as a creative outlet.
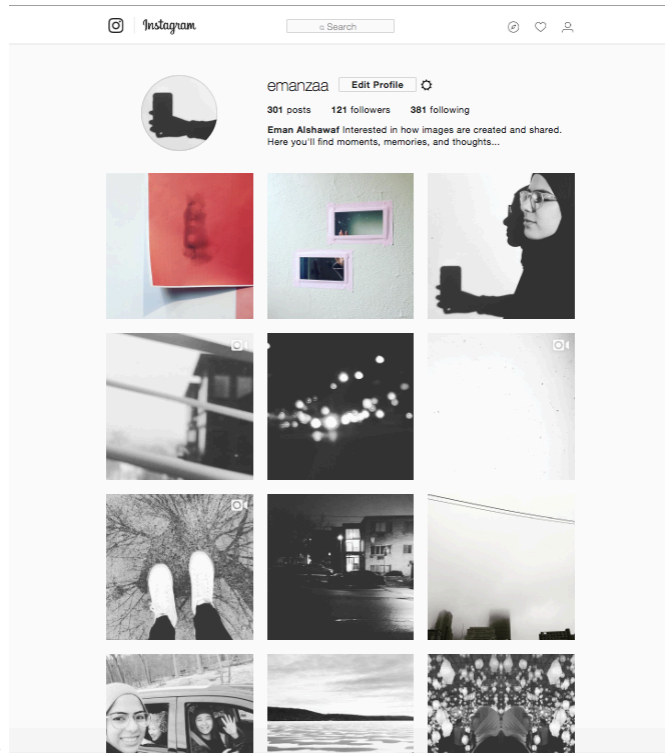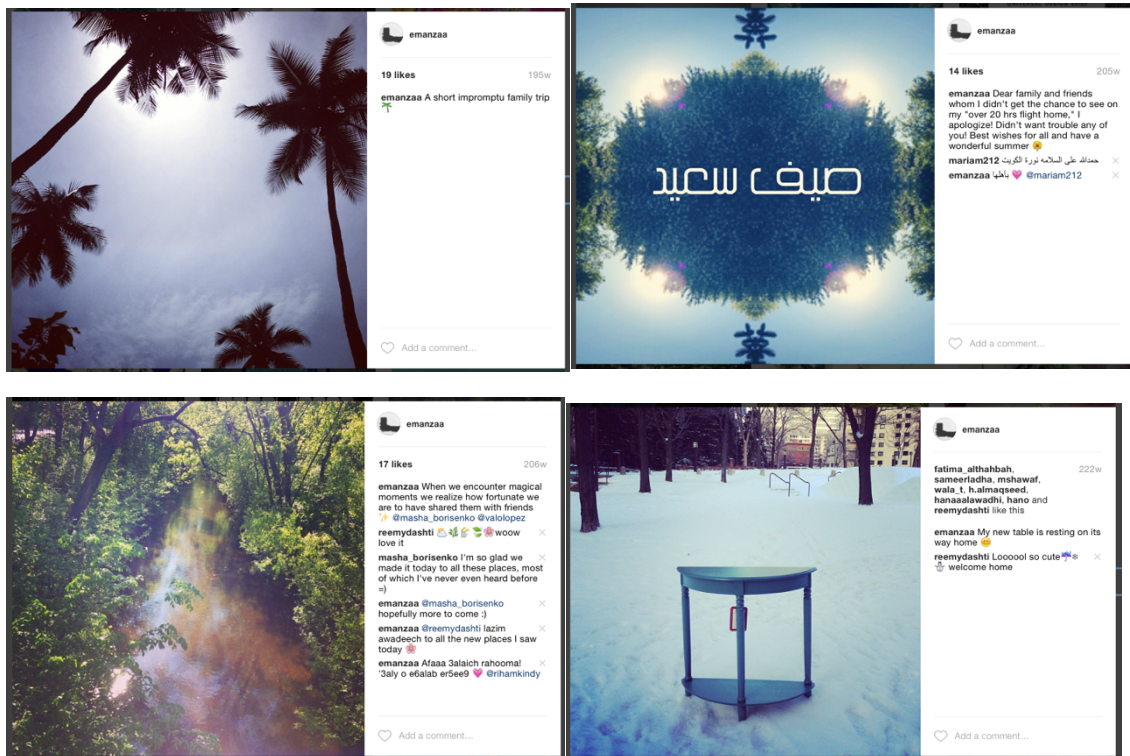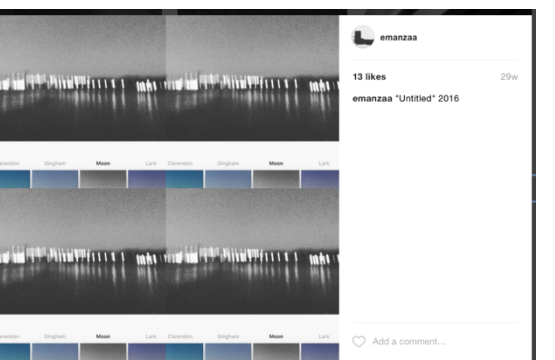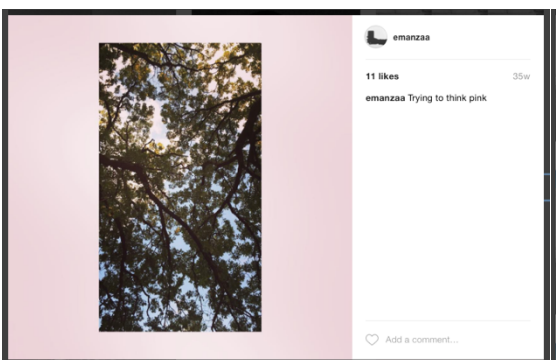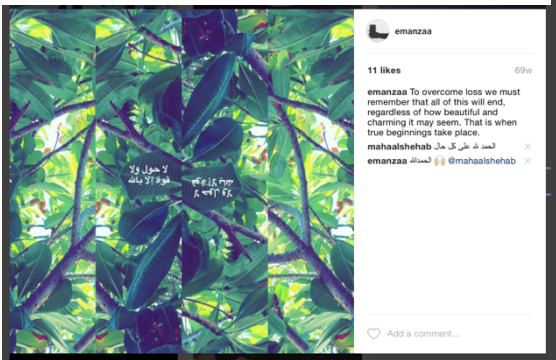
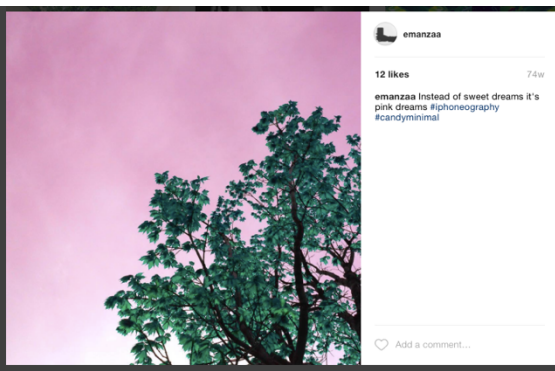*Illustration 8: a screenshot on my Instagram feed in June of 2017*

emanzaa

15 likes 171w

reemydashti 😍😍😍😍😍😍
😍😍
قاعد أتخيل محشي مربى 😋
😋😋😋 @reemydashti
لا!!! الحاله صعبه😋 مر reemydashti
قتايح نبيبب مكتين #من_اجل_ابلتي
لا الدونت ما يشلاخ الصحية ما دام emanzaa
@reemydashti 😋 الخيال موجود
noor_s Yummy 😍
emanzaa 😍 @noor_s
shahed_jt إصافية 😋 وين الكرك؟
emanzaa 😋 نطرح @shahed_jt
shahed_jt o 3arafna l neqsa ;) x
noor_s 😋 الله يحييج. حلتا على الدونت
@emanzaa
dalnaggar Yummy. Looks good.

Add a comment...

---

emanzaa

19 likes 94w

emanzaa And so the past days felt
like... upside down? Now Ramadan
comes to an end.

Add a comment...

---

emanzaa

12 likes 82w

emanzaa Find me everywhere... Find
me no where... #iphoneographicstory

0:12
1:07
Hola from
the road
ahead
0:10

Add a comment...

---

emanzaa

12 likes 74w

emanzaa Instead of sweet dreams it's
pink dreams #iphoneography
#candyminimal

Add a comment...

---

emanzaa

11 likes 69w

emanzaa To overcome loss we must
remember that all of this will end,
regardless of how beautiful and
charming it may seem. That is when
true beginnings take place.
mahaalshehab الحمد ش على كل حال
emanzaa الحمدلله 🙌 @mahaalshehab

لا حول ولا
فوق إلا بالله

Add a comment...

---

emanzaa

24 likes 45w

emanzaa I make images to self-reflect.
Why do you make images?
#lostwithinblue

Add a comment...

---

emanzaa

11 likes 35w

emanzaa Trying to think pink

Add a comment...

---

emanzaa

13 likes 29w

emanzaa "Untitled" 2016

Clarendon Gingham Moon Lark Clarendon Gingham Moon Lark

Clarendon Gingham Moon Lark Clarendon Gingham Moon Lark
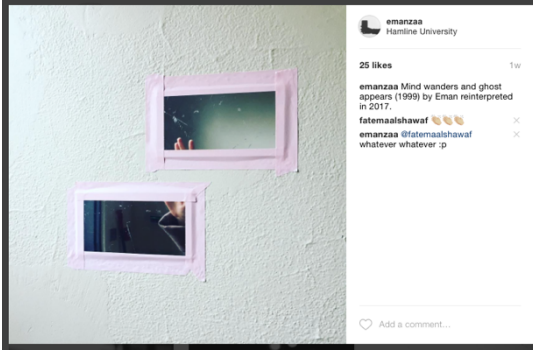
Add a comment...

Illustration 9: a number of Instagram posts where I worked with varying levels of iPhoneography

I can't help but think that my work, even prior to existing on Instagram, shared values similar to those of iPhoneographers. The people I spoke to while writing this dissertation talked about how using one device is very convenient, motivates people to create wherever they are, and encourages them to be experimental. I also heard that they liked sharing their work in an environment that was less critical than that of an art gallery. Most of the people I've spoken with are amateurs, without any training in visual fields like art or design. They liked to experiment and use their life as resource for content. I too enjoy working with whatever tools or software I have access to and any applications I have available on my smartphone.

Going back to my example of how I saw photographic prints sold at the IKEA store as meaningful and beautiful, I am aware of how the abundance of images shared on social media is sometimes derived by the desire to generate beauty in the world and be surrounded by it. I strongly felt then, as the 10 year old child, that hanging a print purchased from IKEA with a photograph of a flower meant constantly looking at something beautiful. I strongly believe that these early phases influenced how I produce work today. After owning both cheap and expensive equipment, I now believe having access to what some see as limited tools encouraged me to be a resourceful image-maker.

4.3 Ethnographic Analysis

After observing Instagram for five years, I can say there is a uniformity that takes place when a large number of images work harmoniously together as if they were created for the same art exhibit. While these images are created by different individuals and posted from different parts of the world, some of their similarities make it seem as though they were

created by the same person. There are several groups of images on Instagram that share similar visual qualities and techniques, ultimately formulating visual trends.

The newness and rapid pace of Instagram, which doesn't allow critics or historians the time to name these trends, has placed power in the hands of iPhoneographers. Through observations I recognized two methods of naming used by iPhoneographers: hashtags and community accounts. An Instagram user generates a recognizable hashtag when they decide to add the hashtag icon "#" in front of any word that they feel relevant to their work. They would then add the hashtag to the caption of their post, making it searchable by anyone on Instagram. An example of how a hashtag becomes a trends was mentioned by Sam Bakhsian, a participant in this dissertation. When he goes out to shoot photographs with other Minneapolis based Instagrammers, he mentioned that several them were taking pictures of their friend Eric Mueller, who is another participant in this research. Someone added the hashtag #backofericshead to caption their post and now many people who know Eric use this hashtag. The #backofericshead is not a widespread movement but showcases how a hashtag could represent images with similar content (See figures 10 and 11 for #backofericshead).
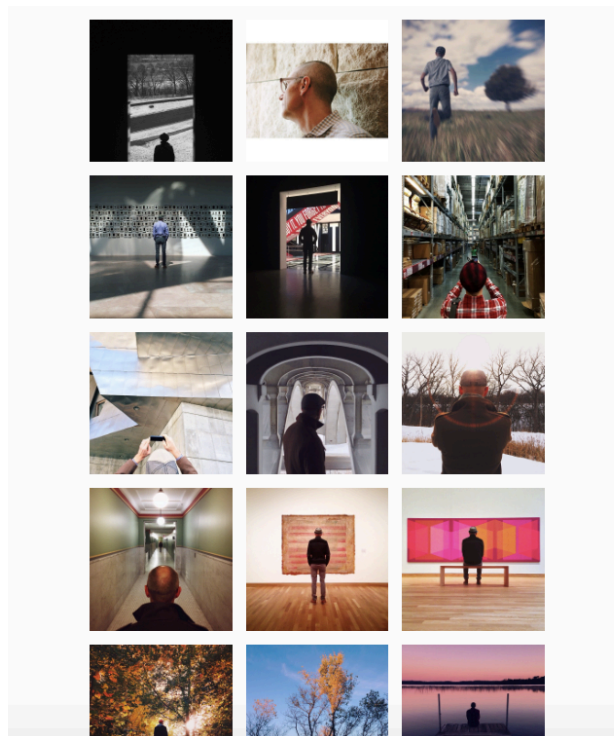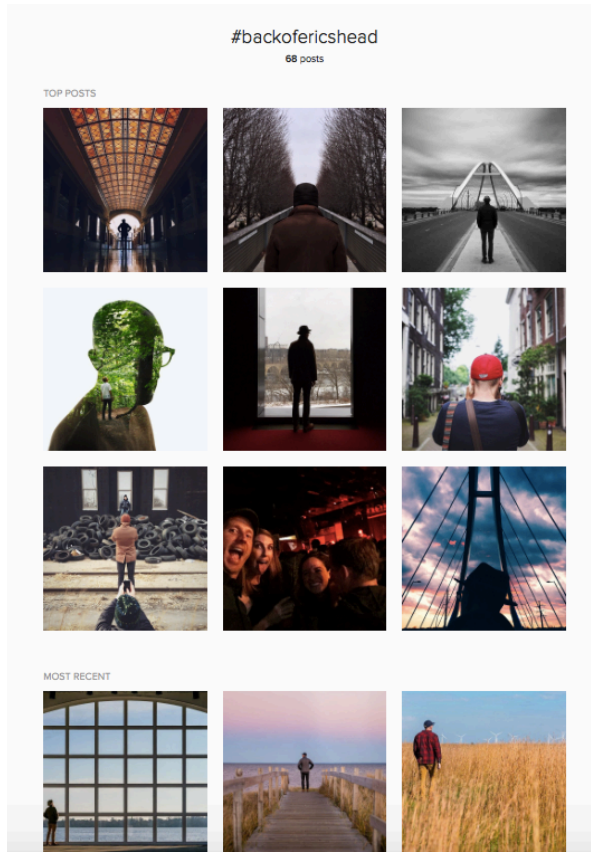
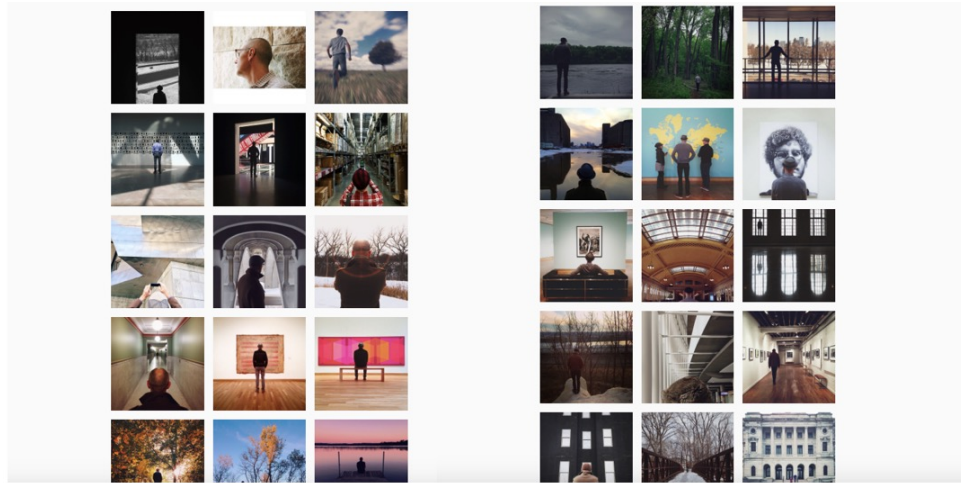*Figure 12: Screenshots 1 and 2 of #Back of Eric's Head*

Figure 13: Screenshots 3 and 4 of #Back of Eric's Head

Community accounts is another method for naming images of a similar visual style which later becomes a trend. An Instagram user or users start an account that focuses on a visual theme and name it according to that theme. They then search Instagram, via hashtags and the popular page (an Instagram feature that allows viewers to see the most popular images posted recently), for posts that connect with that theme. Posts that fit the theme are then reposted, accrediting the original image-makers. With time, a creative community evolves and has several moderators that introduce hashtags specific to the community, host competitions where they ask people to produce images with specific content or a specific concept, and invite people to collaborate by where capturing an image and allowing another person to edit it.

Instagram users provide visual trends with names for the purpose of community making. When an Instagram post states that the image belongs to a specific community or hashtag, it has a better chance of being viewed by image-makers who have similar visual interests. This process has played a major role in introducing trends such as minimalism, candy minimalism, surrealism, double exposure and others.
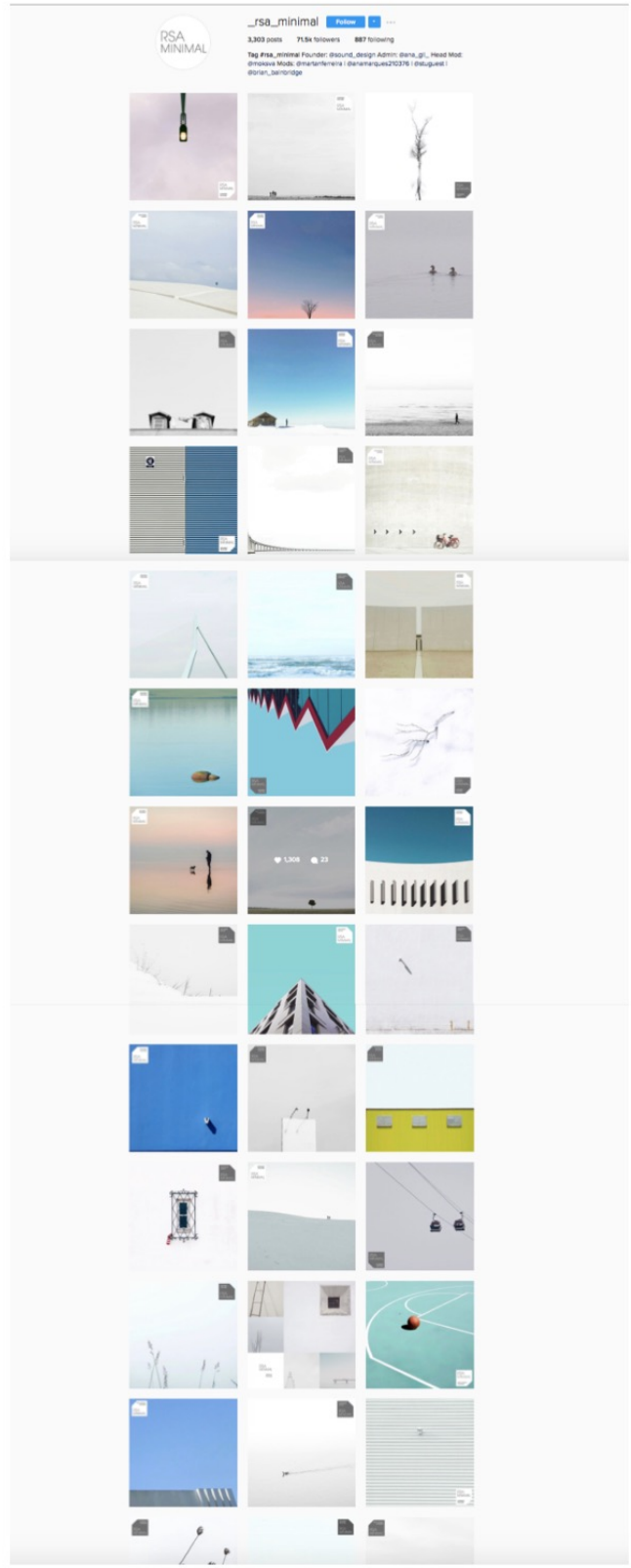
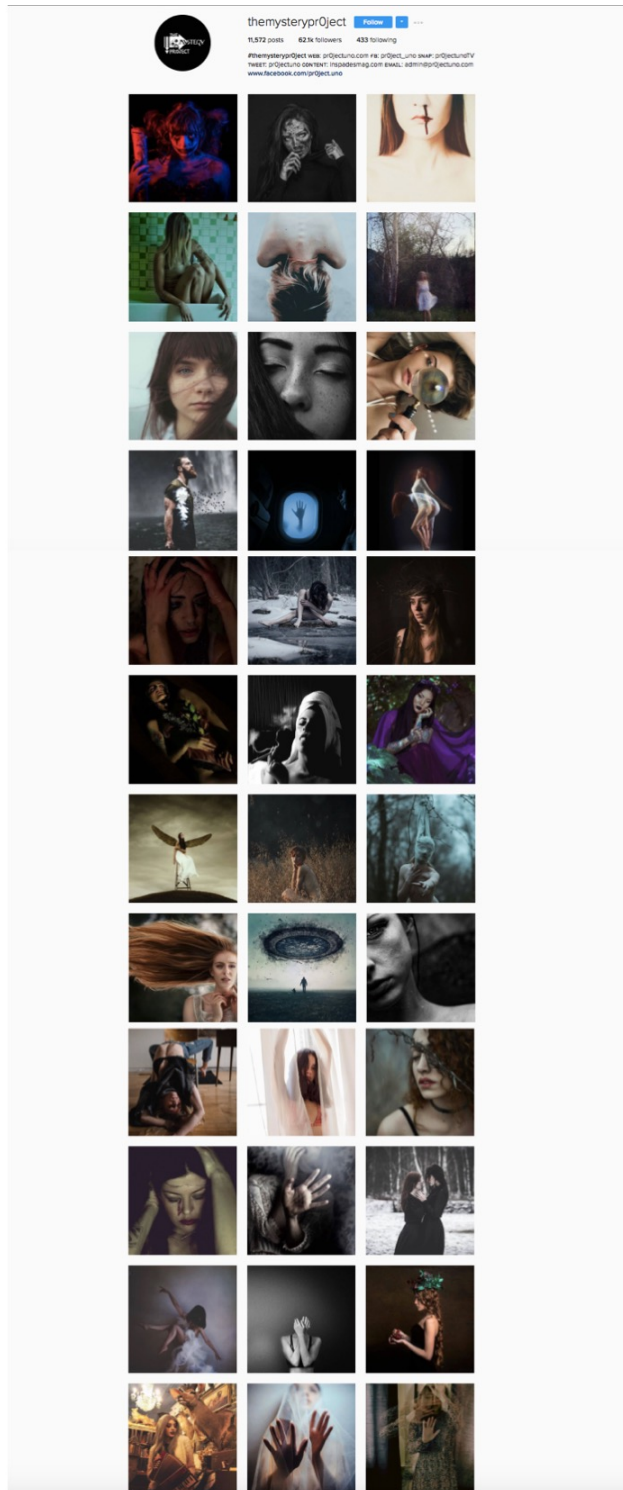*Figure 14: a screenshot of a community account for minimalist Instagrammers*

Figure 15: community account for Instagrammers interested in dark photography

4.3.1 Ethnographic Observations: My observations of general aesthetics and use among the Instagram community.

I would use Instagram a few times a week and view my general Instagram feed and the "popular page." In my early years on Instagram I followed Instagrammers recommended by other Instagram members, or Instagram's "popular page," which lists users whom received the most likes in the last 24 hours. It was the only way to find other users then, yet with time the list of people I followed became diverse. I began to find and follow users from different parts of the world, with different interests and also followed personal, professional and business accounts. In an observation session, I would spend between 15 to 60 minutes looking at recent imaging and tried to identify similarities and differences between posts of different users.

An important note is that Instagram feels like a Pandora's box most of the time. Viewing one post can lead to finding other accounts since a post could reference other users or use a hashtag. Also a quick overview of Instagram's "popular page "meant endless opportunities in looking at what users believe to be interesting. I would usually lost track of time looking at Instagram.

The following summery is based on summarizing observation notes. An important note is that while I only strated using Instagram in 2012, I was able to go back to older posts to determine what was shared in 2010 and 2011:

2010 – 2012: Instagram posts were personal, or random. The content of personal posts was mostly food, family members and friends, and life events. Random posts were of things out in the world an Instagrammer thought to be interesting like a street sign, a found object, or natural scenery.

The visual qualities of these posts were that they were highly saturated in color and sometimes grainy. Several posts used an Instagram feature that allowed adding a black or white frame around the image. Also, sompositions were spontaneous and not arranged.

2013 – 2014: Instagram posts had both personal and general content. People still shared images of their daily lives but also shared images of travels and hobbies. As for the visual qualities of posts they were less saturated, their colors were more faded, and they looked nostalgic like polaroid instant photos. When an image was of still life elements, more

interesting compositions, where the elements seemed to be aesthetically arranged, become frequent. Images of food and objects used top bird's eye view camera angle, and they also used nostalgic filters and worked with romantic arrangements reminiscent of 19th century still life paintings. Aesthetic decisions overall started to look more deliberate and planned. Images of similar content began to look more visually unified.

Companies and businesses started to mimic the general public by posting images that look spontaneous rather than designed by adverting agencies. Also, companies started asking prominent Instagram users to post on their behalf.

2015 – 2016: The content of Instagram posts is very varied: personal daily activities are still there and so are promotional posts yet now there are more motivational posts, educational posts, purely artistic posts and more. Themed accounts became more popular, those that shared similar content and all the posts look like a series of images. The following trends became popular too: Minimal photography, silhouetted portraits merged with natural scenery, and collaboration between instagrammers where one shoots an image and the someone else edits it. Images with No filters became popular too and #nofilter was used. Some Instagrammers began to utilize their personal feed as one unit. So instead of posting a singular post they would post a group that constructed one large image.

As for companied, they move away from spontaneous posts and do not shy away from sharing posts that are professionally designed like advertisements.

Thoughts on observing minimalism as a noted movement on Instagram

There are several visual trends and movements taking place on Instagram; two of these visual movements, minimalism and candy minimalism, were closely observed for this study through the popular accounts and hashtags that promoted them. Candy Minimalism and Minimalism are easy to identify since are both have the following visual qualities: strong lines, geometric shapes, strong colors, strong contrast. They could be seen as the photographic version of Swiss Style also known as the International Style in graphic design which also relied on the use of grids, lines, and the least number of elements needed in a composition.

Both movements, Minimalism and Candy Minimalism, are focused on eliminating visual clutter from the scene. Candy Minimalism embraces the use of vibrant or pastel pinks, blues

and purples to promote colorfully bold images. Minimalism on the other hand has various sub-movements: some focusing on keeping colors authentic and others on only black and white; some work with realism and others with surrealism; some work with bold lines found in architecture and other with soft organic lines found in nature.

Some prominent hashtags that developed into communities relevant to this research are #candyminimal, #candyminimalist, #candyminimalsim, #rsa_minimalist, and #tv_minimalism.

4.3.2 Understanding the participants

Participants were selected for their work in minimalism during or right before the time of their interview. It is important to keep in mind that some of the participants' work evolved into the minimalism movement after they spent their time first exploring other movements or social aspects of Instagram, others had a clear visual approach from the beginning. And just as some moved into it, some moved away from minimalism or away from the use of smartphones, which I saw when I revisited the participants accounts after the interview.

The participants who started using Instagram at the beginning of its release had a lot of personal and social posts at first. They used highly saturated filters and their images had a white or black border and then they stopped using them after it was no longer trendy to do that. The participants that started three years or more after Instagram was released, had a more refined approach from the beginning. Those who started later, had posts that were not pixelated or highly saturated like those seen on the early days of Instagram. There are many sub-movements of minimalism that the participants belonged to. Candy minimalism is strong on the use of filters to transform the colors into vibrant harmonious unless the colors in the image match that criteria. Realism Minimalism either uses the black and white filter or no filter at all. Surrealism minimalism is all about a Photoshop edited look.

The participants were…

11 smartphone users (2 of them occasionally using a D-SLR)
8 iPhone users
2 Samsung user
1 D-SLR user

Table 1: Participants' demographics

Name	Location	Device used to create images	Instagram handle	Visual style at the time of the interview
Alek Malachowski	Warsaw, Poland	Samsung	@hashtagalek	Minimalism
Chris Li	California, USA	iPhone	@chriscreative	Candy Minimalism
Daniel Cardoso Llach	Pennsylvania, USA	iPhone	@daniel.cordoso.llach	Experimental Surrealism
Eric Mueller	Minneapolis, USA	iPhone + D-SLR	@ericmueller	Minimalism
Javi Corral	Valencia, Spain	iPhone	@squarefied @daphunkt	Minimalist Surrealism
Jill Emmer	Minneapolis, USA	iPhone	@shineonyoucraydiamond	Minimalism
Michel Garzon	Madrid, Spain	iPhone	@michel.ito	Candy Minimalism
Naqib Jamaludin	Jakarta, Indonesia	D-SLR	@naqibj	Candy Minimalism
Radoslav Davidkoff	Sofia, Bulgaria	iPhone	@r.davidkoff	Candy Minimalism
Sam Bakshian	Minneapolis, USA	iPhone + D-SLR	sbakshian	Minimalism
Sherry Jeffry	BC, Canada	Samsung phone	@sherryjeffry	Minimalism
Stefano Bonomelli	Milan, Italy	iPhone	@mastroste	Minimalist Surrealism

Naqib was the only participant that used a professional camera all the way through to shoot his minimalist work; the other 11 participants all used smartphone only or a smartphone and some occasionally used a D-SLR. With the exception of Sherry and Alek, who owned Samsung devices, the other participants, Stefano, Sam, Daniel, Javi, Radosalv, Sam, Jill

and Eric, all own iPhone devices of various models. Everyone who used a smartphone, stated that information on their Instagram profile.

How did the participants define themselves? Asking the participants how they defined themselves was key to understanding how they place themselves in the world of image-making that takes place on Instagram. While this research considered them iPhoneographers because they create visually compelling work using smartphone technology, none of the participants used the term iPhoneography when describing their work. They however used the following terms: photographer, storyteller,, or someone who exchanges images.

The participants had a variety of educational and personal backgrounds too: photographer, social media manager, stay at home mom, filmmaker, graphic designer, graphic design student, interior designer, university professor in architecture, mechanical engineer, a web developer, and IT student and a restaurant owner. Some felt their background was critical, such as Chris Le who felt his education and work in design fed into the work he shares on Instagram; others didn't feel their background molded their work like Jill Emmer who studied English Literature and only started her creative career after she started an Instagram account dedicated to photography.

Each of the participants had different reasons for practicing iPhoneography. For some it was a form of personal expression that reflected emotions and stories, for others it was a creative expression, and some saw it as a way to practice photographic image-making. Or in another case, like Sherry Jeffry, it was a way of escaping from her busy daily life. On the other hand some practiced iPhoneography with craft in mind like Javi Corral, a graphic designer based in Spain; he looks at his work from the perspective of design and treats every iPhoneograph he posts on Instagram as a graphic design piece that requires attention to balance and detail. He said: "I'm a designer who works with photography. [….] I treat an image as a design" (Javi Corral)

Daniel Cardoso Llach, an architecture professor, also had a specific interpretation for his work. He considered the work he shared on Instagram as "recursive collages", which he defines as technology dependent and enabled images. He also considered his work to be the result of experimentation: "I see my Instagram account as a visual experiment in mobile networked photography" (Daniel Cardoso Llach)

Stefano Bonomelli on the other hand shied away from identifying as a professional image-maker. His career is based on the use of social media since he works as a social media manager for an art museum. However, regardless of the hundreds of photographs he shares on Instagram and the increasing number of Instagram followers he has, he didn't feel comfortable saying he was a photographer. He expressed how he believes professional photographers would not approve of his work:

"it took me so much time [to create work and write clear captions] because I am not a professional and I do that only with my smartphone, my iPhone." (Stefano Bonomelli).

He also didn't feel comfortable using the term "Storyteller" because he felt it was overused. Instead he identified as a guy who likes to share visual work on social media. Radoslav Davidkoff also expressed that he was a hobbyist who simply liked to photograph his city.

Regardless, all participants produced iPhoneographic work that belongs to a visual trend and used a smartphone to capture, edit and share most of their work seen on Instagram. The the excpetiond for using a smartphone were Erci Meuller who initially used a smartphone but started using a D-SLR more in 2015 and Naqib Jamaludin who used a D-SLR to produce work with an iPhoneographic mindset.

4.3.3 Themes that emerged from analyzing the interviews

Several themes emerged from analyzing my conversations with the participants. Participants talked about that value of Instagram as a tool that enabled them to connect with like-minded image-makers and to practice image-making on a regular basis. Participants were also impressed in how one device could offer a lot of option for creative production. They focused a lot on how iPhoneography allowed them to learn about themselves and to evolve as creative image-makers.

They also showed a strong attachment to Instagram, which as a platform encapsulated the documentation of their progression as image-makers. Through Instagram they were able to constantly find inspiration and become motivated from their interactions with other image-makers. Regardless of the some of the restrictions of Instagram, like the small scale of images and the square ratio, they felt the platform is responsible for the popularity of image-making today.

An unexpected theme that emerged was the notion of human connectedness that participants felt from working with Instagram. It was a surprise to hear different image-makers repeat how other Instagrammer are helpful, supportive, and generous with their knowledge and time. Instagram turned out to be as human centered as it is image-centerd.

The emerging themes are **(1)** the notion of identifying as smartphone users, **(2)** Instagram is a powerful tool, **(3)** Instagram fosters connectivity, **(4)** iPhoneography is an opportunity to learn, and lastly **(5)** unexpected aha moments. The last fifth theme showcases a number of unexpected ideas brought up by the participants.

(1) The notion of identifying as a smartphone user

To understand iPhoneography, it was important to know why the participants publically stated their use of smartphones instead of professional cameras. The following phrases were found on most participants' Instagram profiles "iPhone only", "99% iPhone" or "Samsung Galaxy." When they were asked about the reason behind sharing such information, the participants talked about the mobility of their smartphones which allowed them to make images on the go. They also desired to help others understand that iPhoneography was a democratic practice available to everyone, and reinforce the idea that one doesn't have to be professional image-makers or own expensive tools to create great work.

Sam Bakshian reflected on the portable aspect of creating images with a smartphone since the device was easy to carry ad use anytime. Sam gave the example of taking a picture while biking and how it would be hard to carry a professional camera:

"Most of my photos are with my phone. Like I took this picture when I was biking, and so I'm not gonna carry my D-SLR when I go biking but I can carry my phone" (Sam Bakshian).

And one participant, Daniel, felt the term iPhoneography was restricting and said "The term 'IPhoneography" sounds somewhat clunky and hardware-dependent to me. Why would people want to restrict themselves to a particular machine manufacturer?" (Daniel Cardoso Llach), other participants felt they wanted their audience to recognize that their sophisticated work was done using a simple tool:

"I'm not sponsored by Samsung but I thought that it would be cool just to share this information what I'm using to create those pictures. For example, I'm not using this camera [referring to his D-SLR]. I'm just using mobile." (Alek Malachowski)

In the case of a professional graphic designer, Javi used his smartphone as an escape from his professional practice which relied heavily on Adobe Photoshop. For viewers who assume that high quality work is the result of professional software like Adobe Photoshop, Javi felt it's important to clarify that he uses only iPhone applications to create his surrealist Instagram images: "I want people to think that if I can do it they can do it" (Javi Corral). He also didn't own a professional camera when he started sharing on Instagram and this was a nice challenge for him.

Another aspect of using a smartphone was the conviction that the type of camera owned doesn't determine the quality of work produced. Someone who strongly spoke about the wrong conviction that great imagery needs professional tools was Chris. He said the following:

> "I think underneath the surface, it's a way for me to say: even with a camera module that's built in a smartphone (considered inferior to high end equipment) - with the right composition, care and precision during the editing process, and right eye, you don't need a $450 camera to engage a viewer or to transport them to another place and time. Scratch that. Correction. $1,000+ camera. DSLR's can cost upwards of that!" (Chris Li).

In one case, Stefano talked about the stigma associated with using a using smartphone: "Millions of [professional] photographers are going to yell at me with insults." (Stefano Bonomelli). But another part of publicly stating that he used his smartphone for these images was his desire to have an honest relationship with his viewers and to reflect on using a portable device:

"And I always say no, no it's just my iPhone. I think it's a way... I'm not saying that using a traditional graphics is bad. it's just something that defines me more easily. Right now, I feel more comfortable seeing that I can take a picture of my world and my feelings with something that is very little and very handy" (Stefano Bonomelli).

There was definitely a sense of pride in their declaration of using an iPhone or a Samsung device. Overall, iPhoneographers felt empowered and not creatively restricted when using a smartphone device. It allowed them to identify as amateur or experimental image-makers who use accessible devices. Participants strongly felt that their smartphones do not determine the quality of their work or take away from the experience of capturing and editing great images.

(2) Instagram is a powerful platform and tool

Instagram was a key component in this study and therefore participants were asked to reflect on the reasons that directed them to choose Instagram as the main platform to share their visual work. They all showed their enthusiasm when talking about Instagram and felt it positively shaped their experience with images.

Most participants started an Instagram account to socialize and connect with others. Stefano started using Instagram to share images of his daily life with his family and friends. Radoslav found working with Instagram an opportunity to photograph his city, Sofia, and highlight its attractions. Or in the case of Sam, his interest in photography was "rekindled" after his daughter was born and Instagram has become a personal diary. He describes how Instagram is crucial in documenting the growth of his two daughters as he scrolled through his Instagram account during our interview:

> "This was when Sophie was going to get her eye exam and we found out she needed glasses. So, this is a good memory to know forever that ok, back in august 2015 that we went and got you some glasses. Some photos are [have] more meaning in them and others have less" (Sam Bakshian).

When I asked the participants why they think Instagram grew in popularity, several qualities were mentioned in relation to Instagram's success:

a. *It is user-friendly and available for everyone:* Instagram is both an image-based application and a networking platform that has the qualities of good smartphone applications. It is user-friendly, available to everyone, and provides the opportunity to instantly create and share visual work. Compared to other networking platforms it

had a strong focus on image enhancement and editing that is open to individuals' various creative styles.

b. *It provides an opportunity to be expressive:* To some participants sharing on Instagram is a form of storytelling. To others it's a creative outlet to communicate "a visual story with an artistic kick" (Chris Li). And when practicing iPhoneography, they feel they are sharing ideas with the world and connecting with others. They feel that Instagram successfully provided a space for personal and creative expressions where image-makers can reflect on their personal life with no judgment.

c. *Instagram is a network based on worldly connectivity:* Interacting on Instagram is defined by the "like" feature that is found on any social media platform, where users become aware that other people can show an interest in their work. Therefore, using Instagram enables connecting with the world, as both viewers and generators of content, regardless of society or culture. Looking through a user's Instagram feed, participants felt they were seeing the world through the eyes of others and are exposed to different lives:

"It's like this magic way of being able to get into someone else's head and really see the world through their lens, if only just temporarily" (Chris Li).

"Instagram makes people connect with each other and experience something that is not in their neighborhood" (Stefano Bonomelli).

"I chose IG because I think [it] is the best platform to show your images...you can share all that you want in only one "click"...your life style, your work, your travels, your feelings...with all persons around the world..." (Michael Garzon)

Several spoke about how they gained genuine relationships through Instagram which will be discussed in a later section. Overall, they felt that Instagram made the word smaller.

d. *It provides engaging content*: Instagram has many users and it helps them find people with similar interests. Participants saw Instagram's success strongly linked to how it engaged people with images, informed them of current trends and allowed

them to discover new content. It gave users the ability to "cultivate a unique presence" by having their own visual style (Chris Li). They felt that great photographic content stimulated their emotions and motivated them to be mindful of the content they shared.

e. *Instagram's impact is beyond smartphones*: Visual media is very connected and strongly now, more than ever, we can see the connection between iPhoneography and other forms of visual communication. Javi gave the example of looking at a magazine and finding content that is inspired by Instagram and its trends: "You can see advertising on TV and in newspapers and in magazines and you see, wow that's an Instagram style picture" (Javi Corral). And the participants' continuous use of Instagram also altered how they perceive the world. Where it altered how they view the world around them and look at it with Instagram in mind.

All of the participants considered Instagram a great platform that encouraged the democratization of image-making by allowing the process to be accessible and easy. The platform encouraged the co-existence of individuals with a variety of professional and personal agendas and also with several creative styles. It also encouraged communities to emerge where users became loyal to one community and it's aesthetic choices. Overall, Instagram emphasized photography as a form of art and visual communication.

(3) Instagram fosters connectivity among image-makers and viewers

Although the participants were from various parts of the world, and had personal differences in the genres of image-making they like to work with and different intentions behind using Instagram, what really echoes is that the social interactions that happen on Instagram are different than those on other social media platforms. Most participants spoke about how they appreciated their followers, connected with them, and learned from them as well. Regardless of the recognition and fame enjoyed by some of these participants, they all felt equal to their followers, in the sense that Instagram is a community where everyone has something to share. In addition to expressing these beliefs about Instagram, these are the subthemes that emerged from it.

a. *We perform better when we have an audience*

Participants were aware that they were being viewed and that they could gain and lose followers at any given moment, depending on what was popular or trendy at that moment. The selected participants had anywhere from 100 followers to 110,000 followers at the time they were interviewed. These numbers had all changed by the time of the analysis, due to the transient nature of the platform, and most of them have more followers now. Several of them talked about the importance of being aware of the audience and engaging with them, either through the comments section or by maintaining a visual style that their audience liked.

Stefano was a strong advocate for follower engagement and didn't approve of the word "followers"; he preferred "friends". In the spring of 2017 he had 10,400 followers, yet at the time of the interview in April of 2016 he had only 7,000, and felt like "nobody" when he compared himself to people who had 100,000 followers or more. However, he still felt that his followers motivated him to challenge himself and his practice. He believed his followers pushed him to improve on both personal and professional levels, and he is now more mindful of the content he creates because he believes that people are not naive and cannot be fooled by unprofessional work. Stefano believes that if he continues to engage his followers, they will not unfollow him when he changes his visual aesthetic style. Regardless of his busy life, he still connects with his audience almost every evening as if it's a normal daily activity. And he doesn't want to place "likes" randomly but chooses to spend time getting to know people before liking their work.

b. *People are generous*

Instagram users, especially those who started using the platform in its first two years, felt that it's very easy to connect with strangers and ask them about their practice. According to Eric Mueller, it was very common to comment on somebody's post and ask about the applications and techniques they used to create an image. Sherry also felt the platform enabled her to connect with other individuals who supported both her personal life and her creative work. Most participants echoed the same idea; they felt that Instagram showed how generous people are in sharing their knowledge, offering support, and showing kindness.

Echoing the feeling of support, Naqib mentioned that he is active on Instagram due to the support of strangers he met on the platform. All things considered, iPhoneographers who used Instagram created more creative work because they were being exposed to other creative users. This is the next theme we will talk about.

c. *Real-life connections happen*

Several participants mentioned how they became friends with other Instagrammers in real life, and would occasionally meet those who lived locally, or meet others who lived in other cities when traveling. This would happen in one of three ways. The first is through what is known as Instameets. These are events arranged by Instagram users in a specific city inviting other Instagrammers to show up and get to know each other. Some Instameets are based on a prompt or a cultural event which allows the participating Instagrammers to create images at that meeting.

The second method by which real-life connections happen is when an Instagram user travels to another city and contacts Instagrammers in that city for a meet-up. Sam, who is friends with Eric, talked about meeting Geny, based in the UAE and known on Instagram as @genyvb, when she visited Eric:

"She's another very talented photographer, super kind person, and world traveler that I actually got to meet when she came here. So she would a very good representation of the sense of a global community and how she has all these strong connections." (Sam Bakshian)

The third method is to take personal initiative and to contact other Instagrammers and start conversations with them online. Here is Sherry's story:

"I think I was feeling really isolated as a parent and I felt like once I learned how to use Instagram — because you can use it in many different ways —
I think once I really learned how to connect with hubs and different communities online on Instagram, that everyone was just so supportive and positive. Like, I've never really encountered any negativity through the way that I use Instagram in a way.

[…] I could connect with strangers. I think that was what it was. Like I could connect with people from around the world and get to know their lives. It was like a really big form of people watching, in a sense. So, yeah, and, you know, Facebook never provided that for me.

[…] I've met a lot of people in real life from Instagram and have created very good friendships with them and then also done Skype with them. We chat a lot on WhatsApp so we just, you know, just like voice messages on WhatsApp with quite a few people so it does tend to, you know, become very personal. But that could be just because of me, because I'm, I need, I feel the need and I always have to connect with people and find out the roots of why they do things or what they like and all that kind of stuff."
(Sherry Jeffry).

Several of the participants, especially those who established their accounts soon after Instagram appeared, had made connections with other Instagrammers in real life. In addition to these specific stories, other participants spoke of how they felt Instagram was instrumental in their getting to know other talented individuals, and key in forming friendships that were sustainable due to a common interest in image-making. Most of them felt that they came across people who were genuinely interested in their work, supportive of it, and invested in sustaining a creative community.

(4) iPhoneography is an opportunity to learn

It seems that iPhoneography, which is a seen by several scholars including myself, a very creative and aesthetics driven practice, is in its reality very human centered. It tends to trigger the curiosity of humans and their desire to learn. The following subthemes emerged from looking at how the participants found iPhoneography an opportunity to learn and grow as image-makers on three levels: first of all, iPhoneography enforced practice by allowing iPhoneographers to apply new knowledge regularly; second of all, it helped them evolve as image makers by constantly exposing them to the work of others; and lastly, iPhoneography enforced critical self-awareness because these iPhoneographers have an engaged audience who responds to their work. These three variables that enforce growth positively influenced the quality of the work iPhoneographers produce.

a. Learning by practice

Prior to participating on Instagram, most of the participants were not invested in photographic image-making. Instagram became a space where participants developed their image-making skills and more became critical of their visual work. Most of them talked about how their initial start on Instagram was not their proudest moment. Their images had personal content, were out of focus, and saturated in color due to the use of color altering filters. Their practice, however, strongly evolved through time as they became more engaged with the platform and became more aware of its potential.

As participants became aware of how they can create visually interesting work with all the new skills they've gained, they began to focus on the creative and technical aspect of image-making. They worked minimalism by because they recognized how to avoid chaos through camera angels; they created interesting experimental composition by testing out applications that repeat and mirror images; and they would merge several images together, erase elements in a photograph or remove the background to create surrealist work. Their attentiveness to compositions, colors, and concepts show their confidence in experimenting with smartphone applications.

They also spoke about how much time they invested in practicing iPhoneography. Participants would go out and take as many photographs as they can then spend more time editing their work using smartphone applications, like Snapseed and Fuse. Sherry talked about her work on Instagram as a full-time job; regardless of being a stay at home mom, she must dedicate several hours in the day to her Instagram work. To keep their audience engaged they must post on a regular basis.

Pariticpants rejected the misconception in that iPhoneography is an easy practice and that the content is not of value; Naqib disagrees with that idea here:

> "Sometimes people just assume that iPhone takes an automatic great image due to the camera's performances but definitely not. It requires good skills to perform such things and shooting on an iPhone with such limited options and settings can be an obstacle […]" (Naqib Jamaludin)

Also, a lot of planning goes into creating great iPhoneographs. Alek explained that he spends sometime on google map and google earth to identify a location he wants to shoot. And then spends more time editing a single shot: "Basically, it takes me from fifteen minutes to even a few hours for one picture because I love when every detail in the picture is set in the way I want. An average number of application is about three-- two or three applications." (Alek Malachowski).

b. *Learning by seeing*

"I don't know why… but that images speaks to me about their emotions." (Stefano Bonomelli)

Another important aspect to practicing iPhoneography in the form of snap, edit and share is the ability follow other users and be up-to-date with how other creative people practice iPhoneography. Several participants reflected on the benefits of viewing the work of others. They spoke of several pros like gaining inspiration, being aware of trends, and learning how others built a unique style. The following statements explain how they reflected on how Instagram allowed them to learn by providing an opportunity to be exposed to the work of other image-makers:

Javi spoke about how seeing the work of others was a source for inspiration: "it's very important to me to see other people's approach to images and to photography, because from time to time I always find somebody that inspired me and his work becomes very inspiring for me." (Javi Corral). And Alek second that when he said: " it […] inspires me just looking through some pictures of the people I follow."

There are also opportunities to learn by mimicking the work of others because it is a common trend, and through that learn about building ones induvial style:

"You follow people who have interesting concepts and a specific visual [approach] through out Instagram, and then you say: Ok, I will take a picture and follow their lines, perspective, light and shadow. That's when grow out of amateur photographer" (Stefano Bonomelli).

c. *The challenge of being constantly seen*

"For me every shot is a treasure and I'm glad when people like it." (Radoslav Davidkoff)

The third factor that impacts the growth of the participants as iPhoneographers is their awareness of how their Instagram accounts are followed by a diverse audience. Knowing that their followers can respond to their work motivated them to increase the quality of their images. Recognizing their audience to be smart and critical pushed them to produce for higher expectations.

Alek talked about how his awareness of the audience is a motivation: "Maybe in some way it encourage[s] you to take better pictures or to continue your work." (Alek Malachowski)

A challenge to being seen on Instagram is that in 2014, Instagram changed how a person views their feed, which consists of the posts of others. Instagram's feed, where users would see the recent posts of the people they follow, was no longer organized in order of the most recent to the least recent posted in a day. The rationale behind the new feed arrangement is still unclear to Instagram's users and some believe it is based on what Instagram believes a user would receive more likes. Stefano spoke of how that negatively impacted his engagement with his followers but felt the only way to combat that challenge was to focus on quality.

  "My engagement was cut down by half after the change of the algorithm
  and I complained [to Instagram] several times. But then I said: Ok, let's
  be new and put quality over quantity. Hopefully it will mean something for
  me" (Stefano Bonomelli).

On another note, Javi recognized that image-based social media had the potential to influence people in a way that conventional media hasn't. When speaking about the surrealist work that he creates on his iPhone, he talked about his awareness of how the audience is intelligent and critical of the work they see. He strongly felt that conventional mass media assumes the audience lacks the critical ability and does not allow them to think. He said the following:

  "I'm happy if I can achieve that the people think for two seconds. I like
  [making people think] … and I like to provoke in one way or another that

you think about what I think or what I've done. Because [they] say that
the old media is silly, but when I'm watching a movie or TV show and
they are treating us as silly people that don't like what is happening on
the screen I feel bad. I don't do that, I don't like that. I believe that we are
smart people and sensitive people and I want to trust that... your
sensitiveness and your head and your heart" (Javi Corral).

Chris Also added: "it's no longer simply sharing photography snapped on the-go,
but it's about engaging the viewer on a very intimate level. The content itself take
on a personality of its own." (Chris Li). It seems that being aware of having a group
of viewers that could critique and respond to their work helped this set of
iPhoneographers challenge themselves more.

Yet, I asked the participants if being observed continuously by does influence their
decision to maintain a consistent aesthetic style or not. Stefano had a positive
experience where he made the decision to change his aesthetic style twice on his
Instagram account, first when he realized he move away from spontaneous images
to create artistic images and second when he started a minimalist surrealist style. In
both cases, he felt his followers were very supportive and chose to continue
following him.

"[…] I do have an incredible respect for the audience and I'll tell you why.
Because I start very traditional, I changed completely and they stayed.
The public still follows me, so I would like to think that they understand
more than the visual [which] was always linked to my persona and so
they didn't change, they didn't say you change so I'm gonna skip away.
Probably that will change again. I will definitely change my style in a little
bit because I think this can't move. Now I'm more confident that when
my visual is going to change I'm not gonna lose the public that is
following me. So that's the most beautiful big gift that I ever had from
Instagram." (Stefano Bonomelli)

Other participants had a different view and believed maintaining their number of
followers meant committing to one aesthetic style. Sherry created minimalist work
that she called "White minimalism" because of her use of soft colors and snow as a

backdrop during the winter. Her account has received recognition and was mentioned in an article posted online by the smartphone lens manufacturer *Moment* as a must follow Instagram user ("A Celebration of Mobile Photography: Sherry Jeffery," 2017) . When talking about her followers she spoke of how she would not share stylistically different work in Instagram from what her viewers are accustomed to, fearing they would not accept it:

> "I do have a lot of photos that I take that I don't put on Instagram that are very graphic so but they don't match the flow of my Instagram feed so I just keep them for myself right now. […] I do, do darker images too. I love shadows and I do love darkness as well because it gives a good balance but it just looks funny in my feed. I feel like it just stands out too much and I feel like now with the following that I have they kind of expect so that's changed a little bit too. Before I never cared about what people wanted to see because I was doing it for me and I'm still doing it for me but now I have a sense of my community and why they're following me" (Sherry Jeffry).

d. *Learning through restrictions: how the Instagram square shaped their experience.*

Instagram has a strong visual identity specifically that it popularized cropping images into squares where the image aspect ratio is 1:1. It also presents its feed in a grid made of three squares per row but one can have as many rows as a user posts. After four years of Instagram's release, users now have the option to work with the 1:1 ratio or the 4:5.

I've asked participants how they felt about Instagram's visual identity in terms of the use of the square versus the ability to use a rectangular ratio which was later introduced. When the participants were asked about their feelings towards the square, most of them said that it forced them to challenge themselves and to learn how to create compositions that are successful within the square.

> "But I've had some few pictures which literally my heart was bleeding when I had to crop it in the square… Sometimes square is not enough

just to show all of the details you want to show on the picture." (Alek
Malachowski)

e. *Practicing iPhoneography means evolving as an image-maker*

It appears that practicing iPhoneography has long-term effects on one's ability to
create, understand, and criticize images. Participants mentioned that after working
with iPhoneography and observing what others share on Instagram, they have
started recognizing good work and are "more finicky" about creative images shared
on Instagram.

It was very evident in the interviews that participants didn't not consider
iPhoneography to be a mundane activity but a very complex and expressive
practice. They've benefited from practicing it because iPhoneography provided
them the opportunity to express emotional and intellectual content. How they speak
about their growth shows a sense of awareness of the impact of their dedication to
iPhoneography on their work. An example is Stefano, who started as a what he
called "a typical Instagram user who shared pictures of family, friends, pets and
food." He feels that that phase had no conceptual or emotional depth since he
uploaded every picture he ever took but he later decided to challenge himself, but
he feels now that he can channel how he feels about life rather than document it.

Stefano said: "Sometimes you understand a little more about yourself and your
concept and [therefore] your images have to change with you." (Stefano Bonomelli)

And Javi shared the following:

" […] Instagram started and I started to do pictures with my phone. Since
today, when I look back at all the pictures that I have upload[ed] to
Instagram two three four years ago, and I see what I'm uploading now I
can see an evaluation. Because when I started I didn't know what I was
going to do on Instagram, I don't know what kind of photography I like to
do and with practice I found my way." (Javi Corral)

A specific example that portrays growth was brought up by Naqib who is a graphic
design student. After observing creative work shared on Instagram he started his

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own practice using a D-SLR. He mimicked commercial photography done in a studio using very simple tools like cardboard for backdrop. He later on focused on using the color blue as a main theme for his work. He believed this has positively fed into his schoolwork and allowed him to become a better designer (See figure 15).
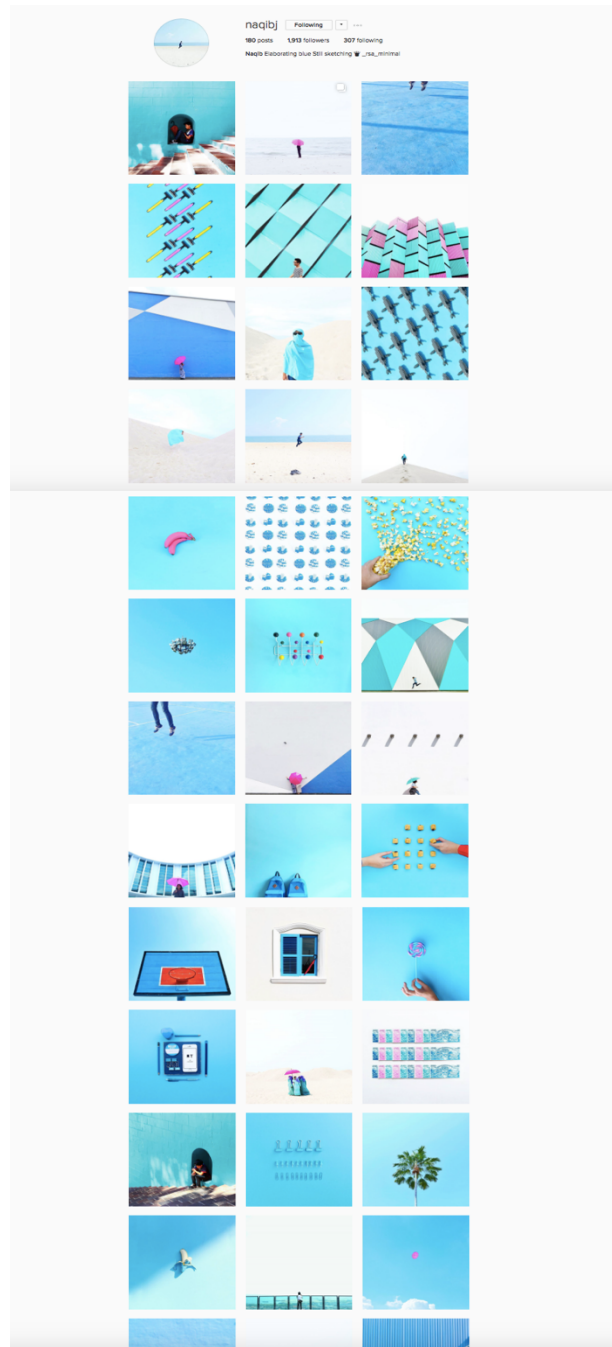
Figure 16: Naqib's blue themes account

(5) The unexpected aha moments

A few unexpected ideas arose when analyzing the interviews; they were "aha" moments in the sense that I didn't expect to hear them coming into this research with my personal assumptions about iPhoneography and Instagram. Here are these unexpected ideas:

1. *Different locations in the world evolve creatively at their own pace*: Alek spoke about how in Poland Instagram has just became popular at the time of our interview in the spring of 2017. He noticed that the public was using Instagram like other places did when Instagram was first released: "I feel like in Poland that most people still love to look at oversaturated colorful pictures, not some minimalist like me. […] most of the average person-- people just like to look at some over saturated colorful pictures of the nature or just selfies or just from the kitchen, photos of the food."

2. *The evolution of photography could be going back to professional tools:* Sherry, and Alek spoke about how the small resolution of their iPhoneographs makes it challenging to print them. Sherry talked about how she would do some photoshoots and had to explain to people that these prints cannot print beyond a specific size. Alek also talked about how a musician contacted him to use his work for a promotional poster, but the small resolution of the original image was the reason he lost this opportunity.

   Due to that, Alek believes that image-makers will move back to using D-SLRs at some point to be able to share the work away from social media and screen based platforms.

   "I think the future of photography will be also that more and more people
   will be switching from the mobile to the DSLR photography cameras.
   Because even though on the Instagram my pictures or pictures of the
   others look cool and great, when you start to think about making it more
   business oriented-- for example, if you want to sell your prints or make an
   exhibition then it's starting to-- you start thinking that it's not enough
   resolution, for example, from this mobile camera. And if you want to take
   it to another level like prints, like some businesses, like exhibition you
   have to fortunately or unfortunately switch to the DSLR cameras. I think

it's my future too to switch from mobile photographing. Not now but I think that sooner or later it will happen." (Alek)

Javi on the other hand, who had the same complaint about printing images, had already moved back to using his DSLR and Photoshop to work an upcoming art exhibition. He worked with the same ideas and aesthetic standards he established on Instagram using his smartphone, but has worked on recreating them using tools that provide higher resolution for the sale of printing. It seems that Alek's prediction might be already happening for some.

3. *An important part of iPhoneography is experimentation:* There is a sense of wonder that the practice of iPhoneography brings to image-making, which happens when iPhoneographers use a mainstream device and to visually experiment with the contents of their daily lives. Daniel, who uses Instagram's sister application Layout to edit his images before posting on Instagram, talked about how experimentation was core his experience:

   "I do my best to 'mis-use' tools […] in slightly unexpected ways. […] Sometimes creating fields, patterns or emergent shapes. While there is nothing new about these techniques, which have been available in image processing software since at least the mid-eighties, the networked mobility enabled by smart phones is new and brings a renewed sense of discovery to this kind of image-making practices."

4. *iPhoneographers are aware of Image-worlds:* even though they had not heard of Burnett's Image-worlds, the participants all agrees that the concept manifested through Instagram. I heard statements like the following:

   "That's [...] like "The 100th monkey theory''. When I look at random pictures in Instagram [I] often come across similar [ones] like my style pictures. I notice that there are many new accounts with creative ideas [that] intertwine -minimal and abstract. And I like this trend." (Radoslav Davidkoff)

And the same idea was mentioned again when Sam said: "Instagram is a lot about monkey see monkey do because you get inspired by somebody and you do a photo like theirs." (Sam Bakshian)

But Sherry saw a more emotional side to how similarities appear in the works of different image-makers, rather than copying what you see:

"I know I'm not unique […], like there's so many people in the world. I mean we can't all see something and do something completely different but… I love it. I feel like when I [see] something that I feel really connected to [and it] looks like mine I feel sort of an instant connection with that person because we see the world in a very similar way and so in that sense I tend to chat with them." (Sherry Jeffry)

And if these similar images make it difficult to distinguish the identity of each image-maker Chris said:

" [...] there are also great images that stand out from the rest. I think it's that distinction from the rest of the herd that really lend[s] a hand in stimulating creativity in those that experience it. I have those experiences on a day-to-day basis. I'll say to myself "I have seen this subject so many times before, but this particular shot literally took my breath away." That can in turn inspire to really look at the world differently than I'm used to." (Chris Li)

4.3.4 Discussion of ethnographic results

Talking to participants was fundamental in providing insights that go beyond basic assumptions of the role of Instagram in contemporary image-making. As an image-based social media platform, Instagram provided a democratic outlet for users with various levels of tech expertise and interests to voice their opinions. It is true that the participants were already motivated and determined to create interesting images, but they also recognized that that way the platform was designed allowed all of them to easily engage with it.

iPhoneography that takes place on Instagram is based on connectivity, and the participants emphasized three positive experiences that emerged from this feature: Instagram users learn because they are surrounded by generous people; Instagram users developed real-life

friendships from among their Instagram friendships, and; this continuous connectivity and exposure helped them to improve the quality of their work.

In the early days of Instagram, and when the community was smaller, it was very common to ask others how they created their work, and Instagram users were very open to explaining their techniques. When more people work with similar methods, communities emerge, and people bond over the content. Several participants had started meaningful conversations with others and met them in real life through Instameets, meetings open to all Instagram users in a city, or by visiting cities where their Instagram friends lived. It was very clear that having a sense of community motivated Instagram users to produce work of higher quality, because they are driven by the desire to maintain and increase the number of followers they have. iPhoneography's ability to facilitate connectivity, especially connectivity that takes place on Instagram, is very recognizable and of great impact.

iPhoneography was also a facilitator for learning by encouraging practice, providing opportunities for inspiration, and fostering an awareness of how others interact with successful iPhoneographs, which drives creative growth. Participating on Instagram on a creative and sophisticated level means creating intriguing content regularly. iPhoneographers who had no professional experience in image-making prior to working with Instagram realized how their skills improved after participating in the community, because they were continuously motivated to challenge themselves. In addition to practicing, they were able to see creative and intriguing images that stimulated them and their practice; they were always inspired. The design of Instagram as an image-based social media platform is based on followers and likes, and this has instilled a sense of competitiveness; iPhoneographers learn to improve the quality of their work in order to keep their audiences engaged. Regardless of the participants being only "professional amateurs", learning iPhoneography meant learning how to perform at a professional level, where only quality work was shared.

The story of Javi, the graphic designer from Spain, is an example of how image-based social media has an impact that exceeds what one might expect of a smartphone device. In his interview, he talked about how he can look at a magazine advertisement and see an Instagram-style image. But he made a stronger connection when he mentioned a music video by the band Coldplay, published on YouTube in May of 2015. Javi's work was surrealist in intention; he would manipulate environments but also experiment with scale

and content in an artistic manner. He strongly felt the music video resembled his artistic approach and that commercial art was definitely observing what went on in Instagram:

> "Well, that video when I saw it, from Coldplay.... wow... I saw my work
> there! […] I feel a connection with that video clip. Maybe they don't know
> and never have seen my work but the connection is there between us."
> (Javi Corral).

Another view of how what is created on Instagram will become part of the physical world is what Sherry shared:

> "I'm excited about the future of smartphones because the more that
> people use it and create amazing imagery and tell stories with their
> photos, the more beautiful art there is out there in the world, right and it's
> just opened up an avenue for a lot of people who didn't have that before.
> So, a lot more voices are being heard through social media." (Sherry
> Jeffry)

Overall, the participants are very committed to producing images of importance to them and sharing work they consider meaningful and inspiring to others. They are also aware of how forming a relationship between their emotions and their surroundings or the objects and locations they snap influences their work. They might not be fully aware of how they are contributing to the rise of new trends in aesthetics, but they are very invested in how the use of Instagram and the practice of iPhoneography have shaped them as contemporary image-makers.

4.4 Phenomenological analysis

The purpose of the post-intentional phenomenological component of this research is to understand the aesthetic implications of practicing iPhoneography. This section will introduce a post-reflexive approach to analyzing my personal assumptions going into this research, my observations regarding the Candy Minimalism movement that takes place on Instagram, and an analysis of what it feels like to me to practice iPhoneography.

My observations in this section take a different approach from my precious ethnographic observations. Here, I bring more awareness of myself as an image-maker rather than

document my observations. After speaking to iPhoneographers, some who worked with Candy Minimalism, several important insights arose. We now understand the practice or behaviors (the proper term when working with ethnography); yet the meaning of iPhoneographic Minimalism and Candy Minimalism remains vague.

Three levels of analysis took place in this section in the form of written reflexivity. This was done to better understand Candy Minimalism as a trend. First, I analyzed my relationship to my smartphone and to iPhoneography in what I titled *Observing Oneself.* I then observed Candy Minimalism to understand how I emotionally and intellectually responded to it as a trend; that was titled *Observing Others.* Lastly, I wanted to live the experience of these others and so I practiced Candy Minimalist iPhoneography in what I titled *Becoming Others.*

4.4.1.1 First: Observing Oneself

Instant or Slow or Non-transient

Different levels of emotional connection

Playful experimentation

I use my iPhone to create images on a weekly basis. There might not be a specific schedule or a consistent number of times a week, but whenever I see something interesting I use my smartphone to document it. And when (and if) I decide to share my iPhoneographic work on social media, it is either on Snapchat, the application where images posted to one's story disappear after 24 hours, or Instagram, a platform that allows images to be displayed indefinitely unless deleted by their creator. With Snapchat, any textual or graphic elements are added on top of the photograph and therefore these elements become components of the composition. In Instagram, text becomes a caption seen on the bottom of the image. My goal in using these two platforms for the past few years has been to continue to generate creative work while working on writing this dissertation.

When sharing my iPhoneographic work, I've encountered three experiences: instant and temporary, slower and more thoughtful, or non-transient yet portable when I decide to not share these images with others but carry them on my smartphone. The last happens when I see iPhoneographs as having the potential to exist as prints or projected videos. These three experiences, the instant, slow, or non-transient, depend on the connection I

personally have made with an iPhoneograph; the stronger the connection, the less the chances I will share it.

When using the application Snapchat, I post images in real time. I will capture a scene or an object, add filters, graphic elements, or text to it and post it on "my story", which is seen by all users who follow me. These images disappear the following morning. With Snapchat, my experience of generating and sharing creative work is instant. In other iPhoneographic cases, it is a longer process. An image is revisited days or months later, sometimes shared on Instagram, and many other times only saved on my smartphone (yes, neglecting the full process of snap, edit and share which is synonymous with iPhoneography). However, some iPhoneographs are not fleeting opportunities to translate emotions and thoughts through mundane moments. They become more personal, and deeper emotions and concepts are injected within them.

The experience of sharing iPhoneographs instantly is very different from sharing images at a later time. My instant sharing of images frames them as short-lived memories and thoughts. My mindset is then different, in the sense that I want immediate creative release and to talk about where I've been and what I felt. Yet, looking back at older photographs means examining how memories and thoughts are experienced differently with the progression of time. I start to question the intellectual concept and emotional value of these images. My connection with images that I look back at, and then share on Instagram, is different from my connection with those immediate ones created on Snapchat. When I take my time in the creation of an image, my connection to it becomes stronger.

The iPhoneographs that live on my phone sometimes leave it and sometimes are doomed never to be seen by others. The photographs start as memories documented in an instant, but after they are processed with smartphone applications they are transformed to become images that are meaningful to me. They carry similar value to artwork I've professionally created and shared. I do say "similar" here, and not "the same", because I still long for them to be seen beyond the small screen of my iPhone.

Practicing iPhoneography is enjoyable. Regardless of how deep or sad a concept becomes as these images evolve, there is a playful aspect to using my hand to alter colors and combine images. I am always fascinated by the unexpected results of "tiling" images together when they are placed through an application like Layout. Images can become

humorous when the same element is repeated over and over again, like my pouty face, or can become very mysterious and dark, like when I removed the heads of my nieces and mirrored their legs, or geometrically abstract, like when I repeated a photograph of a speeding car. When working with an image-processing application, the possibilities are infinite (see illustration 11 for examples).
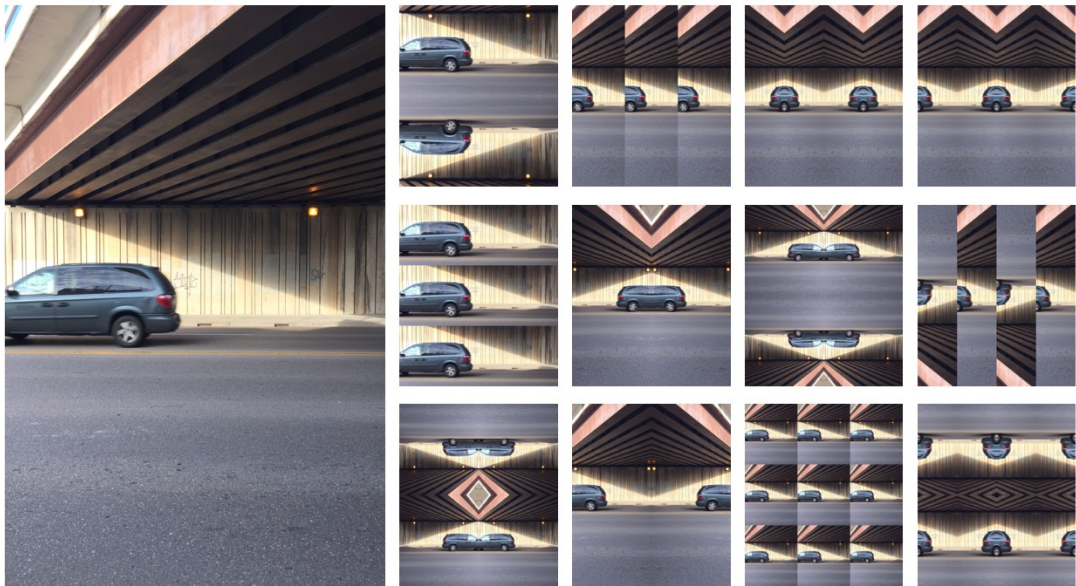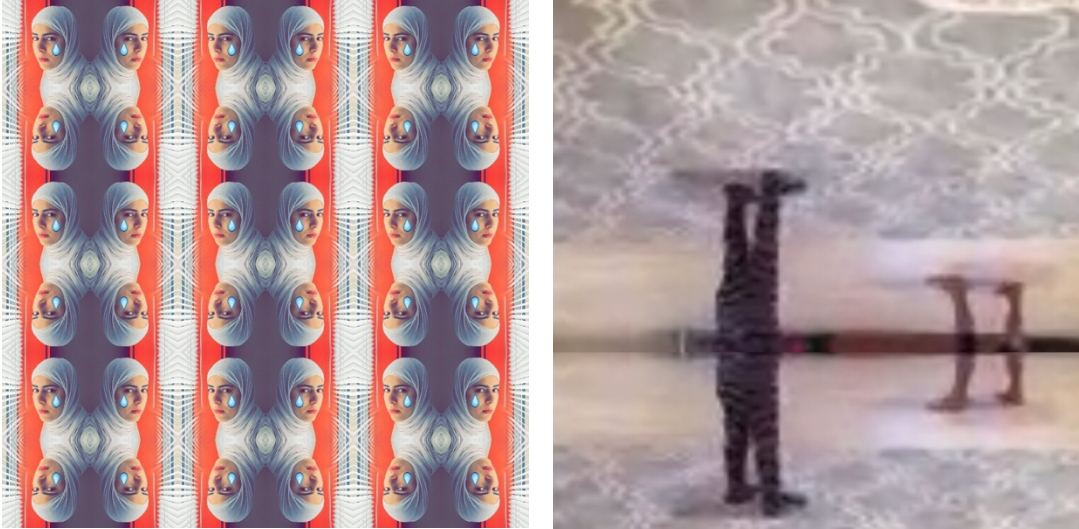
Illustration 10: Experiments using the smartphone application Layout

It is also extremely easy to reinvent myself stylistically, and I am able to copy various trends I've seen on Instagram. It could be because I have seen these trends often enough that I

have become automatically inspired, and it also could be my personality as an image-maker who enjoys experimenting.

4.4.1.2 Second: Observing Others (the Candy Minimalists)

Strong bold lines

Playful colors

Fun and playful content and appearance

About embracing life

Those who create it are sensitive to colors and lines

Those who create it are (not always) experienced image-makers.

I have followed candy minimalist iPhoneography for the past three years. I will recall here my initial assumptions when I first encountered Candy Minimalism on Instagram and realized it is an image-world (a reference to Burnett's (2005) Image-Worlds), and I will also talk about my current views on the trend. The person behind starting an official candy minimalist account that promotes candy minimalist image-makers and images is Matt Crump, a graphic designer based in the USA. His personal account attracted a lot of attention when he set off the candy minimalist trend, and he now promotes businesses using Candy Minimalism on his personal account @mattcrump and curates Candy Minimalism on the official Candy Minimalism account.

The images that end up on the Instagram account Candy minimal (@candyminimal) share similar visual qualities, like the use of vibrant pastel colors such as pink and purple, bold lines, and either repetition in visual elements or contrast in figure–ground relationship. These images are interesting. I see them as revolutionary for three reasons: (1) Image-makers who create them use applications on their smartphones rather than professional software found on a laptop to create and enhance these images; (2) after looking at their Instagram profiles, it becomes clear these image-makers have different backgrounds, that several of them might never had professional training in image-making prior to signing up on Instagram, and that these images and image-makers popularized a new visual trend.

I arrived at the idea that candy minimalists use their smartphones rather than professional software by noticing the phrase "iPhone only" on several profiles. To me it seems as if these image-makers are proud of the fact that they are using their mobile devices, but it also creates the impression that they might be defensive of their methods as well. My second thought—that several candy minimalists might be amateurs—comes from tracing the history of each image-maker on Instagram. I have scrolled through their accounts and looked at the first few images they shared on Instagram. Most of their earlier posts looked candid and didn't have balanced compositions. Lastly, I concluded that Candy Minimalism has become popular because I have seen several similar posts and accounts on Instagram for the past two years, and some of the image-makers have shared sponsored posts and used the candy minimal method to advertise a brand, which means that individuals and businesses are noticing them.

However, while these images share similar visual qualities, several differences must be acknowledged. Candy minimal images bring a variety of content; where some document the world around us, like architecture or nature, others were of staged scenes set up in a photography studio with backdrops and most had still objects. Each image belongs to an image-maker with a different interest and background; when tracing back the makers of these images, surprisingly few take a candy minimalist approach, and yet others are very committed and have accounts dedicated to Candy Minimalism. Sometimes one image/post is silent and not as loudly expressive. Other images are more powerful in the sense that they scream with visual boldness and therefore have a stronger presence.

My assumptions about these images stem from my training and background as an artist, graphic designer, and producer of visual artifacts. I work a lot with photography, and therefore I strongly connect with these candy minimal images. From an emotional standpoint, I connect with these images because I saw some vibrant expressions, a sense of excitement and enjoyment, a visual boldness that is executed in a poetic manner, and an unexpected stillness and silence in something that can still look fun and amusing. My initial assumption is that, due to the high quality of most images, their creators must have been trained in art or design. But then investigating who the image-makers were and realizing that my initial thoughts were wrong, I couldn't help but be more amused.

After spending time with Candy Minimalism, I realized that another reason it draws my attention is its ability to find a balance between art and design. It does that by blending

photography, an art genre, with a graphic design mindset. Candy minimalist iPhoneographs have clear compositions and utilize gestalt principles like understanding figure–ground relationships, similarity and proximity.
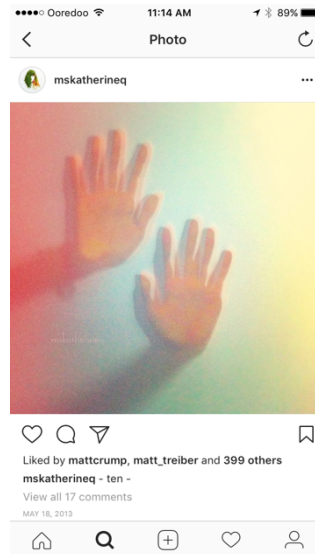
Figure 17: an early Candy Minimalist post

I am also drawn to Candy Minimalism because of the mystery it adds to an image. For example, I took my time observing the image of hands at the window, which the image-maker @mskatherineq captioned " - ten- " (illustration 11). This image confuses me because I feel it conceptually talks about connecting with something unattainable or a breakthrough, both of which I usually associate with hardship. However, here, it is softly colored.

As for who the image-makers are, I visited the first 12 posts shared on the Instagram account @candyminimal and looked more closely at the images and also tracked the image-makers identified. The first was about Matt Crump himself and the rest were of 12 other candy minimalists. Out of these 12 mentioned image-makers in 2013, five continue to work today with Candy Minimalism, three work in minimalism without specifically focusing on altering colors, three don't work with minimalist styles, and one has a private account. It seems like candy minimalism is an experience or phase for some of these image-makers; for others, it continues to be their main stylistic approach.

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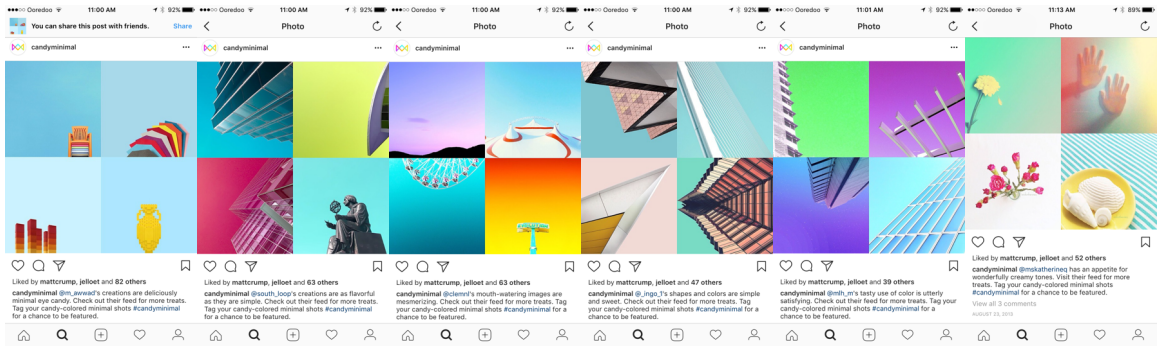
Figure 18: the first six posts on the Candy Minimal community account.

4.4.1.3 Third: Becoming Others (Practicing Candy Minimalism)

Reframe memories

Process emotions

Highlight charisma

Re-experience the mundane

In working with Candy Minimalism as a stylistic decision, I was able to examine my personal creative process differently. My work took place on one device, and yet my other work took weeks or months in the making. I experimented with, and reflected on, Candy Minimalism by practicing image-making. In the making of the following images, I have used my phone to snap and edit, but have shared some of these images in real life instead of online. Three of four of the images discussed here were exhibited in 2016 as part of a group exhibit. My work with Candy Minimalism was a personal experiment with no intention of strictly following the candy minimalist guidelines; I was simply following my instincts as an image-maker and my interest in bold images.
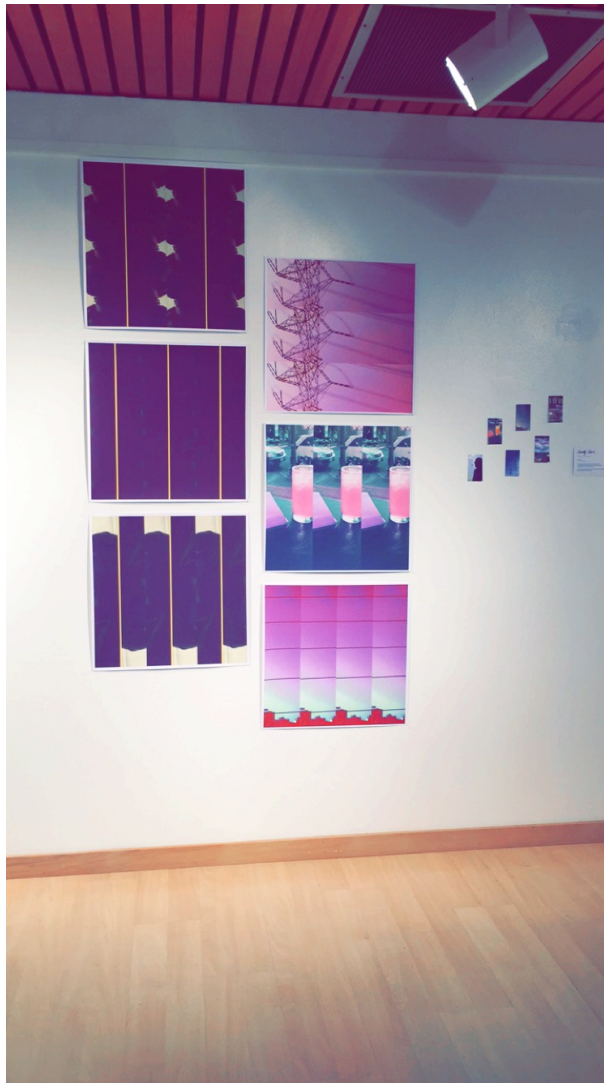
Illustration 11: a series of candy minimalist inspired images I presented at a group exhibit at the Larson gallery, UMN.

Each image symbolized a personal story and a memory that it evoked. In these images, I attempt to reframe memories, examine the experience of loss, highlight the beauty of deterioration, and experience the mundane differently. When choosing to alter the colors of an image, I was attempting to redefine and probably alter the emotional impact of memories. While the produced images do not hold clues leading to a specific concept, they are charged with many personal stories.
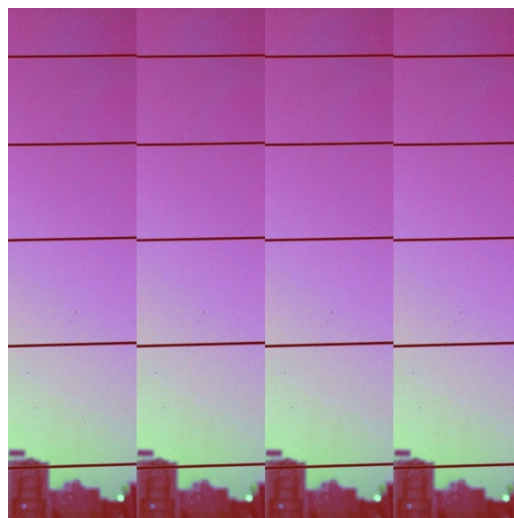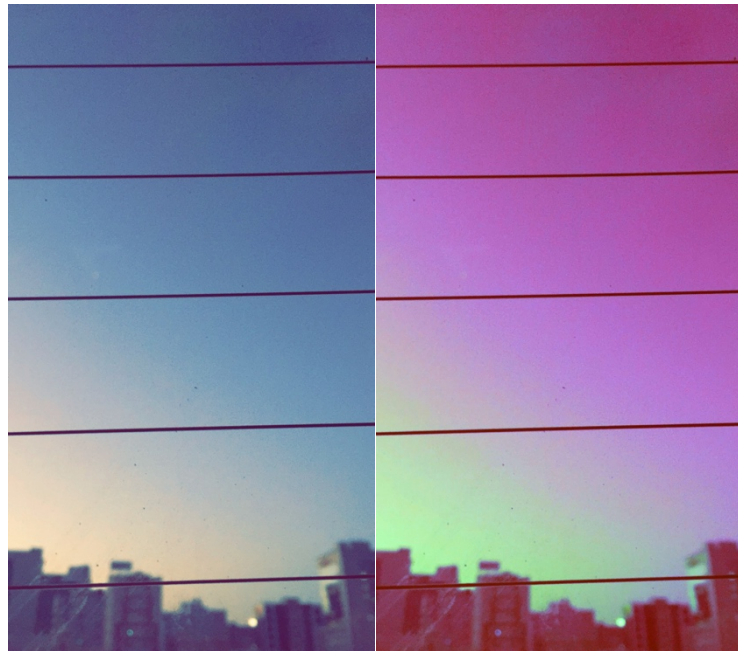
Illustration 12: An example of a memory I abstracted using Candy Minimalism

An example of how I attempted to reframe a memory is this photograph I took through a car's rear window while driving away from the city of Manama in Bahrain (see illustration 10). The car was packed with family members and we were leaving my grandfather's funeral. The original image was ordinary, with only the lines of the window barely disrupting the visual flow of a blurred skyline. I revisited the photograph two weeks later with the intention of altering what I thought at that time to be the photograph but now realize was the memory itself. While the bold colors symbolized how strong my feelings of loss were, I

could hide these emotions with vibrant colors. Later, I reshaped this memory even further when I repeated only sections of it.

Illustration 13: another example for transforming memories through Candy Minimalism

Another opportunity to re-examine my feelings of loss was working with a photograph of tree branches against the bold sky (see illustration 11). It was only a few months later and, in the interim, I once again had experienced the loss of a loved one. As flowers bloomed that season, more than I'm usually used to in the Twin Cities, I took several photographs of trees and flowers. Yet the colors of the actual photographs did not always stand out in my iPhone snapshots and I decided to experiment with Candy Minimalism again. The monochromatic green image became dramatic because the light and shadow of the bold clouds were emphasized.

Through the making of these images, I have become aware of my progressive approach to image-making. I think about and contemplate the value and meaning of images, and wonder at how the process of image-making can be seen as healing and emotionally transformative.

4.4.2 Discussion of phenomenological analysis

Instagram. The square. The past comes alive in a filter.

Snap, edit, share. Process. Practice.

Creative Agency. Awareness of aesthetics.

New aesthetics. New Image-worlds.

Bold colors and lines and thoughts.

Everybody creates.

There is an increase in the number of smartphone applications that are easy to use (Berry, 2014), offer simple graphics and text overlay capabilities, and have built-in filters that alter saturation (Keep, 2014b), among other editing features. To a professionally trained eye, amateur image-based work produced through smartphones is filled with clichés. Yet, as amateurs gain popularity on image-based social platforms and professionals embrace these "clichés," distinctions blur.

One wonders what drives image-makers to push the boundary of creative images. They are created on the go, with the mobility and connectivity of smartphone devices, by image-makers with a range of expertise and training. This experimental nature of iPhoneography has transformed image-making and visual communication. Images today can express the mundane in human life, like our daily activities and social interactions, but can still be seen as artistic and creative.

In addition to the mundane nature of images, we are seeing the emergence of new image-worlds like Candy Minimalism. These bold and playful images are influential, because now not only individuals who use Instagram but also businesses are paying attention to them. Several corporations have asked candy minimalists to produce promotional images for them, including Starbucks, Disney, and MTV.

I overcame several challenges to examining iPhoneography by practicing it. I could take in the experience of those whom I observed and became more mindful of the value of practicing iPhoneography. After several months, I have become aware of how my work is

driven by personal memories and beliefs and how image-making practice is a way of processing them.

I explored other aspects of iPhoneography through practice. I have learned from working with iPhoneography that using a smartphone as the main image-making device and sharing method is a distinct experience. Some of the disadvantages are the inability to work with highly detailed images due to the small nature of the screen, the need to always abstract and simplify images in order to not overwhelm or overcrowd, and the inability of disconnecting from technology. However, there are also several advantages. The first major advantage is the ability to create images whenever desired. Moments of boredom while commuting or waiting can be utilized to make images, and also eventful moments like celebrations and vacations can become opportunities to artistically document memories. The second advantage is using one device to generate interesting iPhoneographs; all I needed to create images were a couple of smartphone applications—one to enhance colors and another to multiply and tile images. The third is the continuous challenge to make new images with these limited resources. The fourth is the ability to use iPhoneography to connect with other image-makers. And while this has not been a personal goal, it was evident in observing the candy minimalist account that image-makers were mutually supportive.

The process can be tedious when parts of an image must be masked, but at other times seems quick and gratifying. Practicing iPhoneography has allowed me to release creative energy in a way similar to that when sharing a print in an exhibition. I now create images on a regular basis, sometimes daily or a few times a week, and the fact that these images are stored on my phone means I can take time to reflect on their creative and conceptual value and easily revisit them when needed.

Now, iPhoneography images, which have become stimulators of connections and immersive experiences, are social technical artifacts that embrace this new mundane and the processed nature of images. Therefore, they are images they can help scholars understand cultural patterns (Hochman & Swartz, 2012) and they can illustrate how people perceive themselves in the world (Gye, 2007). This examination of iPhoneography and iPhoneographs contributes to understanding the current state of visual practices.

4.5 Discussion of analysis of ethnographic data and phenomenological material

Both approaches, the ethnographic and phenomenological, were valuable in brining forth insights on how iPhoneography as a practice and Instagram as a platform are contributing to contemporary visual communication. iPhoneography was an opportunity for image-makers to evolve as creative makers by finding several sources for inspiration and practicing on regular basis. It was also an opportunity for translating and processing intellectual and emotional experiences, since as a practice I found it to be as powerful as other forms of creative making.

Speaking with iPhoneographers who are committed to their practice highlighted an aspect of creative making that is sometimes missed: community making. iPhoneography promotes learning through experimentation, since to create iPhoneographs image-makers must be out in the world to find interesting content and then spend time working with various smartphone applications. As Instagram also provided image-makers with built-in editing features that exposes users of various tech expertise and interests to basic image-enhancement techniques. Through Instagram Participants could connect with a global audience and other creative individuals. They had several opportunities to follow image-makers that inspire and motivate them. This meant that image-makers that use Instagram are constantly aware of the evolution of contemporary image-making since these image makers drive and initiate that change.

iPhoneography was also an opportunity for visual communication through creative expression. Aesthetically pleasing iPhoneographs embody intellectual and emotional messages placed by the image-maker.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Overview

Visual communication is sending messages with conceptual, intellectual, or emotional content through the use of visuals in various forms. The messages communicated could be the result of self-expression or representations. Yet, regardless of the nature of the content and format, visual communication is about connecting with other humans and the world through visual artifacts. This definition of visual communication gives the possibility of understanding creative human practices, rituals, and creative expression through a scholarly lens.

This research examines contemporary image-making for image-based social media in an attempt to understand how a new practice, iPhoneography, has reshaped how we create images. The emergence of smartphones, which are mobile phones with computer-like features, has provided both novice and expert image makers with the opportunity to produce images on-the-go. It is evident that these images carry a new visual and social aesthetic, since they represent new visual trends while also reflecting the daily lives of people. By examining the power of smartphones as image-making tools, my goal was to understand the meaning behind using a single device for image-making purposes and practice, which is called iPhoneography. I also examine the role of iPhoneography in shaping visual movements on Instagram, like minimalism and candy minimalism.

Capturing snapshots with a smartphone, processing them with smartphone applications, and sharing them on social media are three steps that researchers refer to as snap, edit, and share (Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Gye, 2007; Keep, 2014b). While this phenomenon started when cameras on mobile phones were introduced in the mid-2000s, it is only in the past few years that the practice has fully evolved. Compared to early mobile devices, which allowed only basic photo sharpness and contrast adjustments (Dolcourt, 2008), editing on a smartphone now is a sophisticated process where color levels, color temperature, sharpness, vignette, blur, and crop can all be controlled. This editing can easily be performed through applications that allow adding a ready-made filter, although one could still choose to invest hours in manually enhancing images.

For this research, the popular image-based social media platform Instagram was used as a lens through which to examine the phenomenon of iPhoneography. Through observations, there are at least four main reasons that make Instagram a great framework for examining

iPhoneography. These were determined prior to the research and through reviewing scholarly work and conducting observations of iPhoneography on Instagram. The first is that it allows iPhoneography to take place very smoothly by providing everything an image maker needs on the same user-friendly application. Instagram turns on a smartphone's built-in camera, and it has photo adjustment features and sharing capabilities that allow users to post images to their personal feed, which becomes a personal album, diary, or portfolio. The second is that posts can have hashtags and geo-tag locations as identifiers, enabling similar posts to be grouped and viewed together. The third is that Instagram allows users with various levels of creative expertise to share and become exposed to each other. And lastly, it invites individuals with a variety of visual styles and creative interests to co-exist, therefore, it fosters various creative communities. Together, these make Instagram a great vessel for studying image-making, especially iPhoneography.

Two concepts drove this dissertation from theoretical and philosophical perspectives. The first is Ron Burnett's (2004) notion of image-worlds and the second is Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory (Bourdieu, 1977). In Burnett's outlook on how images function in the world, he talks about how powerful images go through two phases of interpretation or two vantage points. The image maker is responsible for the first vantage point and the viewers are responsible for the second. If an image is powerful, it can inspire other images to be generated and therefore, these images together can create image-worlds, which are immersive groups of images. Looking at iPhoneography on Instagram, it is easy to recognize various image-worlds taking shape.

Bourdieu's practice theory states that to understand a practice we must understand its context or "field," the gains it produces or the "capital," and also the way the practice naturally occurs or "the habitus." iPhoneography cannot be studied without identifying a specific context, since it can happen on a variety of platforms. It also produces capital in the form of likes and comments, since its output is usually shared on image-based social media. It also seems that iPhoneographers gain enough experience to produce interesting works using their personal judgment. Many well-known iPhoneographers do not have a formal education in art or design. The three main elements of practice theory (the field, the capital, and the habitus) are all important when studying iPhoneography on Instagram.

At the beginning of this research, I posed these two questions: (1) What does it mean to practice iPhoneography on Instagram using one smartphone device, a smartphone? **(2)**

How does the practice of iPhoneography shape new visual trends like the minimalist and candy minimalist movements seen on Instagram? This dissertation was designed to explore these issues and highlight the evolution of contemporary image-making practices and visual communication rather than provide definite answers. Therefore, qualitative methodology is the core of this journey and both ethnographic research methods and phenomenological research methods were used as guidelines. Ethnography was used due to the transient nature of the iPhoneography practiced by Instagrammers, which needs to be observed rather than be tested through a hypothesis. Phenomenology was another way of examining iPhoneography as a practice, and that happened when I phenomenologically observed it and practiced it myself.

Qualitative research often becomes more about the journey rather than producing definitive answers to the research questions. In addition to having observed Instagram for around 5 years, I have spent the past year interviewing Instagram users who share visually creative content and are invested in image-making. Since these participants are in different global locations, some interviews were conducted in person and others online through video chat applications like Skype and Google Hangout or via email. My work reflects a global view of the subject and allows image makers to reflect on their practice and its impact.

Scholarly work has talked about how smartphones enforced the use of one device in what researchers refer to as snap, edit, and share (Favero, 2014; Gómez Cruz, 2012; Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Gye, 2007; Halpern & Humphreys, 2014; Hochman & Schwartz, 2012). Image-making becomes more accessible when one device, the smartphone here, enables people of various interests and technical expertise to produce images. A smartphone is carried everywhere and hence, it is available when needed while providing a variety of user-friendly applications.

This has also pushed what we could call new sociotechnical aesthetics. Image-making now revolves around the mundane aspects of human life since the smartphone has enabled photographs of our social life to become technology dependent artistic artifacts. These images are also very technology dependent. When we embrace the low resolution and quality of smartphone-produced images, we are also creating work consisting of data and pixels that can be constructed and deconstructed at any time (Keep, 2014a, 2014b).

The accessibility of the technology has allowed individuals of various tech expertise and education in the creative fields to practice iPhoneography. Hjorth and Sharp (2014) talked about three types of image maker who are seen today on image-based social media: the educated professionals, who make a profit; the professional amateurs, who practice out of a personal interest in image-making; and the producing users, who make images to document their lives. Recognizing these three types of image maker we can see that image-based social media like Instagram have encouraged all these image-makers. However, the professional amateurs became the focus of this dissertation because of the quality of their visual work where their image-making skills improve with time.

5.2 Summary of Results

I initially entered this research with several assumptions. I believed that working with iPhoneography enhances one's awareness of aesthetically pleasing images and their knowledge of image-making practices, regardless of their education or expertise in image-making. Also as iPhoneography on Instagram became popular, some of its prominent qualities like nostalgic filters or candy colored images were becoming evident in mainstream media. I also argue that Instagram is responsible for the spread of new visual trends.

This dissertation followed qualitative methodology as a guideline for understanding the experience of working with iPhoneography and using the image-based social media platform Instagram. An ethnographic approach was used first, where Instagram was regularly observed and then image-makers were interviewed about their practice. In general, participants felt that practicing iPhoneography helped them improve their skills as image-makers for a variety of reasons, and that Instagram had a major role in their creative growth. Also, as I interviewed image-makers from different parts of the world with various backgrounds and creative expertise, I heard many speak of how they felt connected to other image-makers that inspire them and motivate them.

I also better understood iPhoneography and the emergence of the candy minimalist trend when I used post-intentional phenomenology as a guideline. My post-intentional phenomenological analysis was driven by observing Candy Minimalism on Instagram and attempting to practice it myself. This helped in understanding how iPhoneography shapes the emergence of new trends and bring forth meaning to beyond the visual value of these images. I was practicing iPhoneography before I conducted the interviews, but only wrote

my reflections afterwards when I became more acquainted with phenomenology as a research methodology.

This research took a qualitative approach to bring a different understanding to iPhoneography different from previous attempts to quantify it. The importance of the ethnographic approach is that it highlights the image-maker rather than only the artifact they produce. Manovich (Manovich, 2016), emphasizes that looking at an image does not allow us to fully understand its meaning and context. While he was able to quantify thousands of images of the mundane shared on image-based social media and bring interesting insights, Manovich believes he did not interpret their purpose. I believe an image referring to a trend, a movement or a concept could not be completely recognized for such without understanding who the image-maker behind it is.

5.2.1 The Ethnographic approach

Several interesting insights were found through the ethnographic approach. From my observations of Instagram as a platform I became aware of how image-makers on Instagram, through their generation of interesting work, had the authority in producing and naming new visual trends. Their desire to connect with other users who share similar interests drove them to establish Instagram accounts run by users who work as moderators. These moderators would work as curators and search Instagram for work that fits visual qualities they deemed to be interesting. This led to the emergence of accounts that market image-making techniques or styles, and later become visual trends that carry the name of these accounts. Examples of that, which I mentioned earlier in this research, are the Minimalist and Candy Minimalist accounts that popularized the elimination of clutter in an image and focused on a selection of colors in the latter.

Observing Instagram was always intriguing and sometimes felt like entering a rabbit hole, since looking at one account meant finding interesting posts and later interesting accounts and interesting trends. Viewing one account meant finding interesting and endless possibilities. Dedicating a few times a week to enter the world of Instagram for the past few years, I've notice that Instagram started as a personal platform were posts were of family and friends, food and coffee, and to daily activities. In 2012, Instagram was used as a diary to document the mundane of daily life or sharing vacations. Instagrammers showcased their

life to their family and friends through heavy and saturated filters, yet at the same time they became aware of its artistic potential and marketing value.

By 2013 and 2014 I witnessed posts becoming less saturated and becoming more faded with the use of nostalgic filters. Many photographs of food and objects were shot in a top view 90° degrees camera angle. Photographic compositions looked more deliberate rather than spontaneous and people seemed to be aware of how to create beautiful images. As well as seeing improvements in image-making skills, it seemed then that Instagram brought forth a poetic aspect to image-making (see figure 19).
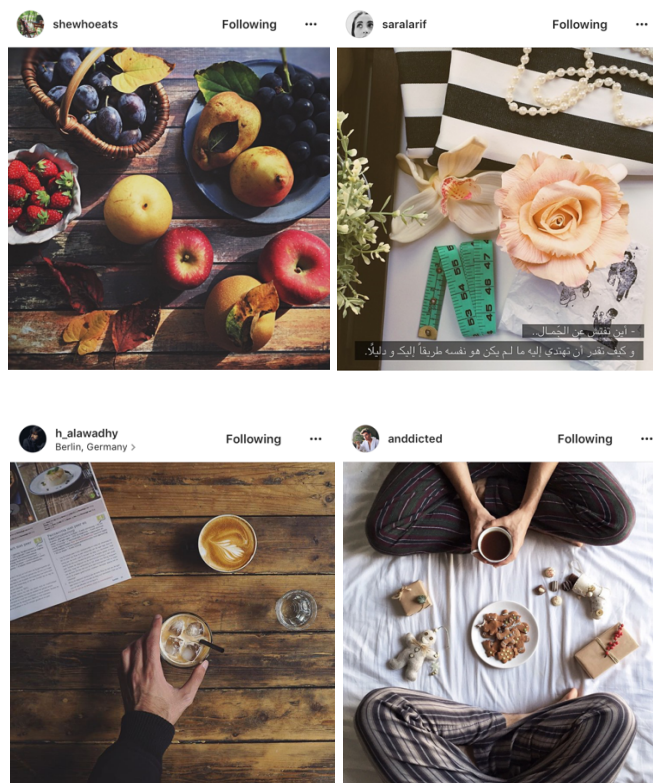
Figure 19: from top left to bottom right, Instagram post shared in 2014 by @shewhoeats, @saralarif, @ h_alwadhy @anddicted

During that time, commercial posts by businesses and corporations were also produced in a visual manner similar to that of popular Instagram users. Products were photographed with smartphone cameras and filters were added to them. Yet later on, in 2015, some business and corporations started to gradually move away from these spontaneous looking posts and appropriated the aesthetic of conventional advertising to fit the small screens of smartphones. They worked with less elements in a composition or relying on color to make

a post stand out. In figure 20 you can see posts by the clothing store Gap shared from 2012 to 2017. Arranged from top left to bottom right, they show the progression from shots taken with the iPhone to those professionally photographed. Their initial posts followed popular Instagram trends like photographing ones feet and neatly laying out clothing on the floor. After their posts became professionally designed, they embraced more colors due to an ongoing Instagram trend where vibrant backgrounds are used in photography. They, however, reserved some aspect of their early Instagram posts like bird's eye view shots.
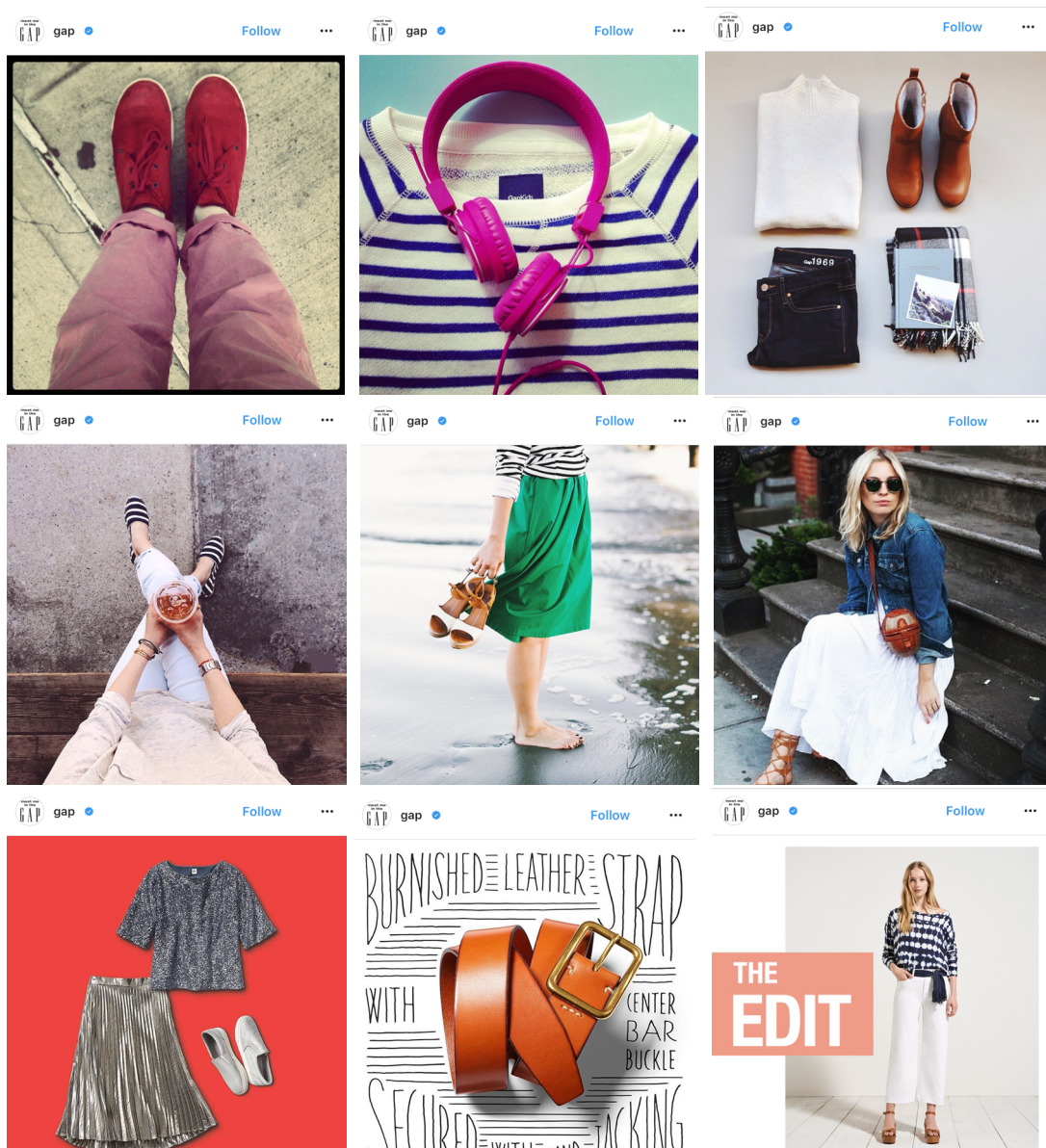
Figure 20: posts shared by the clothing store Gap on their Instagram account from 2012 to 2017

Also in 2015 more themed accounts emerged were posts that share similar visual qualities produced by different users were seen on the same account; that created a cohesive Instagram account where each single image responds to others. Some users started to experiment with the grid structure of Instagram on a visual and conceptual level (See Fig 21). Some followed a theme for their posts and others used the gird to create continuous large images. and creating continuous posts that link to one another (See figure 22).
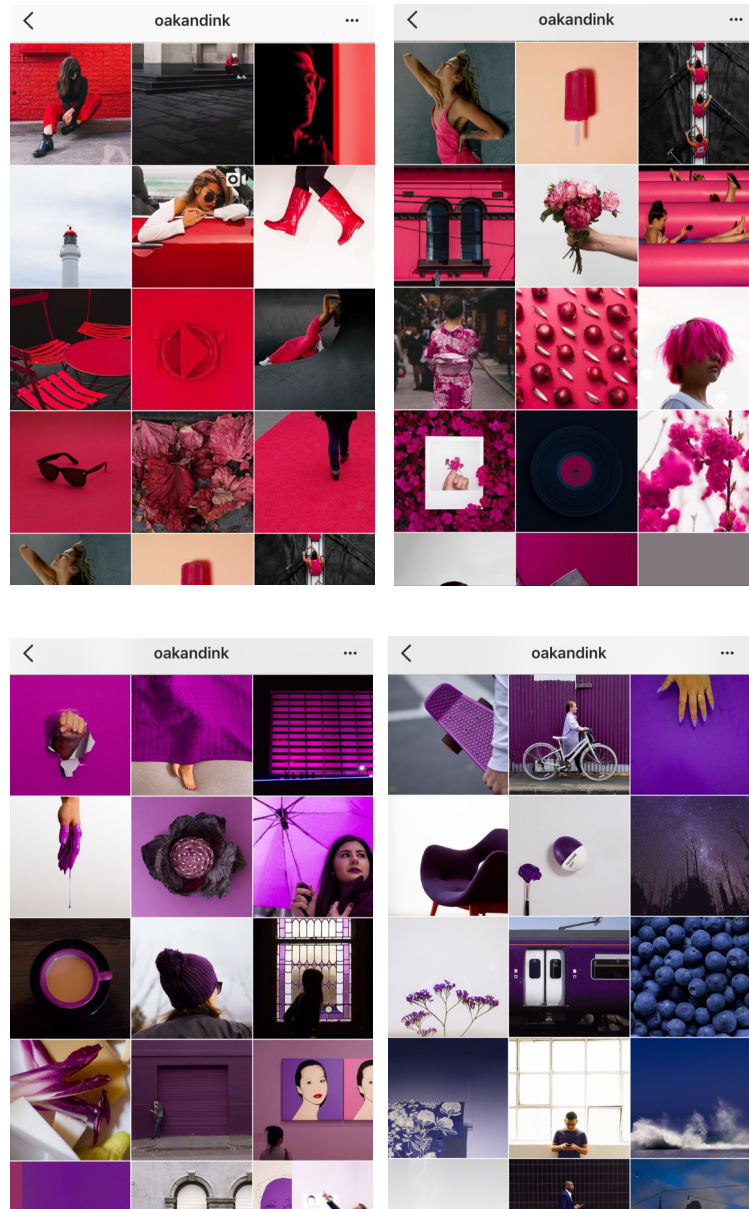
Figure 21: screenshot of the Instagram account @oakandink which works with Panton colors as a photographic concept
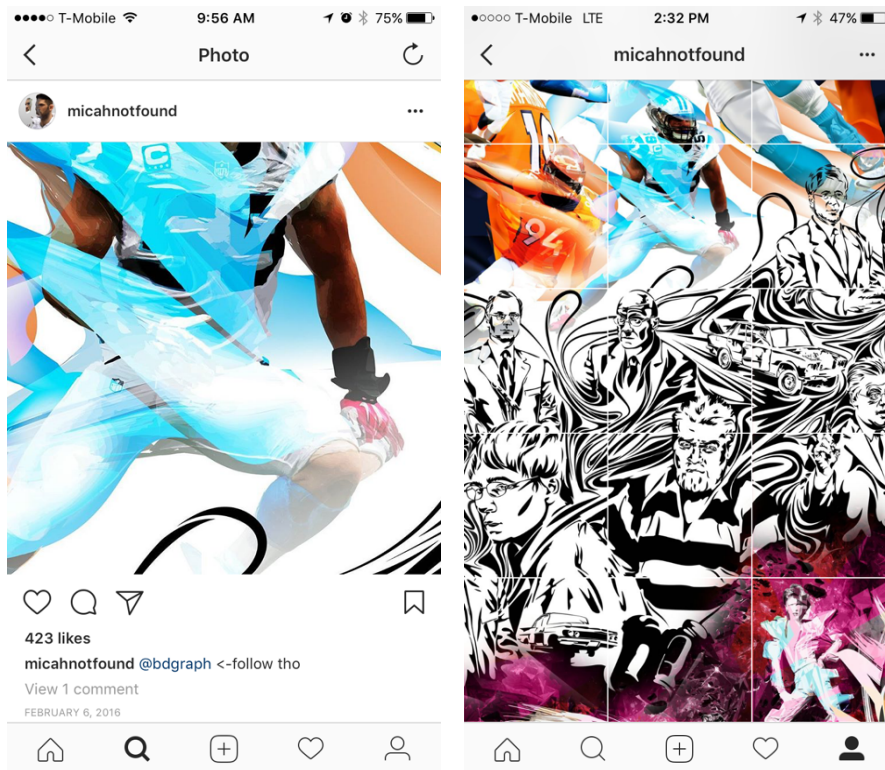
Figure 22: Acreenshot of the account @micanotfound which works with a continuous image over Instagram's grid.

Overall, these observations highlight how fast change takes place on image-based social media. Instagrammers could adapt to several cycles of change in a short period of time, not by receiving formal education as one would do in an art school or participating in artist retreats, but by simply being open to trying new things. Instagram become a documentation vessel for these trends and visual experiments.

In addition to these observations, a total of 12 Instagrammers were interviewed, eleven iPhoneographers and one who used his D-SLR. These interviews brought an understanding to how image-makers think today about Instagram and user smartphones as image-making tools. Starting a dialogue with iPhoneographers from different parts of the world and with various backgrounds, I was surprised to hear similar motivations, thoughts, and beliefs early on in the interviews. I have asked the participants about their process and the impact of using Instagram on their creative work; several themes emerged from analyzing what these Instagrammers shared in the interviews. The participants talked about how they see Instagram as a valuable tool in enabling visual expression while also fostering human connections. They also extensively discussed how iPhoneography encouraged learning

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more about image-making through different means. The participants believed that using Instagram and working with iPhoneography is important to them.

To further explain, here are the four main themes and their subthemes that emerged from these interviews:

(1) **it was important to the participants to embrace the use of smartphone devices**

On their Instagram profiles, several iPhoneographers mention that they use their smartphones to create images. For some that declaration is driven from a sense of pride in the fact that they use a simple tool to create sophisticated images; others want to be transparent with their audience. It is true that some of the images created by these participants, in the recent past, could only be generated by those who had knowledge and access to professional image-enhancement software. Things have significantly changed today. Some of these image-makers aspire to inspire others to participate in image-making by enforcing the fact that everybody can use their handy device to create intriguing images. Some of these iPhoneographers hadn't worked with image-making before using Instagram and were seeing great success of social media. They wanted their audience to recognize they've accomplished a lot regardless of the stigma that amateur image-makers create work lesser in quality.

(2) **Instagram is a powerful tool**

While initially the goal behind starting an Instagram account was socializing with family and friends for some Instagrammers, many soon realized its potential as a creative image-making tool. It either became a personal diary where memories were creatively interpreted or an extensive portfolio of creative expression. Instagram plays a major role in transform the contemporary visual communication experience.

It is clear that Instagram's popularity keeps growing several years after its release for reasons beyond the desire of people to participate in social media. Not only is Instagram an image-sharing platform, but it became well known for successfully offering the following: a user-friendly platform which people can participate in regardless of their expertise in image-making. Instagram has simple built in process

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to follow in order to create an iPhoneograph. Casual snapshots can be enhanced on Instagram to become artistic. and those who constantly and mindfully create images become successful image-makers.

Instagram was also able to provide exposure to image-makers from different parts of the world to the works of each other. Image-makers are connected by their desire to express stories and concepts through digital images, and enjoy interacting with others. Becoming an Instagram user, with a non-private Instagram account, means there are several opportunities to have an audience. There are always opportunities to see engaging content on Instagram and to also create intriguing work that will be seen by others.

It also seems that the aesthetics of Instagram, with its ability to democratize image-making, are influencing art and media. In their annual trends report, Shutterstock.com, a leading stock image provider, shares the most searched for and downloaded themes. They declared vintage to be a major visual trend for 2013 and 2014. There is not definite connection between the popularity of vintage images and the emergence of Instagram and its filters; however, I cannot help but question the implications of using such platform.

(3) *Instagram fosters connectivity among image-makers and their audience*

It seems that Instagram encouraged some interactions different from what takes places on other social platforms by providing a core reason to be on the platform, an interest in making images and/or viewing them. This commonality made the experience of being on Instagram to feel genuine, since most Instagrammers with an interest in creative images know that they have an audience who is hungry to see more fascinating work in the world. This meant that Instagrammers performed at a better quality knowing that their audience could be critical of their work and unfollow them if they perform poorly. Yet, they also were open to asking complete strangers for insights on which applications and techniques to use to create great work. This combination of a common goal, an expectation for high standards in image-making, and the willingness of most image-makers to help and educate each other made Instagram a space where image-makers can always connect with one another.

A lot of real life relationships happened because of Instagram's ability to connect global image-makers. Some participants talked about how fascinating their experience was meeting other image-makers in person, some from countries other than their own. Instameets, a publicly advertised meeting from Instagrammers in a city is one way where local image-makers meet. But it also happens that when some visit a city where they another Instagrammer whom their connected with lives, they would meet. Some of these meetings meant going a group photo-shoot where they can create images together, or simply sharing a meal and getting to know each other.

(4) *iPhoneography is an opportunity to learn and grow as an image-maker*

The process of creating images of a new aesthetic seems to be connected to the human desire to learn and grow. Working with iPhoneography provides image-makers with an abundance of opportunities to trigger their personal curiosity in image-making as a practice, another deep curiosity in what other people create, and the desire to challenge themselves to meet the standards of an audience. In the first point, their curiosity in learning, working with iPhoneography means constantly experimenting. The process demands investing time in testing and trying new things like in this case new image-enhancing applications and new visual techniques.

Those who are not familiar with image-making practices can discover joy in using applications that can, with a few taps on the screen, alter how a photograph looks. They can then use these applications to mask areas as you would in Adobe Photoshop, alter the original colors of a photograph, add texture that can make an image look an aged print, add symbols and text, in addition to many other features.

iPhoneography comes with challenges too; a main one is such as Instagram's inherent aspect ratio of 1:1. While some iPhoneographers saw this challenge a positive one, others felt it was too restricting. Yet, working with this specific aspect ratio in the early days of Instagram pushed iPhoneographers to be more critical of their compositions in order to create images that complement the square frame.

Another strong aspect of learning is being constantly exposed to images. These images, can function as triggers for both inspiration and motivation. An Instagrammer could be inspired to become and iPhoneographer by seeing how

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others are utilizing their smartphone to re-interpret images. They are also exposed to new concepts, visual trends, and new people. Images are usually instantly shared in Instagram, which makes exposure also happens in real time. This leads iPhoneographers to be present with their practice and aware of the world of images around them.

Participants were fascinated by many positive aspects of Instagram such as the content they could view, their ability to express themselves to a global audience, and the opportunity to connect with other creative individuals. They were always able to find content of value to them and users whose accounts they would enthusiastically want to follow on Instagram. They felt the community was very creative and talented. The platform provided many opportunities to keep up with contemporary trends in image-making since content was instantly posted and shared leading to being constantly intrigued and inspired by what they saw. Since Instagram was based on connectivity, it allowed these Instagrammers to find people that felt relevant to them and to find others that helped them push their creative boundaries. While Instagram allowed them to view the world through the visual interpretations of others, they felt they were part of a creative and talented community that encouraged them to express themselves through their iPhoneographic work.

Interviewing iPhoneography and observing it on Instagram was valuable in understanding how one device, the smartphone, defines the image-making experience today. iPhoneographers are individuals who observe and absorb changes on the Instagram community and are willing to learn and grow from what they see. They are dedicated to their practice and invest their time in experimenting with new trends and techniques. They do not shy away from creating work that belongs to a specific trend and shared visual similarities with the work of others; they see each image as a personal reflection and therefore unique in its existence. It seems that regardless of where iPhoneographers are located they all aspire to create visually interesting images through a supportive community that validates and acknowledges their efforts.

5.2.2 The phenomenological approach

Another aspect to examining iPhoneography is looking into the meaning of visual trends that emerge through this practice. I chose the Minimalist and Candy Minimalist movements

on Instagram and observed and practice them hoping to understand their popularity. I have used post-intentional phenomenology as a guide to understanding this portion of the research and heavily relied on written reflexivity. I came to the conclusion that iPhoneography is an emotionally and intellectually complex practice relevant in artistic process and emotional processing to art making practices.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, I have a background in image-making that framed my intentions to study iPhoneography. While I was not fully aware of what triggered my fascination with this practice at the beginning, identifying my assumptions about the practice and Instagram as a platform were important in arriving to a deeper understanding of the emotional and intellectual value of practicing iPhoneography.

I am now aware that creating iPhoneographs is an extension to other image-making practices historically acknowledged. Sometimes the process seems simple or accidental due to how user friendly smartphones and image-based social media platforms appears to be. Yet, the practice while requires skills of both technique and conceptual nature. I am now aware that practicing iPhoneography itself proved to be a venue for creative release where feelings are similar to sharing my professional work in the world.

As for the emergence of visual trends, I realized that altering an image to the point where its redefined visually is an opportunity to process emotions and thoughts while obscuring them. When I created Candy Minimalist images I was able to do two things: hide personal dark memories and give them the initial appearance of vibrancy, and re-experience the beauty of mundane of my daily life. I used smartphone applications to transform the colors of photographs into images with vibrant pink, purple and green. I also used applications that allow tiling/ collaging images together to work with the notion of visual fragmentation. The alternations in color extenuated the lines and shapes found in the original photograph, while the fragmentation made the images dynamic and far from their initial emotional energy.

Working with iPhoneography also re-enforced a sense of resourcefulness that already exists in my personal work. It allowed me to recognize the potential of one device in creating a body of work that can still satisfy the desire to interact with the world through visual expression. Digital image makers can create intriguing work using their smartphones only and can challenge their community by introducing new visual trends.

5.3 Discussion

It was once believed that there was no such thing as a relationship between an image-maker and their audience. Barthes (1977) spoke of how image-makers cannot shape the meaning of their work once it materializes because viewers hold that power. The audience uses their personal background and beliefs to interpret and define images. Yet, at a time when image-makers and viewers are always connected and willing to learn about and from each other, we must question if image-makers still lose their power once their work is consumed. This era could be called the birth of the author, since image-makers play an active role in how images are integrated in the world.

How does iPhoneography and the use of one device, as the main image-making tool, shape visual communication in this new era? I attempted to answer this complicated question by talking to iPhoneographers, observing them, and practicing iPhoneography myself. Well executed images have been able to portray human history and iPhoneographs will do the same for this day and age. We must also keep in mind that images will keep changing as new technology continues to shape visual communication and image-makers continue to appropriate them.

Even before camera phones, the Internet allowed better and various creative ways to document memories, where technological advancement allowed people to use democratic tools to write their own biographies (Garde-Hansen, 2009). Camera phones became stimulators for digital creative and artistic practices (Garde-Hansen, 2014, p. 95), with their portability being a main factor that drives creative visual experimentation (Keep, 2014b). Camera phones freed people from the expectation of professional photography by allowing all individuals to be image produces who can "extend our way of looking at the world photographically" (Gye, 2007).

Image-based social media is the latest manifestation in visual communication of the 21st century. Social Media has been known to connect individuals through text and images. However, what we see now is the valuable role of images in self-expression, starting conversation, and community building. In addition to image-based communication, they introduced the opportunity for individuals of some or little training in image making practices to become visual authors responsible for creative decisions.

Instagram played a role in the progression of contemporary image-making by encouraging iPhoneography. Where in the past platforms like Flicker were more passive in the sense that they encouraged sharing work that was done on a professional camera and through professional image-editing software, Instagram encouraged image-making to become experimental by inviting users to experiment with their images on a handy device. The start of the movement was when Instagram asked users to use their smartphones to crop images and add filters, but now it's a movement where iPhoneographers use a variety of mobile applications and experiment with new visual styles.

The mobile photographic device is wearable, portable, and accessible, therefore proving an extension of ourselves and our memories; this is what Reading (2009) calls the notion of "memobilia". She reminds us that people tend to feel lost and isolated without their mobile devices nearby. It is our constant need to document and archive the present has elevated the smartphone from a tool for entertainment to a device of personal value (Wei, 2008).

This new form of visual communication raises questions about the role of technology in transforming the nature of creative practices and introducing creative roles. It emphasizes theoretical and conceptual concerns about democratizing visual communication to be for the elite trained artists and designers, the amateur aspiring creative individuals. Examining image-based social media and iPhoneography can therefore provide an understanding of the evolution of images.

I've entered the research with a few assumptions: using Instagram allows Instagrammers to develop their image-making skills, professional-amateur image-makers receive better exposure because of Instagram, and the practice of iPhoneography does influence visual trends beyond what happens on social media. These assumptions were validated, some stronger than others, after conducting the data collection and analysis,

Instagram could be described as an ecosystem in the sense that it is a complex network where its entities continuously interact with one another. It allows users to learn, connect, grow, and gain on both social and financial levels. Interviewing a group of Instagrammers who practiced iPhoneography, and therefore were committed to the creative and artistic potential of the platform, allowed genuine stories to emerge. It is now clear that Instagram is a platform that encourages experimental iPhoneographic practices, and allows exposure to creativity to happen without effort.

As for the rise of professional amateurs, Instagram provided them with opportunities equal to the professionals. Several of the people I've spoken to were not aware of their creative and artistic potential until starting an Instagram account. Others who were trained in image-making explored their practice differently after working with Instagram by experimenting with new styles and content. When Instagram popularized iPhoneography, it gave these passionate amateurs a chance to use a simple device that they already own to create fascinating images.

And for the last assumption, that the aesthetics of Instagram are leaving the small screen to become integrated into mass media, more nostalgic and filtered images in the world in the past few years. In 2015, a survey of filtered images on Flicker found that they are more likely to receive more likes (Bakhshi et al., 2015). In their annual trends report, Shutterstock.com, a leading stock image provider, concluded that one of the most searched for and downloaded theme for 2013 was "nostalgic" and in 2014 was "filtered" (Black, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2013). These conclusions were found after Instagram and iPhoneography gained popularity, meaning they played a role in introducing these new aesthetics.

An important note to consider is that when iPhoneography is takes place on Instagram Burnett's (2004) two vantage points occur in such close proximity. The first vantage point, the process of applying meaning to the real world, takes place when the image-maker applies meaning to a photograph and transforming it into an image. The second vantage point takes place when the image is viewed by an audience intrigued by it transforms it into an imagescape. These two vantage points occur repeatedly on Instagram when an iPhoneograph is shared and the viewers instantly respond to it.

But can iPhoneography be an authentic way of portraying life in this age? Images are generated through the abstraction of ideas and emotions. While they portray the mundane of human life and are seen as reflective of reality, images remain to be artificial objects (Roxburgh, 2013). iPhoneography has become an experimental practice that encourages the creative documentation of memories. Yet, Garde-Hansen (2014), in her work about teenage iPhoneographic practices, agrees that humans use technology to produce objects that validate their past selves and future selves. In contrast, images are still disposable artifacts and when an image no longer presents the identity and lifestyle of its producer it is deleted.

Another issue we face today is the abundance of images that are either of similar content or low aesthetic and both occupy digital space on personal devices and cloud servers. Roxburgh (2013) warns that this abundance of images, where we are surrounded with a large number of redundant images, jeopardizes the value of image-making. This also might lead to high quality images being occupying digital space but never revisited (Schifanella, Redi, & Aiello, 2015). In general, there are images now in the world beyond our capacity to consume them, and while Instagram and iPhoneography promoted creativity they also contribute to this abundance of virtual waste.

However, we cannot deny that those who successfully practice iPhoneography share unique qualities. There are now more image-makers willing to experiment and embrace rapid change. They also do not shy away from creating images similar to pre-existing work because they believe each person is capable of injecting a personal story to the images they create. Since they are not tied to the standards of a predetermined field, iPhoneographers play a major role in introducing new visual trends. iPhoneography practice on Instagram has truly challenged the definition of visual communication by giving a transient and personal perspective to image-making rooted in the notions of visual experimentation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Smartphone applications relevant to this dissertation

Instagram

Instagram is a smartphone application released in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. It was promoted in its early days as a free application for photo enthusiasts and later as a platform for documenting daily life. In 2015, Digital Marketing Stats reported that the platform had over 300 million followers (Smith, 2015). Famous at first for its square, cropped photos and vintage-looking filters, it now allows users to upload pictures in various form ratios and alter visual aspects such as the hue, contrast, shadow, and sharpness. One uses Instagram by uploading photos from a smartphone or by taking pictures directly through the platform. These images can be manipulated by adding filters from a preset menu. Videos with a maximum length of 15 seconds can also be uploaded and have filters applied. After the images have been uploaded and altered, they can be accompanied by a written post. Unlike many other platforms, Instagram has no limit to the number of characters used in postings; therefore, users can write as little or as much as they want.
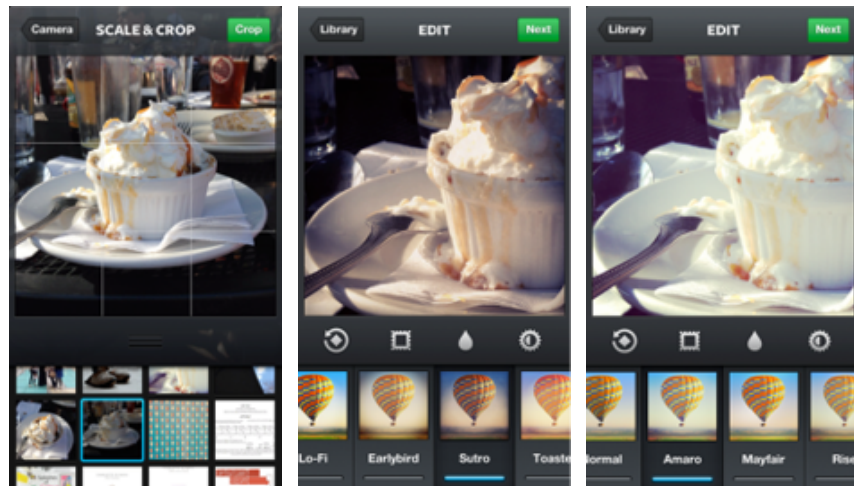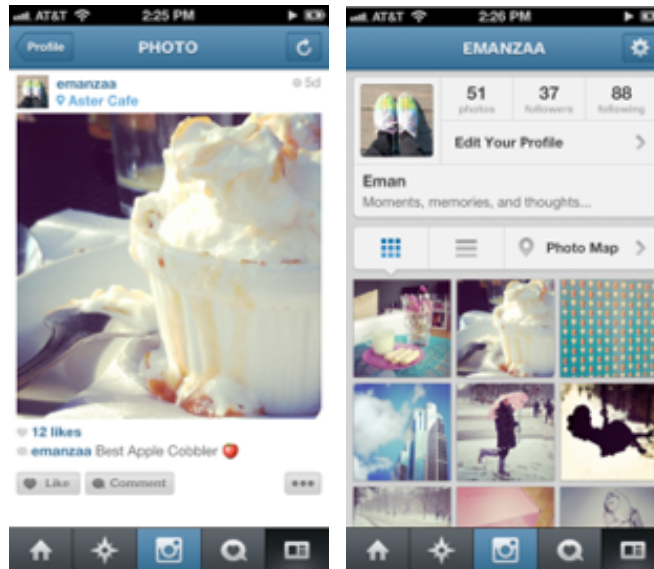
An important aspect of Instagram is that images uploaded by an individual will become a feed that others may view. The feed features images and text that appear to fill the screen. Users scroll down the screen to see the last one hundred images uploaded to the feeds they follow. Images posted by anonymous accounts and family members appear together in the same space. When an Instagram user profile is viewed directly, the images are arranged in sets of three. The grouping of imagines creates the experience of viewing several images at the same time, a feature that some individuals use to visually connect neighboring images.
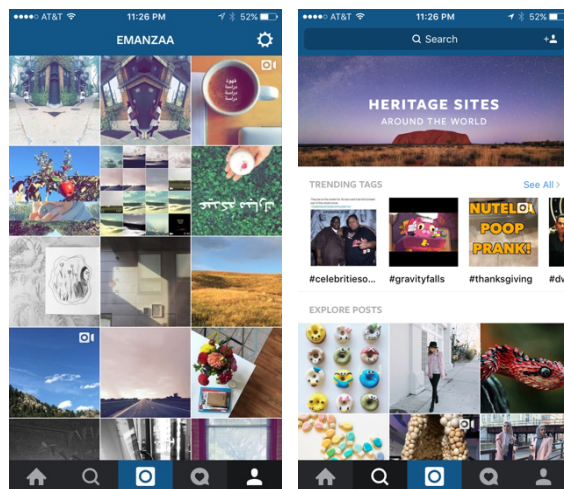
Instagram users can connect with each other in several ways. Instagram provides a "popular" posts feed that shares favorite images from different users. Images become "popular" when a user shares a post and others "like" it within a few hours. In this way, users from across the world have the opportunity to be exposed to images and follow people they may have never heard of or met in person. Instagram uses the

"popular" and "like" features as well as personal data from individuals to predict what images would be the most interesting in relation to who an individual follows. The "popular" feed that a user sees includes posts by people similar to those whom that individual already follows. For example, if a user followed figures important to wearable fashion, then the "popular" feed would show posts about wearable fashion. In 2015 this feature was altered so that the "popular" feed grouped images by topic and allowed users to search for popular hashtags and topics, regardless of their personal interest.

Another feature that allows people to connect on Instagram are the use of mentions, hashtags, and tags. Users can "mention" other Instagram users in their written post by using the @ sign before writing their name, and these users will be notified of being referred to in someone's post. Users can also write a hashtag (#) in their post. The hashtag idea first appeared on the internet chat IRC and was later popularized by Twitter, where the # symbol is used before a word or a sentence. Using the hashtag or a group of hashtags on Instagram gives users the ability to search all images that reference the same topic.

Lastly is the use of tags, which were introduced in 2013 (Geoff, 2014). Tags behave exactly as the mention (@) feature and allow users to acknowledge other users; however, tags are different because they are posted on the image itself and are designed to reference individuals who appear in pictures. Instagram users repurpose tags by using them to reference products that appear in a post. Well-known fashion figures frequently use tags to share the components of their outfits with curious followers.

A large number of applications emerged which cater to Instagram users. Many smartphone photo-editing applications include the option to "upload to Instagram" in their share feature, and several of these crop all images into squares. While some allow the enhancement of colors, others allow adding text and shapes. (See, for example, the applications Studio and Quick.) Other applications allow users to tile several images next to each other to create one image. (See, for example the applications Fuzzel, Pick Collage, and Photo Grid.)

In early 2015, Instagram began launching its own applications. One of them, Layout, delivers the same tiling function. A "hot key" on Instagram directs users to Layout.
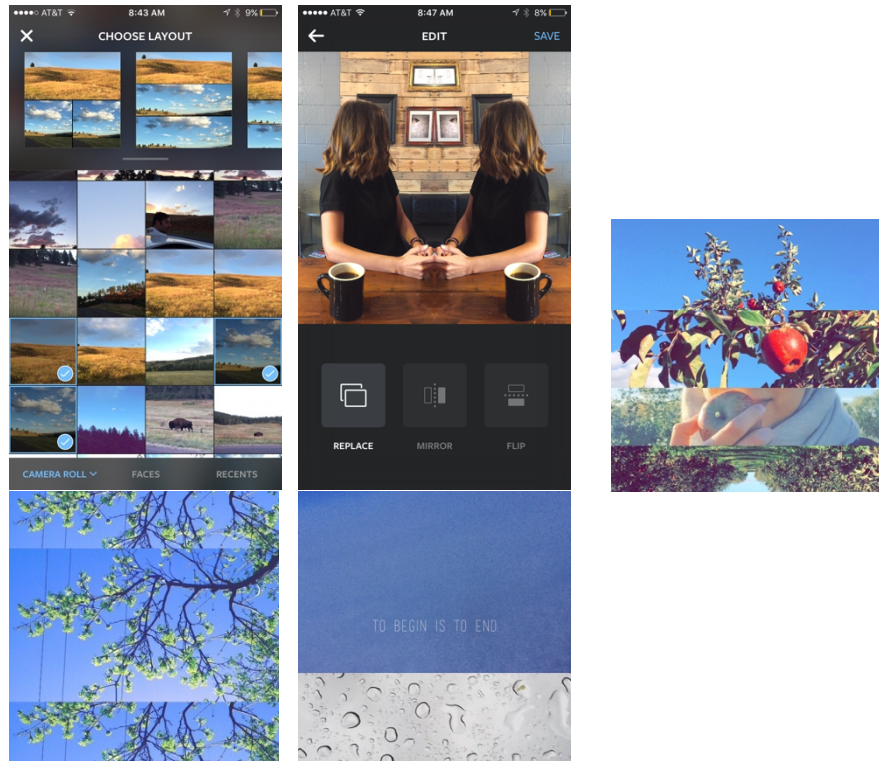
Instagram also released Hyperlapse, its reaction to other applications dedicated to digital imaging. Hyperlapse is a video based application that allows videos captured on Instagram to be slowed down or sped up by changing the frames per second. While this application hasn't gained a lot of popularity, it does cater to the growing number of users that since 2013 have uploaded and shared videos on Instagram.

Hipstamatic camera

Founded in 2012 by graphic designers Lucas Buick and Ryan Dorshorst, Hipstamatic has been sold to 4 million users. The platform mimics Instagram's square and simulates analogue cameras with settings that can determine aperture and shutter speed. Like Instagram, Hipstamatic allows users the ability to add vintage filters that simulate old photography. Hipstamatic is also known for a controversy surrounding photos taken by photojournalist Damon Winters. The images were produced through the application, and won third place in The Pictures of the Year International competition. The pictures were about American soldiers in Afghanistan and were commissioned by the New York Times. These photographs challenged conventional photojournalism, since it was the first time a images created with a smartphone were on the first page of a major newspaper.
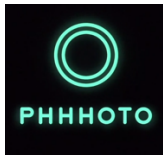
Phhhoto

Phhhoto is an image-based application known for instant moving pictures, or images that are shot in four separate continuous exposures and then previewed as a short, fast video that mimics an animated GIF. Phhhoto does not support any filters, but it does present two options for videos: grayscale or highly saturated color. It also occasionally adds special graphics, which can be super-imposed on the short videos created. Producing successful images becomes difficult with Phhhhoto; therefore, the platform has not gained continuous popularity with professional and amateur photographers who have other accounts on social media.

Snapchat

Snapchat is an application where images and videos disappear instantly from the image-maker's smartphone after they are sent to and received by a viewer. Images and videos can be set to a minimum viewing time of 1 second and a maximum of 13 seconds. The layout of Snapchat is designed to enable images to take over the whole screen and hide other elements like the clock and the smartphone's application dock.
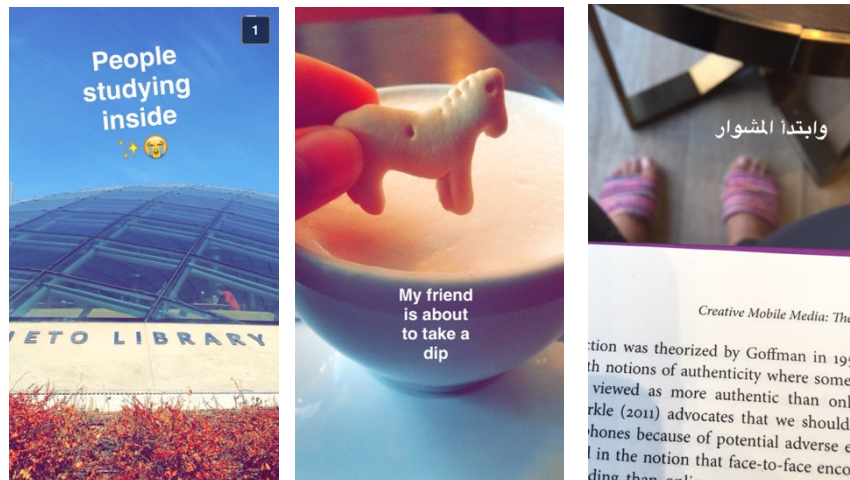
It is fairly easy to write short text on Snapchat, transfer the image from color to black and white, and add a yellow or blue tinted filter to images. One can also show the time, temperature, and the speed of their movement, which appears when the image is taken while moving at a fast speed like biking or driving.

Special illustrative stamps appear on Snapchat images based on the users geo-location. These stamps, which were first designed by the Snapchat team, used illustration to show aspects of major cities in the world. More recently, non-Snapchat designers can submit their illustrations, and, if approved by the Snapchat team, their compositions would appear as stamps that can be used to represent various cities or neighborhoods.
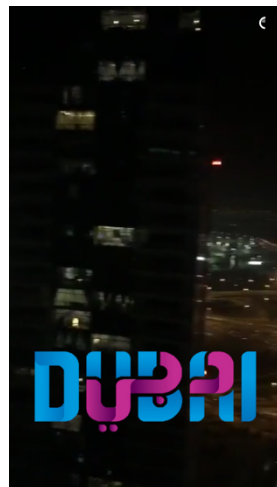
From a visual perspective, Snapchat is known for creating images that fill the entire screen and are mostly in portrait, rather than landscape, format. This has forced many personal and commercial accounts to rely on shooting images and videos in portrait mode, which was frowned upon after the emergence of smartphone cameras specially because shooting video in portrait meaning they will have black bands on the left and write when they are viewed.

Snapchat is known for its "stories" feature, or a personal feed of images uploaded within the past 24-hours to the story section of the platform.

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In the main menu, a list of stories appear for every Snapchat user that an individual follows. Users also see a list of stories curated by the Snapchat team. For example, an extra icon would appear for users attending major events in the USA and around the globe such as the Cochella Music Festival, Black Friday, the Kentucky Derby, India's Independence Day, Breast Cancer Month, and Milan Fashion week, just to name a few. Users attending major events can submit their images and videos and Snapchat's team arranges and shares them with all global users in real time.
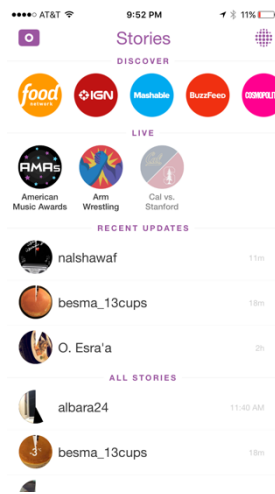
Users can also contact Snapchat and request that certain stories be featured. For example, in March 2015, a popular story was featured on Snapchat as well as other social media platforms. The parents of Seth, a five-year-old boy from the UK who was undergoing a bone marrow transplant, reached out to social media users for support. The parents initially posted a video of Seth on YouTube in which he asked people to show their support on the 27th of March by wearing yellow, his favorite color. The internet was flooded with images under the hashtag #WearYellowForSeth. Snapchat released a special story where people from across the world uploaded their videos and photos in support of Seth.

Snapchat has also promoted popular stories that are city-based. Snapchat would announce through social media that a city in the world had been selected to be featured on a specific date. Snapchat users in that city were prompted to share photos and videos on that day, and a special stamp appeared to highlight the city's name. The Snapchat team curates the submitted images and videos, and then releases them to all users from around the globe. Major cities previewed were Riyadh, San Francisco, Sydney, Prague, Paris, Toronto, London and others.

Advertisements and commercial accounts based on an individual's real-time location started emerging on Snapchat in mid-2015. Some of

these promotions were placed into stories about events or cities, whereas short stories from commercial accounts from popular media organizations such as *CNN*, *Food Network*, *Cosmopolitan* magazine, *National Geographic*, *Comedy Central*, *ESPN* and others appeared in user's accounts.

The fast pace of Snapchat makes it feel spontaneous to its users, who connect with each other from various locations in the world.

VSCOcam

VSCOcam Is smartphone image-based social application which mimics the use of a real camera without the addition of filters. It is designed by Visual Supply Company (VSco) and provides photo filters for purchase that are compatible with Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom. The application mimics a basic DSL-R camera and transforms the smartphone camera into a more professional tool.

Recognized for its no filter images, it allows users to upload their photos in the journal format so that every profile mimics a portfolio or a photography blog.

This application functions as a community-based platform for professional and amateur photographers. It provides its users with an opportunity to be featured on the home page of the application. Images shared on the home page focus on very high quality photography.

The name of the application, VSCOcam, is also used as a hashtag #vscocam on platforms like Instagram to declare that no filters have been used. While several of these posts are not created using VSCOcam, the hashtag has become extremely popular with 90 million posts on Instagram, as on fall 2015.

Studio

Studio is a smartphone application and image-based social media which allows overlaying text and graphics on images. The produced images can then be posted to the platform's social timelime where users can follow other individuals. The images can also be exported to other image-based platfomorms like Instagram and Flicker.
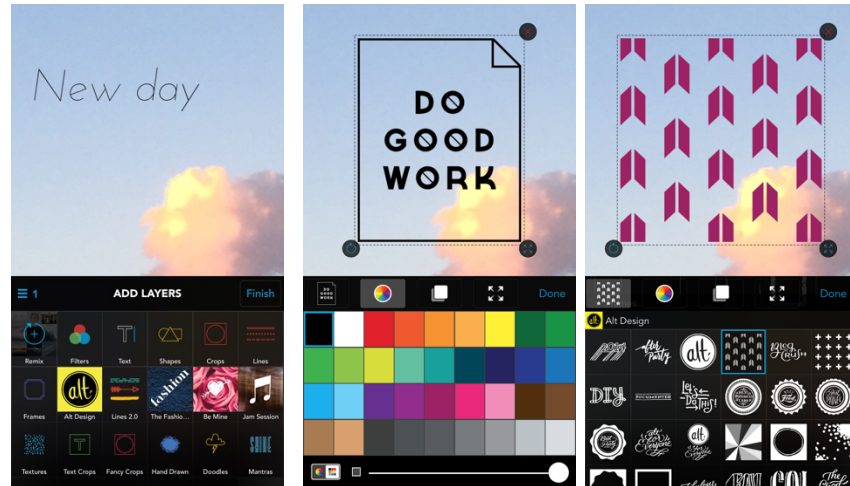
Fuzel

Fuzel is one of many application that allow mirroring two photos and tiling up to 16 photos in one frame. Several tiling layouts are available for free and for purchase. Photos are always exported in as a square.
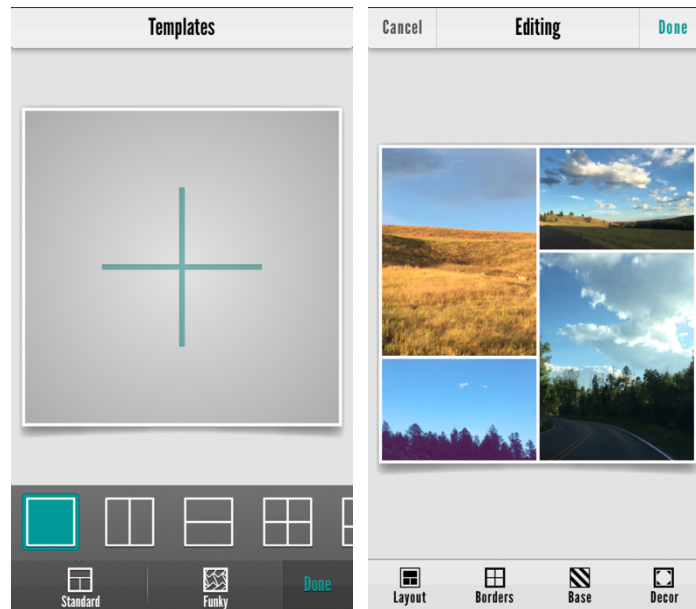
Quick

Quick is an application that was formally known as Overgram. It allows users to add a small line of text and then select its size, color, and placement. Images are exported as squared photos. The application is fairly simple and offers an opportunity to share images for a chance to win the most votes, which on Quick are called "likes."
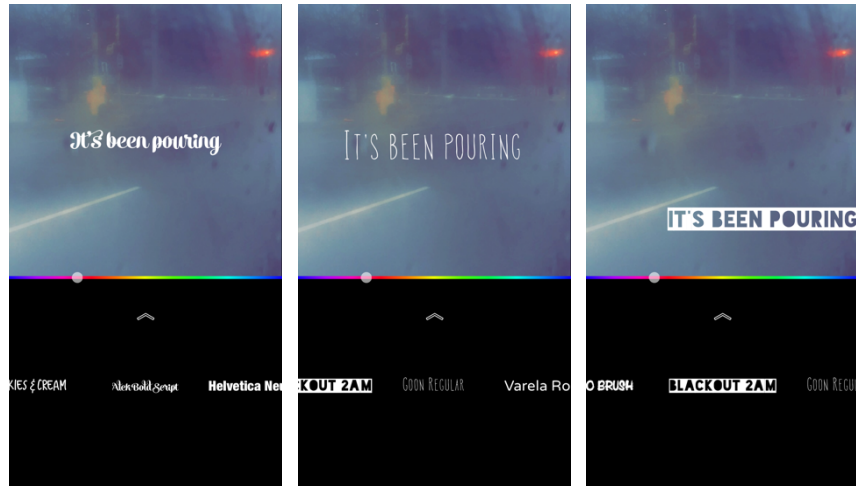
Mextures

Mextures is a Smartphone application that allows users to generate their own filters by mixing pre-existing ones found in the application. Users can also share their custom filters with others. This has allowed well iPhoneographers to upload pre-mixed filters, which hold their names for other users to apply to their images.
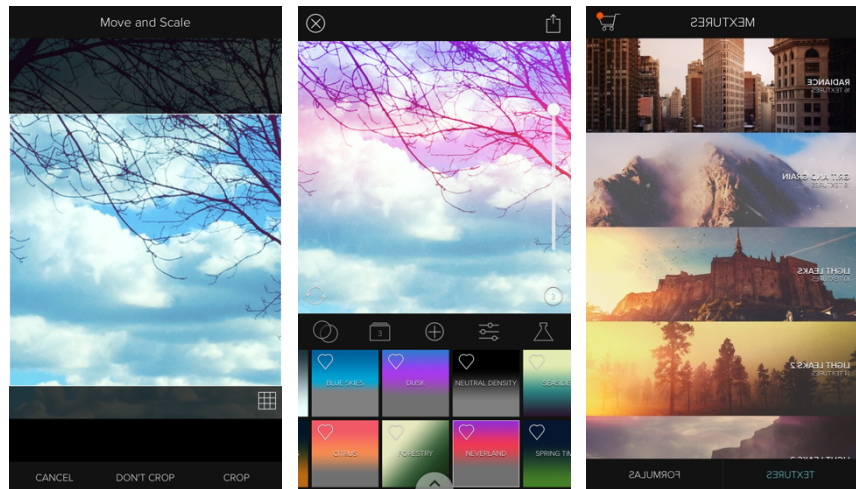
Fused

Fused allows users to merge two still photos into one by using features similar to Adobe Photoshop's blending tools. It is a smartphone application with fairly easy-to-use capabilities where most features are similar to other image-editing applications and therefore it is easy to learn.
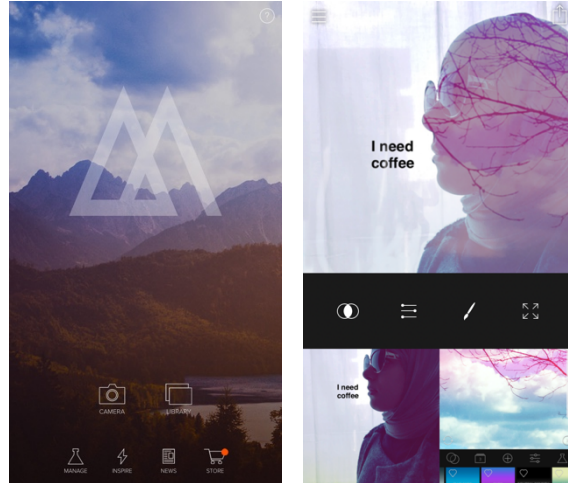
The iPhone Camera app

The iPhone Photos application has been developed to embrace technological advancements and trends in image-based social media. Offering more features with every new iOS release, the iPhone smartphone has increased sharpness, pixel size, color vividness, and other features over the years. In 2013 it released the option to change the photo ratio and add filters to photos via Photos. Several smartphone bloggers noted that Apple's move to embrace these advancements was inspired by the growth of image-based social applications that offer filter enhancing capabilities. In 2014, the Photos application was updated with the ability to shoot images directly as squares. Many have credited Apple's choice to the popularity of Instagram (Palmer, 2014)

Giant Square

Giant Square is an application that enables splitting and merging images depending on the image-based social media where the final image(s) would be shared. For compatibility with Instagram, pictures are split into smaller, individually squared images that can be made into a continuous Instagram post. When used on Facebook, the images can be grouped to create a cover photo. Finally, the application is also compatible with Twitter for the purpose of creating the photo for the header.

Appendix B: Presentation slides

iPhoneography and contemporary image-making

Examining a New Form of Visual Communication in the Age of Social Media

Eman Alshawaf, MFA, PhD Candidate
Advisor: Dr. Brad Hokanson
University of Minnesota
Fall 2017

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iPhoneography and contemporary image-making

Examining a New Form of Visual Communication in the Age of Social Media

Eman Alshawaf, MFA, PhD Candidate
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University of Minnesota
Fall 2017

And to use your personal life and daily activates as material for these creative images?

A new image-making practice
A new form of visual communication

Taking, making and sharing images today...

What does it mean to create images from anywhere and whenever using a handy device?

And also engage with a a global audience using these images?

Overview of this presentation

1. Scope of the research
2. Important scholarly work
3. Methodology (collect and analyze)
4. Findings
6. Conclusions

I am interested in the creative artistic form of sharing

social media and smartphones

(1) iPhoneography is

(1) *iPhoneography*
(2) *Instagram*
(3) *Visual trends*
(4) *Candy Minimalism*

No need for an expensive camera or Expensive software

A form of snap, edit and share

Gye, 2007
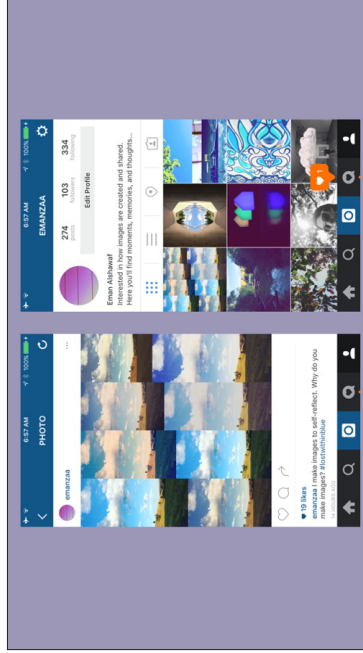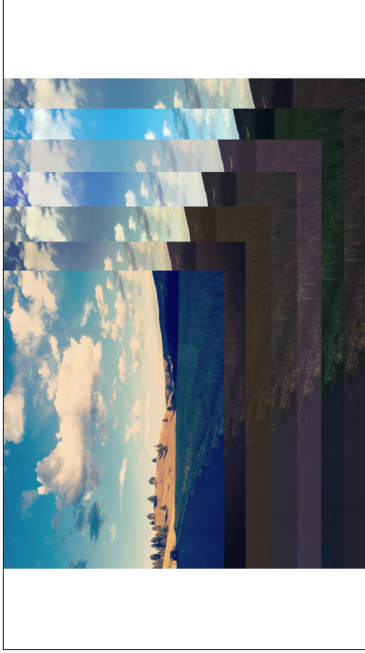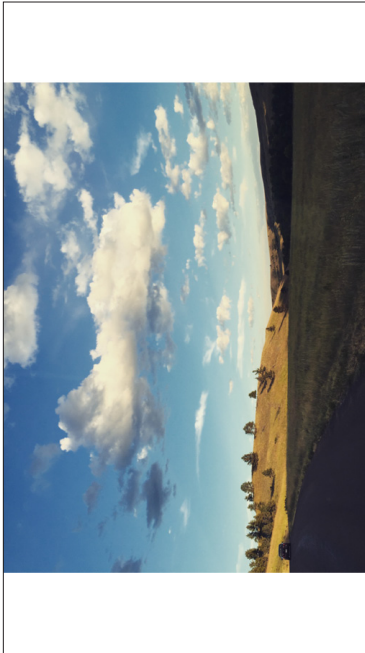
(2) One of the best contexts to study iPhoneography is Instagram

Gómez Cruz, 2012; Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Halpern & Humphreys, 2014

(2) Instagram

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It is clear that many people across the world are talking about their lives using images

(3) visual trends

Focused on images
User-friendly platform
Available for everybody with access to smartphone
Used by individuals and business
Used by people with various tech expertise
Used by people with various interests

Abidin, 2014; Bakhshi, Shamma, Kennedy, & Gilbert, 2015; Gómez Cruz, 2012;
Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Halpern & Humphreys, 2014; Hochman & Manovich,
2013; Kelly, 2014; Larsen & Sandbye, 2014; Manovich, 2016; McNely, 2012

Some of these images are extremely creative and aesthetically pleasing

People appreciate filtered images more than non filtered.

Shutterstock 2013, 2014
Bakhshi, Shamma, Kennedy, and Gilbert 2015

(4) Candy Minimalism

Instagram must have popularized the square (1:1) aspect ratio and the use of filters on images.

There is a variety of content on Instagram but....
I'm more interested in the creative/artistic/designed
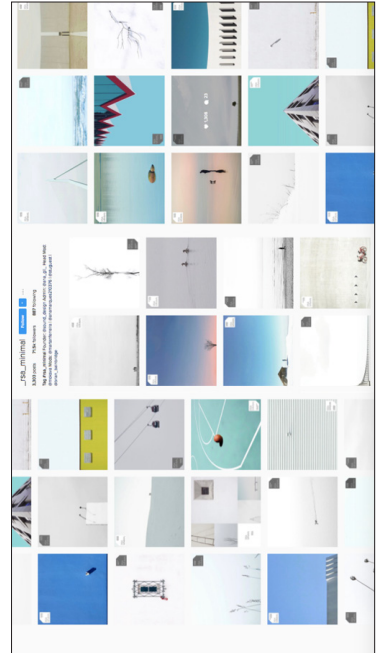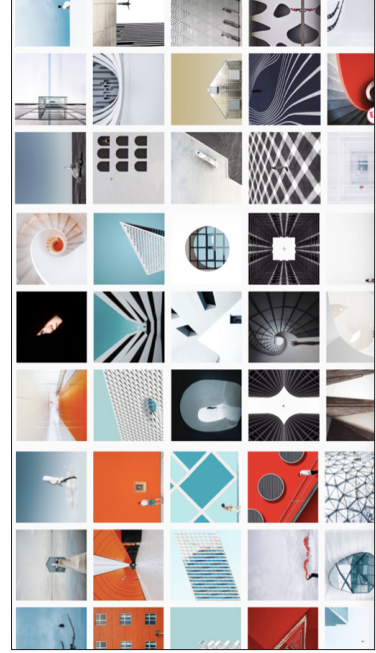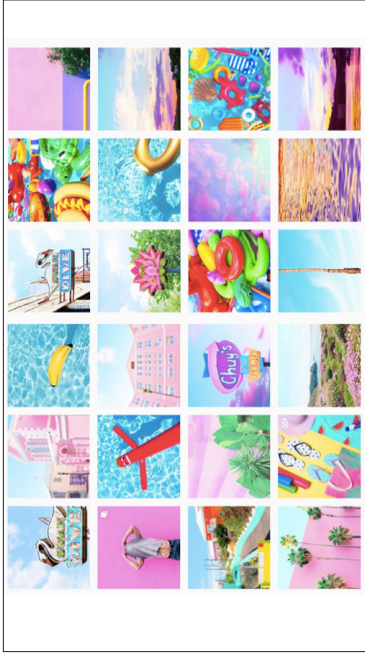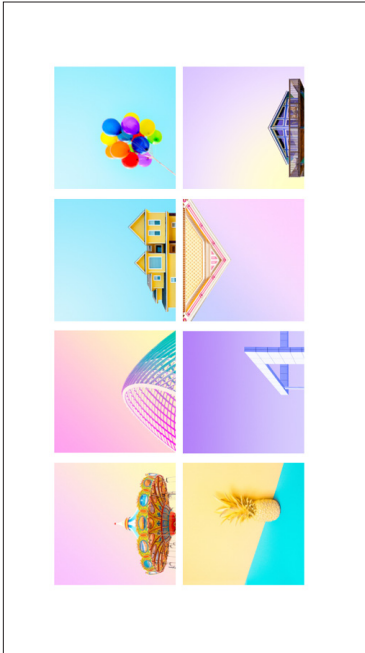
166

iPhoneography and the iPhoneograph
iPhoneography and the iPhoneograph
iPhoneography and the iPhoneograph

Fifth moment for (photographic images).
Gomez Cruz & Meyer, 2012

iPhoneographs are *not*
photographs

image-making is...

The image is artificial
The image is virtual

Roxburgh 2013, Burnett 2004

Maker ////// Image ////// Viewer

Roland Barthes 1977, Ron Burnett 2004

(1) Early photography
(2) Kodak brownie
(3) Film roll
(4) Digital Cameras
(5) iPhoneography

Gomez Cruz & Meyer, 2012

Abstraction of the material world

Is there a relationship between
the image maker and viewer?

1950s

preserve memories
communicate feelings
relive memories
document personal achievements
escape the world

Bourdieu 1956

2000s

document memories
express one's self
communicate with others

Gye, 2007

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they didn't have connectivity.

Sociotechnical

Gomez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Gye 2007; Keep 2014; Van House, Davis, Ames, Finn, and Viswanathan 2005

Maker vantage point Image vantage point Viewer

Ron Burnett 2004

However, some things are new...

New aesthetic criteria

"Liquid Aesthetics"

Images are created through a binary code and could be easily constructed and deconstructed.
Keep 2014

My research questions are

(1) Visual and Virtual Ethnography
the study of behaviors through examining images (Schwartz, 1989), and the study of people in non physical environments (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012)

(2) Post-intentional phenomenology
the study of a phenomenon by examining factors that shape it (Vagle, 2014)

(1) What does it mean to practice *iPhoneography* on *Instagram* using a single smartphone device?

(2) How does the practice of iPhoneography shape new *visual trends* like Minimalism and *Candy Minimalism* on Instagram?

Quantifications failed to understand the purpose

Lev Manovich, 2016

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iPhoneography as a practice

Ethnographic data — Semi-structured Interviews / Observations

Phenomenological materials — Post-reflexivity on iPhoneography / Observing Candy Minimalism / Practicing Candy Minimalism

The meaning of visual trends

Conceptual framework

concept of Image-worlds
Concept of Practice Theory

Observing Instagram was like going through a rabbit hole

Methodology

Qualitative methodology

A form of inquiry based on exploration in the natural setting. It attempts to uncover meanings and delve deep in the issue at hand (Creswell, 2013)

It comes with limitations...

Conceptual framework
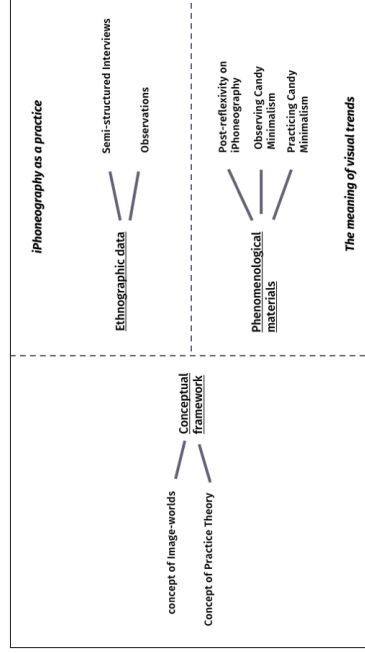
practice theory
Pierre Bourdieu 1970s

image-worlds
Ron Burnett, 2004

Maker vantage point **Image** vantage point **Viewer**

Image becomes an **Imagescape**

Several imagescapes lead to **Image-worlds**

With Image-based social media and smartphone technology we see the birth of several image-worlds

To understand a practice examine the Field, Capital, Habitus

Maker vantage point **Image** vantage point **Viewer**

Habitus takes place   Capital generated

Material world
Vantage Point/iPhoneography
iPhoneograph/imagescape
Vantage point / likes and comments
More images

Image-worlds

To understand a practice we must understand the factors that contribute to it

---

Making digital images = Habitus
Likes, comments and reposts = Capital
Instagram = Field

Maker ////// Image ////// Viewer

1ST VP   VP

iPhoneography   Likes and comments

Findings: What did I learn?

Observations of Instagram
+
Semi-structured interviews

2010 – 2012

(1) What does it mean to practice *iPhoneography* on *Instagram* using a single smartphone device?

After conducting longitudinal observations...

174

2013 – 2014

2015 – 2016

2017

2011

Professional digital imaging practices are *not* limited to professional environments

Here is a visual summary

Talking to iPhoneographers

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The criteria were that they:
(1) practiced iPhoneography and
(2) worked with minimalism

100 followers to over 100 thousand

9 iPhone users
2 Samsung users
1 D-SLR user
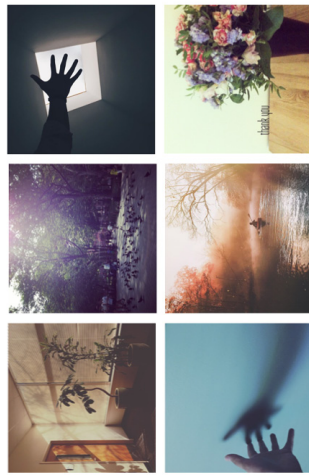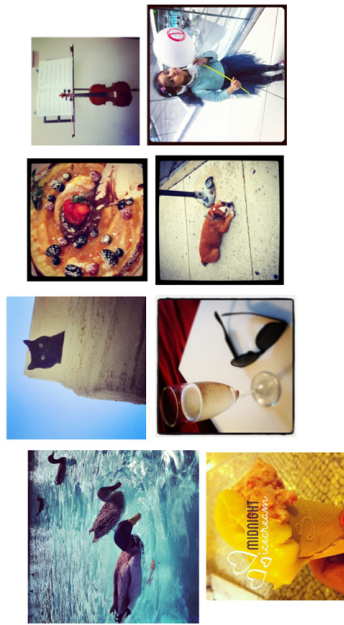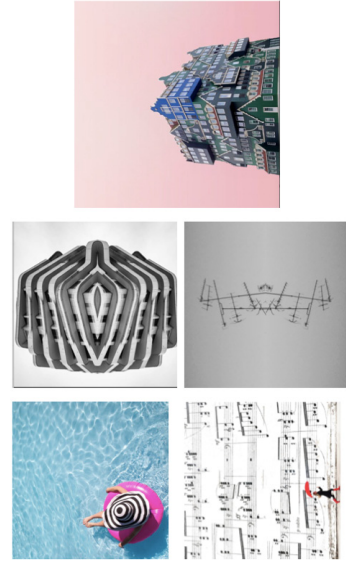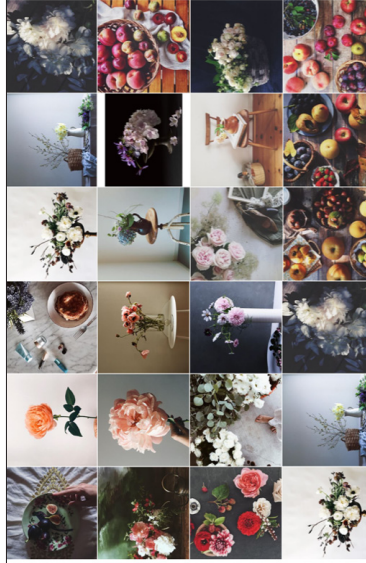
12 image-makers from different locations in the world

Jilt Emmer
USA

Naqib Jamaludin
Indonesia

Daniel Llach
USA

Radoslav Davidkoff
Bulgaria

Javi Corral
Spain

Michel Grazon
Spain

Stefano Bonometti
Italy

Eric Mueller
USA

Alek Malachowski
Poland

Sherry Jeffry
Canada

Sam Bakshian
USA

Chris Li
USA

116 K

2,111

389

4,021

8,526
and 21.6 K

966

11 K

48.8 K

16 K

8,899

87.2 K

2,926

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I asked them what does it mean to practice iPhoneography and share images on Instagram
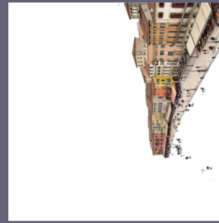
Filmmaker , social media manager, stay at home mom, graphic designer, graphic design student, interior designer, university professor in architecture, mechanical engineer, a web developer, an information technology student and a restaurant owner.
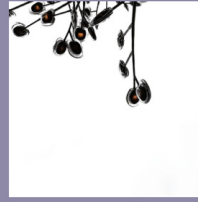
"I could connect with people from around the world and get to know their lives. It was like a really big form of people watching, in a sense. […] Facebook never provided that for me."

Sherry Jeffry

"… I can take a picture of my world and my feelings with something that is very little and very handy"

Stefano Bonomelli

"I'm a designer who works with photography. I treat an image as a design"

Javi Corral

"It's like this magic way of being able to get into someone else's head and really see the world through their lens, if only just temporarily"

Chris Li

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Personal expression
creative expression
escape busy life
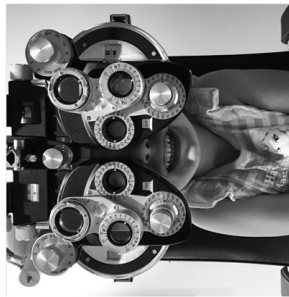
"I think I was feeling really isolated as a parent and I felt like once I learned how to use Instagram [...] learned how to connect with hubs and different communities [...] everyone was just so supportive and positive."

Sherry Jeffry

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(1) There's a sense in pride in using a smartphone

(2) Instagram is a great tool for image-makers

(3) Instagram fosters connectivity

(4) Practicing iPhoneography leads to creative growth

They were very aware of their practice and it's impact

"This was when Sophie was going to get her eye exam and we found out she needed glasses. So, this is a good memory to know forever"

Sam Bakshian

Four valuable themes emerged from analyzing the interviews

179

"With the right composition, care and precision during the editing process, and [the] right eye, you don't need a [$1000+] camera to engage a viewer or to transport them to another place and time."

Chris Li
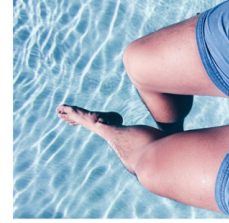
Instagram is an outlet to communicate "a visual story with an artistic kick"

Chris Li

1

The pride in using a smartphone

"I want people to think that if I can do it they can do it."

Javi Corral

2

Instagram is a great tool for image-makers

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3

Instagram fosters connectivity

4

Practicing iPhoneography is an opportunity to grow

Learning through practice

- *share their interests with the world*
- *a diary of experiences, memories, and creative endeavors*
- *showcase their unique visual style with less judgment*
- *so their involvement makes them highly aware of trends*

It is common to ask for creative help and make friends in real life.

"when I look back at all the pictures that I have upload[ed] to Instagram two three four years ago, and I see what I'm uploading now, I can see an evolution."

Javi Corral

"Basically, it takes me from fifteen minutes to even a few hours for one picture because I love [it] when every detail in the picture is set in the way I want."

Alek Malachowski

"Sometimes you understand a little more about yourself and your concept and [therefore] your images have to change with you."

Stefano Bonomelli

"it's no longer simply sharing photography snapped on the-go, but it's about engaging the viewer on a very intimate level."

Chris Li

"Sometimes people just assume that the iPhone takes an automatic great image [...] but definitely not. [...] shooting with an iPhone with can be a [challenge]"

Naqib Jamaludin

"I like [making people think] ... and I like to provoke in one way or another [...] old media is silly [...] when I'm watching a movie or TV show and they are treating us as silly [...] I don't do that, I don't like that. I believe that we are smart people and sensitive people."

Javi Corral

Learning through being seen

Learning through exposure

"You follow people who have interesting concepts and a specific visual through out Instagram, and then you say:

Ok, I will take a picture and follow their lines, perspective, light and shadow. That's when grow out of amateur photographer"

Stefano Bonomelli

They saw iPhoneography as a stepping stone leading to D-SLRs

"I do have a lot of photos that I take that I don't put on Instagram, [they] are very graphic so but they don't match the flow of my Instagram feed so I just keep them for myself right now."

Sherry Jeffry
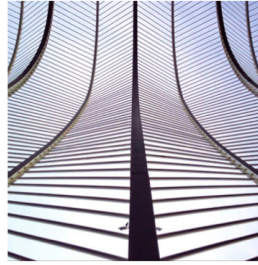
"It's very important to me to see other people's approach to images and to photography, because from time to time I always find somebody that inspires me."

Javi Corral

The unexpected

statements and ideas about iPhoneography and Instagram

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"Instagram is a lot about monkey see monkey do because you get inspired by somebody and you do a photo like theirs."

Sam Bakshian

(2) How does the practice of iPhoneography shape new *visual trends* like Minimalism and *Candy Minimalism* on Instagram?

Used written reflexivity to examine:

my iPhoneographic practice,
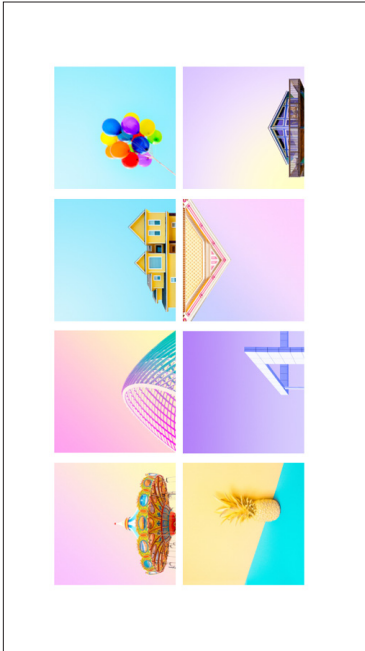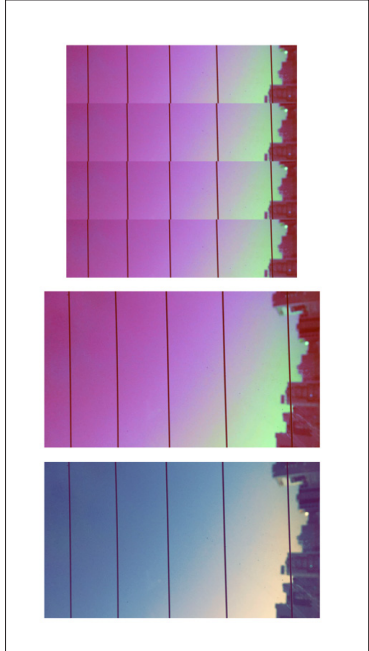Candy Minimalism,
and Practiced Candy Minimalism

The participants are aware of image-world

"I know I'm not unique [...], I love it. I feel like when I [see] something that I feel really connected to [and it] looks like mine I feel sort of an instant connection with that person because we see the world in a very similar way."

Sherry Jeffry

Post-intentional phenomenology: understand the phenomenon of Candy Minimalism
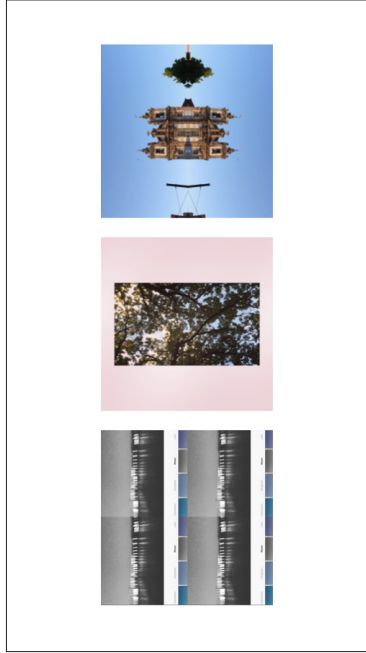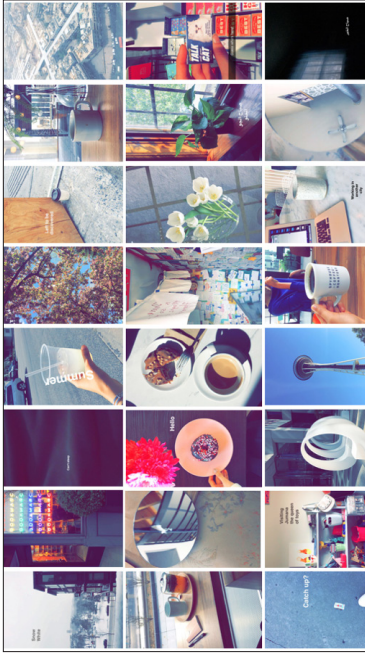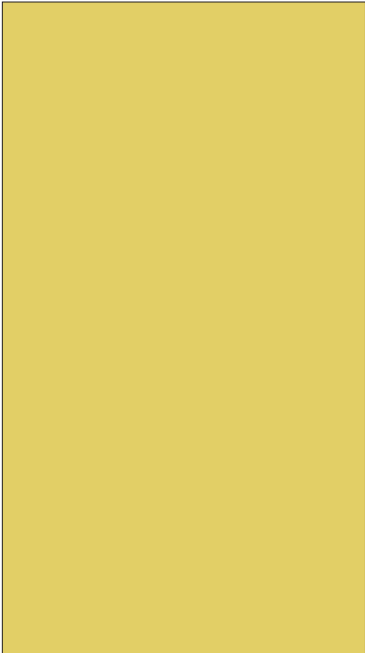
Observing Candy Minimalism

Observing myself working with iPhoneography

185
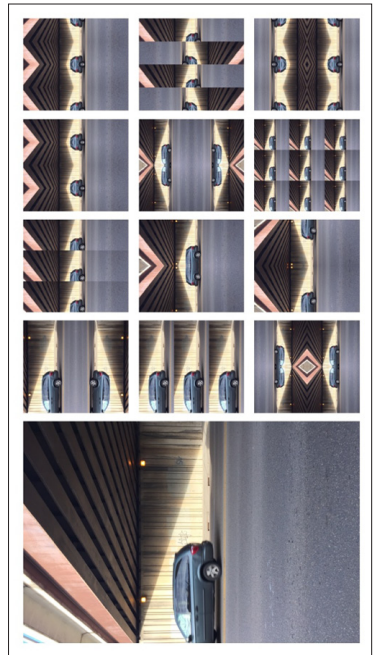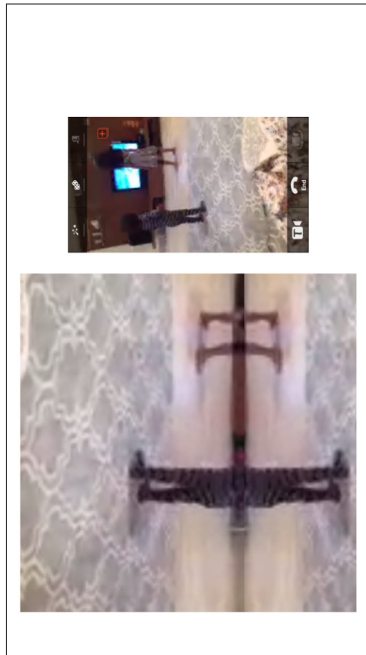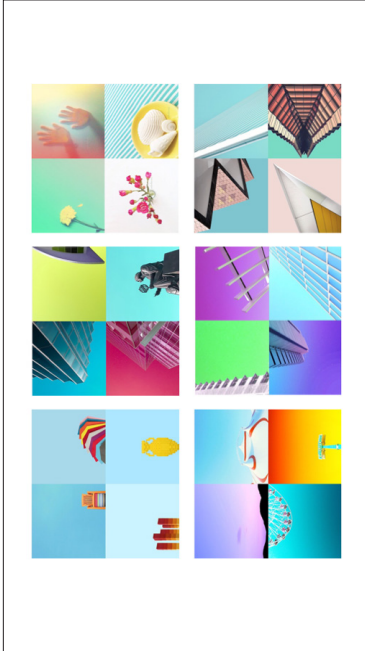
Observing what does it mean to practice Candy Minimalism

Overall...

I entered the research with some assumptions

Practicing on a consistent basis leads to growth

I attempted to understand what quantitative research couldn't

Participants from across the world said the same things early on.

Knowing that your work will be out in the world pushes image-makers to produce with the best standards

Using one device is convenient yet comes with challenges

Image quality remains limited
Stigma about smartphones

Continuous exposure to both the good and the ugly

To be part of a community
To be recognized

Can carry it anywhere and use it anytime
Easy to use and manage
Editing application are affordable

I'm now aware of the emotional and intellectual side of the practice

Is there a crisis?

Roxburg, 2013 and Larsen & Sandbye, 2014

visual visual visual
social social social

Talking to iPhoneographers was crucial in filling the gap of who and how...
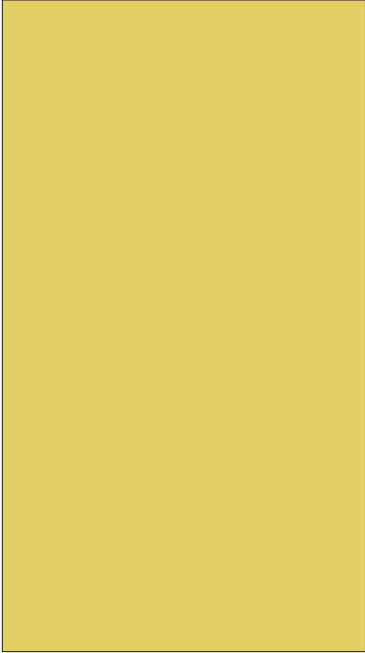
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Many images Many images Many images
Many images Many images Many images
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Regardless of the mundane and repetition, it can carry strong concepts
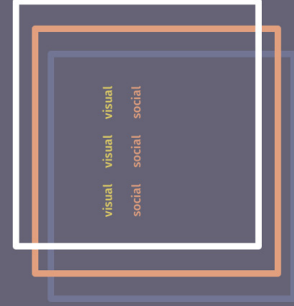
These Instagram users play a role in shaping contemporary images...

Professional amateurs are experimental image-maker

So in short...

iPhoneography is a form of remediation

Halpern & Humphreys, 2014

Today images are the new form of "oral culture." Burnett, 2004

thank you.

Experimental practices
will continue to shape
visual communication