

Snapshots of Text on Instagram: Fashion Curator Communication from a Design and Museum Studies Perspective



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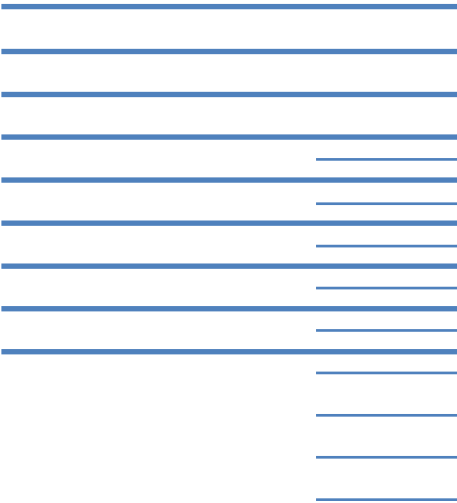
Abstract

This paper aims to examine engagement for a specific Instagram practice of fashion curators: posts featuring *Snapshots of Text*. It builds upon previous research, which indicates that fashion curators frequently post such images of text on Instagram (Sand et al. (2022)) and represent a high impact niche community particularly suited to qualitative research, whose communication strategies have been underexplored. The study examines multimodal digital communication by fashion curators from a design perspective, with a focus on engagement. Its mixed-methods approach combines qualitative eye-tracking, surveys, semi-structured interviews, participative netnography, thematic content analysis, and data analytics. It draws on communication and museum studies to gain a better understanding of how the visual elements of language are used and received in the Instagram environment. Findings indicate that while engagement with *Snapshots of Text* posts is higher with certain typographies and sizes, engagement is also dependent on certain caption characteristics. Furthermore, they indicate that a cross-pollination of digital fashion communication and museum studies research, particularly museum label guidelines and visitor engagement studies, may benefit both domains.

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Keywords

*Instagram, Communication studies, Museum studies,
Fashion curators, Digital fashion communication*



1. Introduction

Texts in fashion communication are loaded with meaning. They have been explored by generations of linguistic and semiotic scholars. That written text is experienced visually is, however, barely addressed in digital fashion multi-modal analysis. Firstly, understanding a text, one word at a time, means we picture its meaning (Mendelsund (2014), Wolf (2000)). Secondly, reading means looking at the geometries of letters, the angles and curves of numbers and punctuation marks, and the space that surrounds them. Viewers experience these shapes along with the content ((Van Leeuwen (2006)). Words are shapes, with contextual meanings of their own, before their expressive and symbolic qualities activate the meanings of their content. Since the very first inception of writing in Mesopotamia, Egypt, China and the Mayan cultures, text has had a visual form. Its shapes are particularly noticeable in hieroglyphs and calligraphy, medieval illuminated manuscripts (Figure 1), concrete poetry, and graffiti. Visual elements of texts are more noticeable if the language is unknown to the reader, as the form remains the only option to decipher meaning. The aesthetic qualities of handwritten or printed texts may reference social class, education, and cultural norms. The font used for an academic paper, a bake sale, or a tombstone will thus usually differ. Despite scholarship addressing images in terms of language (Barthes (1977), Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001)), typography as language (Van Leeuwen (2006)), and linguistics from the domain of typography (Swann (1991), Walker (2001)), surprisingly *Snapshots of Text* have largely been neglected in multimodal Instagram analysis.

FIGURE 1:

St. Barbara reading a book, a tower beside her by Masters of the Gold Scrolls - 1450 - National Library of the Netherlands, Netherlands—Public Domain. Courtesy Europeana.



This article outlines a social semiotic approach to analyzing the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning potentials of letter forms, drawing on Jakobson's distinctive feature analysis and Lakoff and Johnson's theory of experiential metaphor. Distinctive features are recognized and applied to the analysis of examples: weight, expansion, slope, curvature, connectivity, orientation, and regularity. The emotional experience of text aesthetics can best be described by Don Norman's general experience of design (Norman (2004)). Norman cites three categories of aesthetic perception: visceral, behavioral, and reflective. The visceral reaction ignites feelings and taps into attitudes toward certain typographies. They might seem familiar, or their color and shapes may evoke beliefs or memories. The rounded and bubble-gum-pink Barbie logo, for example, is experienced differently than the sharp-edged new black and white Twitter logo. Behavioral perception is related to the ease of use, which in the case of text would be how legible it is. Reflective perception is the most self-conscious category (Ortony et al. (2005)): "Would my friends judge me if I posted in Barbie typography?" This paper builds on previous research by Wragg and Barnes (2016) on audience perceptions in design. It aims to investigate a common Instagram practice by fashion curators—*Snapshots of Text*—from a design perspective. It compares the results with museum label caption guidelines, a domain in which users (visitors) have been the subject of studies since the 1910s (Davey (2005), Bitgood (2009)).

FIGURE 2:

Instagram post courtesy of Alexandra Cunningham Cameron, curator of contemporary design at the Cooper Hewitt Museum New York. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CeoH5YUot8I/>. Screenshot by the author.



What Snapshots of Text is, and is not

It should be noted that this research does not address image-with-text, that is the *overlay* of text over images on Instagram. That category includes typography overlaid in Instagram stories or reels, or images overlaid with text snippets (called "quote cards" by Pfurtsceller 2020 and "inspirational quotes" by Lohmeier et al. (2020)). Memes (see Du et al. (2020), Skjulstad (2020), Yus et al. (2012)) also feature an overlay of text and belong to the images-with-text category. In what Skjulstad refers to as "self-referential memesphere," images are usually subtitled by text and relate to the text by amplifying or altering the textual meaning, the way a caption of a New Yorker cartoon does. As Osterroth (2015) has pointed out, memes are a collective phenomenon based on repetitions and variations. These repetitions include the overlay of specific typographies that reference meme culture (Davis (2021)). Text overlay via the Instagram app also integrates a limited choice of typography formats. *Snapshots of Text* posts, however, are pictures of textual forms. They are pictures in the sense of Mitchell, as "complex assemblages of virtual, material, and symbolic elements" (Mitchell, (2005), xiii) and mediate text through a picture. They are less aligned with subtitles than they are with the concept of a "virtual window" as described by Friedberg (2006). Friedberg described the "windows" interface on computers as a dynamic space similar to cinematic screens. She does so by referencing the painter Leon Battista Alberti, who in 1435 described his process of painting as first sketching a rectangle on a surface, which he regards as "an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen" (Alberti (1972), 55). Images of text may be pictures of

FIGURE 3:

Instagram post courtesy of
Kaat Debo, Director & chief
curator MoMu - Fashion Museum
Antwerp. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ceoh5YUot8I/>.



book pages, posters, neon signs, or screenshots of online web pages or articles – the possibilities are as varied as there are text forms (figures 2–5 and 11). The following research questions (RQ) are addressed:

RQ1: Which *Snapshots of Text* posts can generate higher engagement?

RQ2: Can guidelines for exhibition object captions inform social media captions?

2. Context

FIGURE 4:

Instagram post courtesy of Alexandra Cunningham Cameron, curator of contemporary design at the Cooper Hewitt Museum New York. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGUw19SMfnR/>

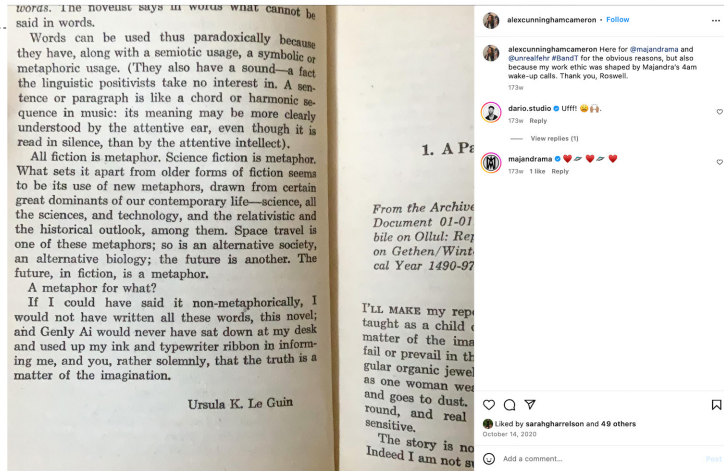
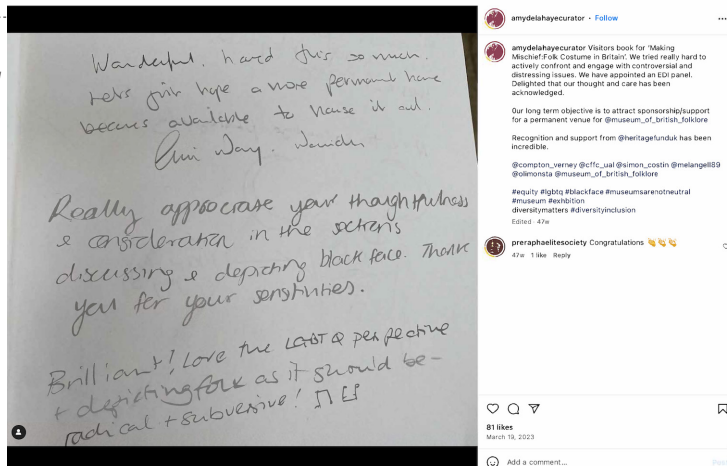


FIGURE 5:

Instagram post courtesy of Professor Amy de la Haye, curator, author, and Rootstein Hopkins Chair of Dress History & Curatorship at London College of Fashion. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cp-hth-NEr//>



The use of text as image on Instagram is examined within the context of communication studies, the "Instagrammatics" (Highfield and Leaver (2016)) of the platform, current fashion Instagram practices, as well as museum studies.

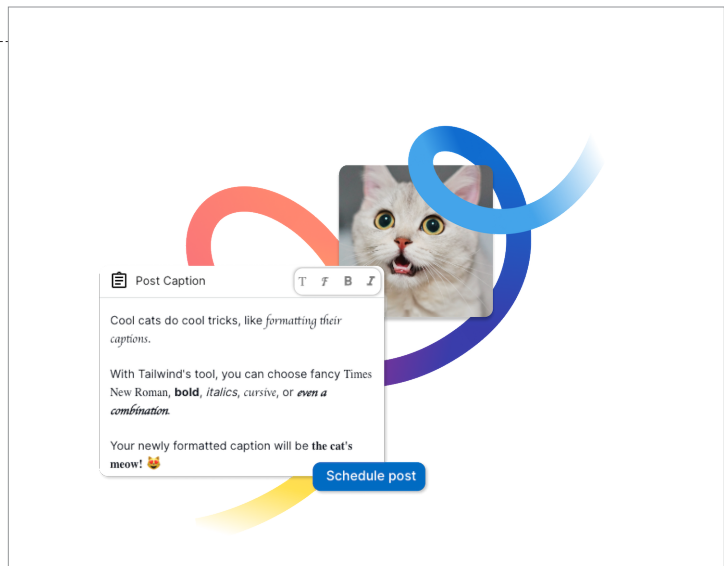
2.1 Instagram and Text

The Instagram social media platform currently has over 2 billion monthly active users (Statista (2023)). The primary focus of the platform, founded in 2010, was the sharing of images. The platform recommends that creators "educate, excite, and engage" (Instagram (n.d.)) with their content. There are three ways that users can share texts in posts. Firstly, through the captions that accompany images. The main text style used for captions and comments is "Proxima Nova," created by Mark Simonson in 2005. According to Simonson, Proxima Nova is the most popular commercial font on the web since the 2010s and can be found on hundreds of thousands of websites (Simonson (n.d.)). Instagram captions offer users the option of "Helvetica Neue Regular," a 16-pixel font. The font perception of Instagram captions may vary depending on the device, operating system, and user settings: Android users will use Roboto for captions. Though most users do not make the effort, it is possible to change Instagram captions using "Instagram font generators" such as Lingojam (Hill (2022)). It essentially generates Unicode (see Instafonts (n.d.)), which can, for example, be inserted using the Tailwind app (Figure 6).

Secondly, the Instagram platform encourages text

FIGURE 6:

*How to change fonts on
Instagram. Image courtesy
of Hill, Tailwind Blog 2022.
Screenshot by author.*



overlays on plain backgrounds or on images for stories and reel formats. These offer more typographic options, through layout tools such as “Type”, introduced in 2018, or adding “Stickers”. These include Instagram Sans, “a contemporary remix of grotesque and geometric styles,” which was designed by the Colophon Foundry (Instagram (2022), para. 2). Text overlays are also typically used for memes. While the social media service Buffer has recommended the use of text overlay within the Pinterest platform (Lee (2015)), marketing research has indicated that Instagram audiences favor posts without text overlay (Ayres (2020)).

Finally, text can also be shared by posting an image of a text of any form or kind: *Snapshots of Text*. Text-based carousels with bold typography became especially popular throughout the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, a trend referred to as “social justice slide-shows” and “PowerPoint activism” (Nguyen (2020)). Images of texts can also, for example, include images of flyers, handwritten notes, newspapers, or screenshots of webpages.

Research of Instagram practices has predominantly focused on text *or* images, the multi-modal interplay of text *and* images, or text *with* images. Visual analysis has focused on image content and its aesthetics and symbolic, and phatic functions (Rose (2016), Mirzoeff (2016), Rogers (2021), Jewitt and Leeuwen (2021), Lobinger (2016, 2017), Miller (2008)). It includes content explorations of proportions, filters, the types of formats (such as carousels, reels, and stories), scheduling, and sequence, but also affordances and affective impact. Textual analysis has investigated readability, style, and meaning as well as the use of hypertexts such as hashtags and handles (Cantoni and Tardini (2006), Sand (2021), Karamalak et al. (2021)). Textual analysis in communication studies has also focused on affordances (Erz et al. (2018), Karamalak et al. (2021)), vocabulary (Cantoni and Tardini (2006)), and readability (Klare (1963)) as well as syntactic composition (Temnikova et al. (2015)). Emoji analysis (Siever et al. (2020)) is situated as multi-modal, as they are images typed into captions. Multi-modal analysis, rooted in the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), focuses on the interplay of image and text. It has addressed argumentation and intent (Rigotti and Greco (2019), Kruk et al. (2019)), as well as the fluidity of meanings and affordances, anchored within specific contexts.

The use of *Snapshots of Text* has been contextualized in the domain of social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001)), graphic design (Swann (1991), Walker (2001)) and advertising semiotics (Barthes (1977), Goffman (1981)). Within the social media marketing domain, images as text have been addressed in terms of the addition of Alt texts (alternative texts) to improve their accessibility for the sight-impaired and for search engines (Macready (2022)).

2.2. Museology

Detailed guidelines have been established for both the content and layout of object labels and captions in exhibitions were reviewed (Bitgood (1989, 2000), Ham (1992), Ravelli (2007), Severell (2015), Getty (2011), Donnelly-Smith et al. (n.d.), V&A (2021)). A review of museum studies points to striking similarities between Instagram users and museum visitors. For one, both are surrounded by distractions. Not all visitors will stop and read an entire sign, just as Instagram users are likely to skim text. In both cases, the way they experience content is not linear, although partially guided by the museum or the platform infrastructure.

Museum studies scholar Ham (1992) divides museum label design into the conceptual component (text) and the artistic component (the design of the text copy). He further points out that the artistic component encompasses numerous factors, including layout, typography, illustrations, photographs, and other graphics; the inclusion of multisensory components; color choice; and the physical shape and dimensions of the sign. He then identifies four key qualities of interpretive communication: it should focus on a central message, be relevant to the visitors' own lives, and the visitors should be able to understand it easily and enjoy it. Museum labels need to be interesting, engaging, and accessible for wide audiences, while Instagram recommends content that will "educate, engage, and excite" (Instagram (2019)). These findings are echoed in museum guidelines, of which the V&A, among those cited, proved to be the most reflexive, recent, and engaging.

Despite the many learnings each domain could provide to the other, social media recommendations for curators are scarce. Within the domain of museology, social media research is focused on institutional approaches (Allen-Greil (2023), Drotner (2013, 2019); Bosello (2022)). A guide for "cultural managers" is available from ENCATC, the European network on cultural management and policy, which, considering the rapid pace of social media developments, is highly dated and not fashion specific. Its Instagram recommendation is simply "to inform and educate as well as entertain or nourish artistically" (Hogg et al. (2017), 21). It makes no reference to the practice of using text as an image. While there are recommendations for Instagram influencers who promote fashion products for sale, there remains a lack of guidance on the specifics of social media use for exhibition curators. A research gap also remains for the use of variations of text as an image, which can include handwriting, images of publications, images of or screenshots of posters, and flyers. Their impact on viewer engagement on Instagram in fashion communication has so far been unexplored, despite their frequent use.

2.2. Snapshots of Text in digital fashion communication

Fashion curation practices are evolving as fashion exhibitions and museums are becoming digitalized (Castells (2013), Loscialpo (2016), Parry (2013)) and mediatized (Drotner (2019), Jenss (2019), Torregrosa and Sánchez-Blanco (2021)). Fashion curators and historians increasingly have personal Instagram accounts, which they use for research and sharing content (Sikarskie (2016, 2020); Sand (2019b)). While larger GLAM institutions employ staff dedicated to social media marketing (Angel and Fuchs (2018), Kidd (2011)), independent fashion curators and those working for smaller fashion spaces often participate in the promotion of

FIGURE 7:

Instagram account ICOM Costume Institute Committee, and Instagram account ICOM (International Council of Museums), 2023. Screenshot by the author.

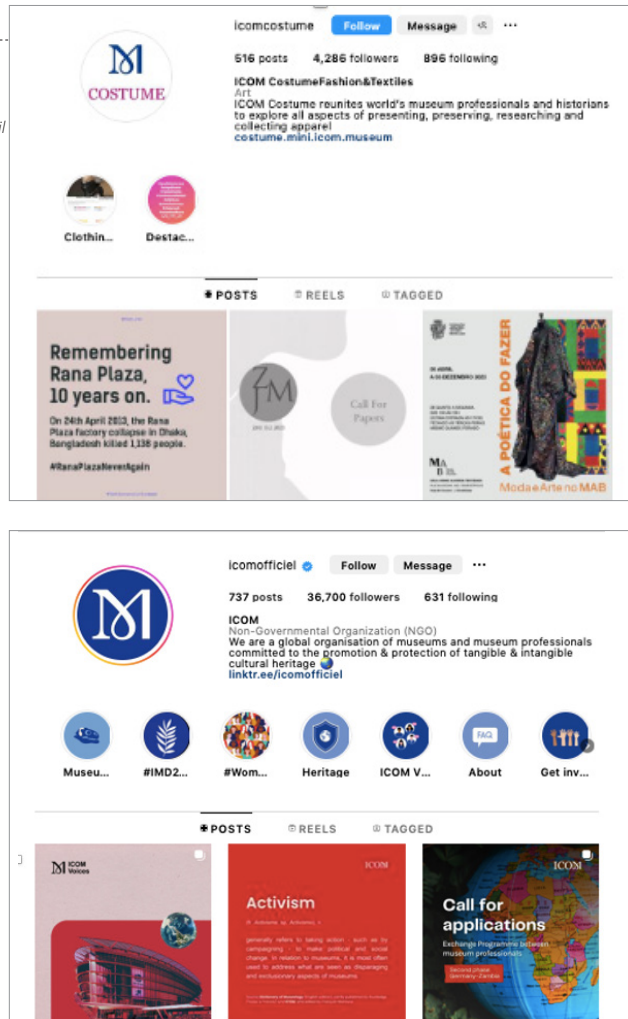
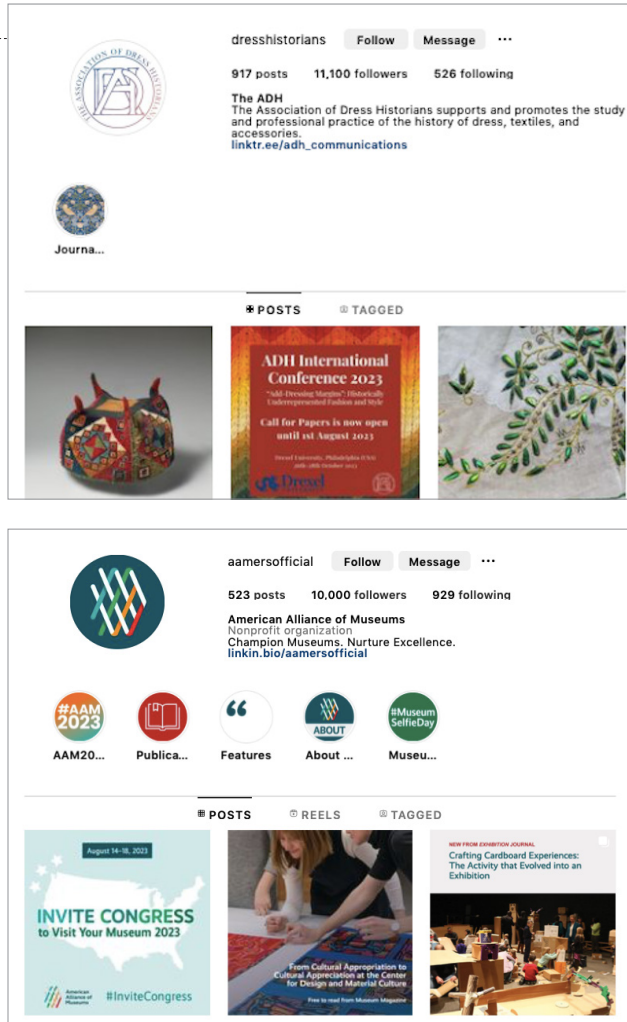


FIGURE 8:

*Instagram Account, Association of
Dress Historians, 2023. Instagram
account, American Alliance of
Museums, 2023. Screenshots by
the author*



fashion exhibitions on social media (Sikarskie (2020), NEMO (2018)). Yet, Instagram practices by fashion curators have been a neglected field of research, and there are currently no Instagram guidelines for the profession.

Communication researchers, marketing experts, and influencers provide recommendations for creating digital communication for commercial fashion promotion (Song (2016), Bendon (2017), Huggard and Cope (2020), Noris et al. (2021), Nobile et al. (2021)). Museum studies have conducted extensive audience engagement research to establish guidelines for exhibition labels (Hooper-Greenhill (1992, 1999, 2006), Dufresne-Tassé (2016), Serrell (1999, 2015); Bitgood (1989, 2000); Getty (2011), V&A (2018)). Although both processes contextualize visuals through text, the two

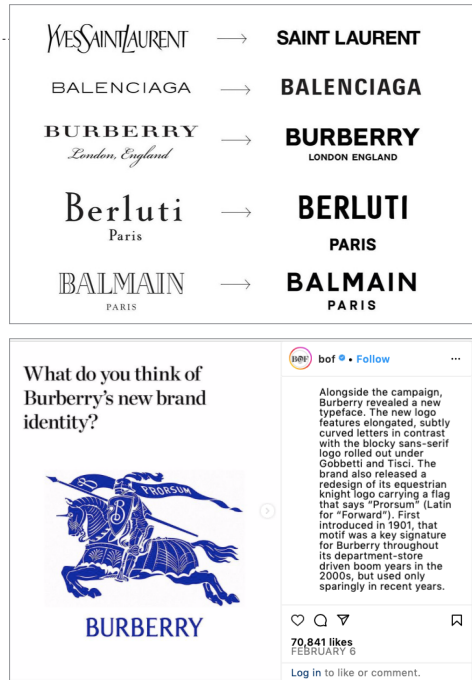
approaches have not been combined. This is particularly surprising, given the rising popularity of fashion exhibitions and their increased mediatization (Calinao and Lin (2018), Torregrosa and Sánchez-Blanco (2021)).

A previous study of communication practices of fashion curators (Sand et al. (2022)) indicates a frequent use of images of texts, or *Snapshots of Text* on Instagram. These include images of flyers, articles, book covers, and images of museum labels. A review of the Instagram accounts of the ICOM Costume Institute Committee, ICOM, the ADH (Association of Dress Historians Instagram), as well as the American alliance for Museums, all key professional associations of fashion curators and fashion historians, showed similar content preferences (*figures 7 and 8*). Their posts between May 30th, 2020, to May 30th, 2023, also confirm that the use of images of text is a prevalent practice in the profession.

Within fashion communication, the topic of images of text on Instagram has predominantly been linked to discussions surrounding the impact of IG on the typography of brand logos (Sand (2019a)). The sans-serif adaptations of logos to make them more legible on Instagram can be described as mediatization (Colucci and Pedroni (2021), Rocamora (2016, 2023)). Examples include Burberry, Saint Laurent, Balenciaga, and Balmain in 2018 (Stanley 2018, Whelan 2019). The adaptations (*figure 9*) created heated discussions in the domain. So did the reversal in the case of the Burberry logo in 2023 (Willson (2023)).

FIGURE 9:

Logo changes as reported by Willson, courtesy Highsnobiety, 2019; Instagram post by Business of Fashion, 2023, courtesy @bof. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CoUWHEQIWjf>. Screenshots by the author.

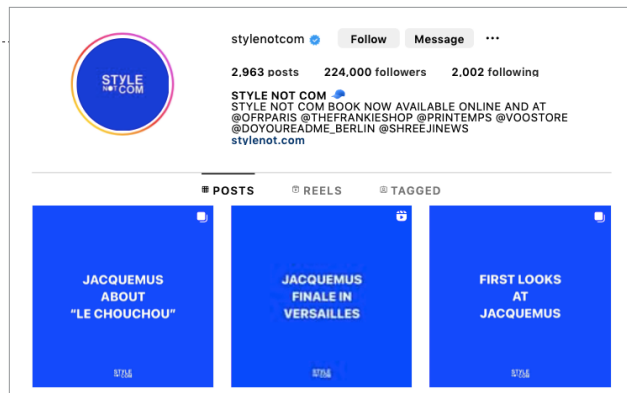


Furthermore, the practice of posting images of text has garnered new attention since 2022 through the rising popularity of the text-based Instagram account "@stylenotcom" by Beka Gvishiani. Gvishiani began featuring posts with a white sans-serif font text on a cobalt blue background (figure 10). Within the social media marketing domain, recommendations for images of text address typographic content specifically designed for Instagram, featuring specific fonts and sizes as well as templates (Godavarthi (2021), Canva (n.d.)).

Meta, which owns Instagram, recommends "using a modern, clean font in a large enough type size and a contrasting hue" (Meta Business Suite (2023) para. 4). It also advises not to obstruct the visuals and to avoid communicating too many messages. *Images of text* in the sense of Alberti's open window, that is text as a pictured aesthetic object, has not been theorized in fashion communication.

FIGURE 10:

Instagram account "@stylenotcom" by Beka Gvishiani, 2023. Screenshot by the author.



3. Method

The mixed-methods exploratory study investigates a selection of six Snapshots of Text Instagram posts, their impact on user engagement, and their alignment with museum label guidelines. It employed a combination of netnography (Kozinets (2010, 2015)) to select the content creator and the posts, reception analysis, and then reviewed the results based on museum guidelines. The reception was evaluated using qualitative eye-tracking with Oculid software (now Tobii), combined with multiple choice surveys, an engagement evaluation, open-ended qualitative interviews about post preferences, as well as the analytic tools Fanpage Karma and Modash. It builds upon the recommendations of Lobinger (2016) regarding mixed methods to gauge image reception complexity and research by Marchiori and Cantoni (2015, 2020) regarding eye-tracking. The study expands a previous Q-Methodology review of fashion curator content,

which indicated both a surprisingly frequent use of *Snapshots of Text* by curators and surprisingly low engagement rates for these posts (Sand et al. (2022)). The study aims to identify engagement levels for six visual variations. Engagement was rated by the study participants following the review of the images on a scale of 1 to 5 and qualified by semi-structured questions. This was compared with the engagement levels by Instagram audiences to the posts in terms of views and likes.

3.1 Curator and Post Selection

Through preliminary netnographic studies (Sand (2019b, 2021), Sand et al. (2022)), Alexandra Cunningham Cameron, curator of contemporary design at the Cooper Hewitt Museum New York, was identified as a particularly frequent user of *Snapshots of Text* in a wide variety of formats and, upon request, consented to the use of content for the analysis. By reviewing the posts of a single curator, the study was able to gauge interest levels from both the usual group of followers through analytic tools and study participants not familiar with the accounts. Following an in-depth analysis of the curator's 306 posts over the 3 years from Jan 2020 to Jan 2023, 6 posts were selected for the study. They included two posts that had received particularly high and low engagement for this account within the previous Q-methodology study. The other posts were chosen for their variety. They represent differences in typography, spacing, sizing, contrast, and color use and include text used in a movie, carousels, and single image posts. The posts feature images of a newspaper article, a vintage magazine article, a journal chapter, a manually annotated slide, a colorful animated event flyer, and an exhibition announcement. The selection was limited to six posts to avoid viewing fatigue and encourage vivid recollection during the post-viewing interviews.

3.2 Participant Selection

Twelve participants were recruited at the USI (Università della Svizzera italiana) Lugano campus through the distribution of flyers, emails, and in-person recruiting in exchange for refreshments. Convenience sampling was used within the framework of a higher education environment which provided a high degree of analytical skills and participants used to articulate observations. There was an equal number of female and male participants, with 70 % aged 25 or younger and 30 % between 26 and 40 years old. The data was collected on April 21, 2023, within the same setting.

According to the preliminary survey, all participants read an average of 1–2 hours of print materials daily. Half spend over 2 hours and half spend under 2 hours on Instagram daily, equally divided between male and female participants. One female spends more than 3

hours daily on Instagram. One male and one female participant each spent less than an hour on Instagram. One participant was farsighted. All spoke English as a second language.

4. Data Collection

The eye-tracking tool Oculid was used to counter the subjectivity of self-reporting. It tracks eye-movement with the help of the smartphone camera, the habitual setting for Instagram engagement. The Oculid app provides the opportunity to gauge reactions within the distinctive environment of mobile Instagram use, as it uses the smartphone camera to track eye movement. To optimize privacy for the participants and ensure anonymization, the eye-tracking app was downloaded on two study devices: an iPhone 13 Max and an iPhone 8. Eye-tracking recordings distinguish what attracts the most attention by what is fixated first and how long the gaze is fixated. Fixation times can, however, indicate either positive or negative attention, and a short fixation time can also mean that the object of the gaze is familiar, or "understood". A qualitative review of the recordings was therefore combined with ratings of posts and recorded qualitative interviews.

As Instagram does not allow for a stable link directly to the original posts, or to an account that reposts content, a graphic design professional rebuilt the posts within the Figma Design Application. This allowed for interface characteristics such as moving images, the swiping through multiple image sequences of carousel posts, showing previous "likes", and the possibility to scroll down over comments. (It should be noted that these are physical interactions with the texts, executed by movement of the fingers, not just the eyes).

To avoid distraction, the data was collected in a quiet room with closed blinds. Each participant filled out a consent form and replied to a survey regarding their age, gender, eyesight evaluation, daily reading time on Instagram, and print content. Participants were briefed on the use of Oculid and the rating form, with an engagement scale from 1 (least engaging) to 5 (most engaging). They reviewed and then rated each post with no time constraint. Depending on the network connection delays, each spent an average of one minute on each post. Following the tasks, each participant was recorded answering two open-ended questions regarding their content preferences (the image they preferred and why), leading to follow-up questions if answers were unclear (such as if whether responses referred to preferences of informative content or visuals). The interviews ranged from 53 seconds to 7 minutes and 40 seconds. It should be noted that twelve participants were recruited and answered the surveys, but only ten data sets were retained after cleaning the data.

The expected outcomes were:

- _____ > Bright images receiving the longest fixation duration and highest fixation frequency
- _____ > Larger typography generating significantly higher amount of fixation duration and fixation frequency than small typography, regardless of fonts used
- _____ > Colorful fonts attracting more attention
- _____ > Photographs of text (printed or handwritten) receiving less attention than IG specific layouts
- _____ > Handwritten text generating higher fixation duration but less engagement

The recordings were reviewed first with an Oculid employee for expert qualitative evaluation, and the individual gaze recordings with heatmaps were selected as most indicative of engagement. Slow motion viewing revealed the first fixation, along with fixation duration, movement patterns, and fixation frequency. The recordings were reviewed again, both in correlation with the rating questionnaires and the comment recordings. The reviews confirmed an unusually high interest in text, both for text in the images and in the captions overall, except for one of the participants. All participants viewed the captions and read at least the first sentence of the longer captions. One participant also reviewed the entirety of the comments, whereas one participant's fixation duration showed an overall disinterest in the content.

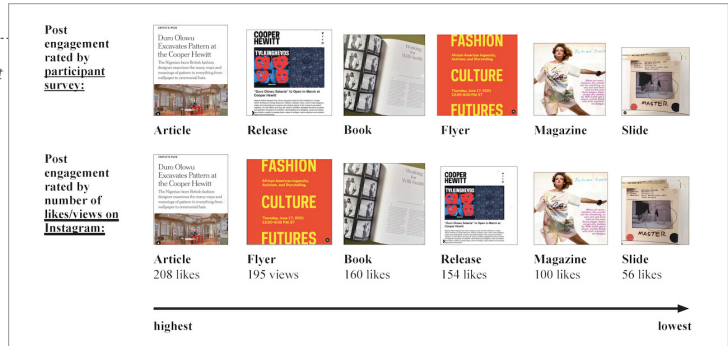
5. Results

Results showed that fixation time was not a reliable indicator of engagement. Firstly, because it included the fixation on the image as it was uploading, which was often lengthy, and secondly because longer fixation time on a post in numerous instances signaled either confusion or frustration with the content, including the attempt to decipher small writing. The strongest indicators of confusion are the fixation of image borders, or the frequent jumping from one fixation point to another searching for information to absorb. This confusion was reflected in the ratings and in the answers to the open-ended questions.

Overall, the post that received the most positive participant rating was *Article (figure 11)*. This carousel post of 3 posts, featured first a New York Times article, which started with a serif font (NYT Cheltenham) and a clear headline, a subheader, then text in a sans-serif

FIGURE 11:

Ratings of participants from highest (left) to lowest (right) engagement, compared to engagement of accounts' Instagram Followers.



font, both surrounded by a fair amount of negative space. They were positioned over an image in warm, muted colors, followed by two high-quality exhibition images in the same hues, contextualized by a 590-word caption. The caption is enthusiastic (including the words “celebrate,” “joy,” “delight,” “exuberance,” and “brilliant”) and informative (listing a series of key objects), describing the article and the exhibition design process. It refers to the authority of the New York Times critic. It describes the contributions made by several staff members in installing the exhibition. It concludes with a call to action (“please come for a visit”) and the argument that each detail has “a designer behind it”. It should be noted that it received the highest number of comments on Instagram, with a wide variety of emojis, and 208 likes. The eye-tracking study mainly showed attention to the headline, the subheading, and the image, following principles of visual hierarchies. The caption was read at least partially, then the images swiped through. Several participants then returned to the captions and the images repeatedly. The interviews confirmed that participants liked the colors, preferred the caption length and the balance of images and text, that the layout felt familiar to them, and that they liked the ability to swipe through.

The second most engaging post, *Release*, (figure 11) was again a carousel, of seven posts. The headline is the Cooper Hewitt logo (in bold sans serif capitals). Underneath it sits a combination of two exhibition images, one embedded with a reverse embedded font, then a smaller headline, followed by a small text. This introductory post is followed by six images of exhibition objects, including a patterned jar/vase, fabric, and an infographic of the city of Chicago. The caption is informative, describing the exhibition concept in language that includes the audience: “how we make patterns and how patterns make us”, which it argues “invites you to think.” It includes an evocative and inspirational quote by the designer Duro Olowu, followed by a detailed bullet-point list with information for each object. It adds personal value through emotion: “excited about this show and honored.” The caption length was 227 words. On Instagram, it also received a fair number of comments, with some

variety in emojis, and 154 likes. Eye-tracking showed confusion regarding the images, with eyes not finding a place to rest and participants nearly immediately seeking information in the caption. Certain images received a higher amount of attention, including the jar and the infographics, which were also mentioned in the interviews.

Two posts received equal ratings: one is *Book*, a carousel showing 5 black and white photographs of pages in a printed journal, including the chapter title, a legible large font citation in serif, and the cover of the book with its title in serif. The pages are positioned at an angle, with larger headlines positioned decentered towards the upper right-hand corner. The caption length was a brief description of 44 words. It explains the content of the chapter and argues for the importance of preserving and surfacing queer culture. It includes the words “beating heart” and “exquisitely.” On Instagram, it received 160 likes and four comments with one type of emoji. The eye-tracking shows strong attention to the chapter title, the citation, and the journal title, as well as the caption.

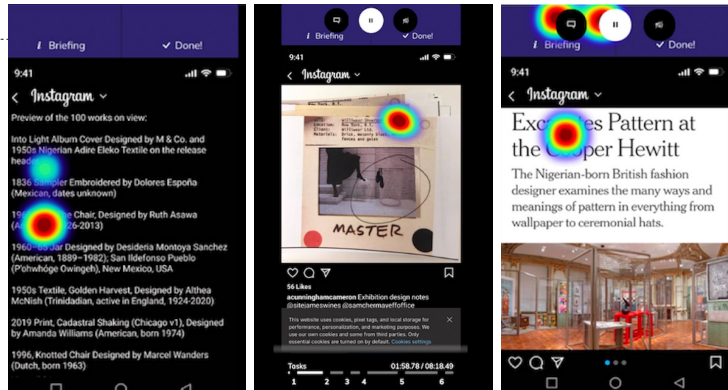
The same rating was achieved by *Flyer*, a movie animating a flyer, which shows a series of 10 posts with bright color backgrounds and large sans serif fonts, featuring the portraits of a series of upcoming speakers, with their names in a smaller font. The caption is brief (11 words) and refers to a specific event: “counting down to noon.” On Instagram, it was viewed 190 times but only received 11 likes and no emojis feedback. In the eye-tracking study, the large fonts primarily attracted attention, even though according to Oculid experts, viewers tend to favor images of people. The rapid progression of images results in agitated eye movements trying to read the words as images advance, with few being able to also read the smaller typography with the names of the speakers being announced. Comments showed that with one exception (“I liked that I did not have to scroll”), viewers were frustrated by the speed (“too flashy,” “could not read”) and not being able to control the movement of the images. They indicated that they liked the larger font size.

The carousel post *Magazine*, of pages from a vintage magazine from the 1980s, did not perform well in terms of engagement. The five cool and colorful images in cool pastel colors featured a fashion shoot with different multi-color lettering styles (handwritten, typographic, and graffiti) on the pages and the outfits. The caption length was 21 words. It references a 1984 event for a designer T-shirt launch, and refers to handles of a renowned graffiti artist, museum, gallery, photographer, and designer. These would be known by fashion insiders; there is no additional context or explanation about them. On Instagram, it received 100 likes. In the eye-tracking study, this post showed confusion. In the interviews, it received several criticisms for the colors and style.

The least engaging post *Slide*, was an image of a black and white slide with a small typographic label and a handwritten

FIGURE 12:

*Oculid eye-tracking study results of
images from Instagram account of
Alexandra Cunningham Cameron,
2022. Screenshots by the author.*



annotation, and a very brief caption of 5 words. The caption refers to the handles of a renowned architecture firm and exhibition design colleagues, with no further explanation. Information about the photograph ("Williwear showroom, material: bricks, masonry, metal") is only visible on the typographic slide label in the image and is not mentioned in the caption. There is no explanation about what is represented or why, and there is no argumentation. On Instagram, it received 56 likes. The eye-tracking showed confusion, with a nervous jumping of fixations and a search for information in the captions and labels, with a preference for the typographic writing even though it was small. The post received the most negative rating and the most negative comments in the interviews, described as "poor," "just a slide" and "there was nothing to read." Surprisingly, the participants who indicated spending more than 3 hours daily on Instagram both rated the photograph of the journal chapter highest (respectively 4/5 and 5/5). The participants who indicated less than an hour rated the animated movie low, which may indicate less familiarity with the viewing of Instagram stories.

In sum, the study revealed that:

- > Warm rather than bright images received the longest fixation duration and highest fixation frequency
- > Larger and bold typography generated a significantly higher amount of fixation duration and fixation frequency than small typography, with a preference for serif fonts
- > Colorful fonts did not attract more positive engagement
- > Photographs of text (printed or handwritten) received more attention than IG-specific layouts
- > Handwritten text generated the lowest fixation duration and engagement.

Content analytics on Instagram show that although the participants were not design experts, their interactions correlated with those of the followers of the curator's account. The highest and lowest rated posts were the same for both groups. Content analytics from Modash reviewing the accounts' 1702 posts, indicate that the average rate of likes on the account is 226, with 625 being the highest amount of likes. The selected text as image posts therefore rate below average. A review of all 1702 posts by the account shows that the two posts with the highest engagement contain both text and a portrait of the curator, one being an announcement of the curatorial team for a project accompanied by a bold headline in the Cooper Hewitt sans-serif font. The caption is brief: only 17 words, out of which five are tags. The photograph has warm color tones. The photograph received 195 comments, out of which half were replies with an emoji by the curator. The second is a magazine feature on the curator, with a sans-serif headline, a subheadline and text body in serif font, a portrait in dark but warm hues, and three small images, including one black and white image. The caption is 72 words long with one emoji. It received 61 comments, including seven replies by the curator. Both captions are enthusiastic, and tag others as well as the museum. Three out of the overall top post feature the curator; one is a portrait of her with her child.

6. Discussion

The current findings align with museum label literature. The success of the New York Times post aligns with observations by museum label expert Serrell that typography plays an integral role in the overall aesthetics and mood of an interpretive exhibit (Serrell (2015), 3). The typeface, size, design, and placement all become vital in an environment in which text must be legible and understandable within an instant. Its font ensures the ideal contrast of black type on a white background, making it easy to read, and respects white space between the headline, the subheadline, and the text body. A study at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the perceived legibility of text and factors found that contrast between text and background exerted a significant effect on legibility ratings (Wolf and Smith (1991)). The fact that the New York Times headlines worked well may be due to the overall familiarity of the Times font family. On the one hand, the New York Times is a well-recognized newspaper and carries connotations of authority. On the other hand, as Mark Simonson (2001) has pointed out, Arial and Times New Roman fonts are free and available on every computer and are particularly easy to read because of their wide circulation (for over 50 years).

The fact that the follower engagement aligns with study participants for the highest and lowest engagement indicates that although engagement by followers may be partly phatic, multi-modal content engaged both groups in four out of six posts.

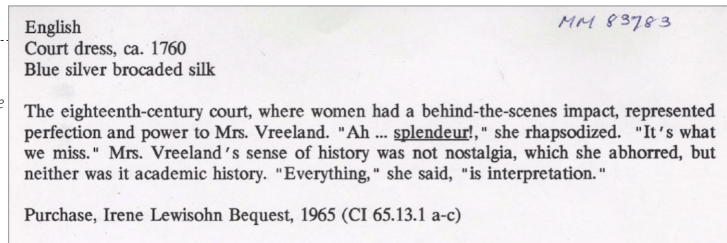
The results also parallel Ham's advice for museum labels (Ham 1992) which marry the artistic aspect (typography, size, color, white space) with the conceptual context (in this case the combination of text in the image and in the captions). The caption of the post featuring The New York Times describes activities by people, aligning with the following V&A label recommendations: "We know from the Getty and other research that people connect with people. This presents a problem in museums, where objects have been divorced from people. But there are ways we can reconnect people and objects. The first, and most obvious, is to include real individuals or to use quotations and humor" (V&A (2018), 34). A good example from a fashion exhibition would be a label conceived for the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute for a retrospective on the iconic curator Diana Vreeland in Figure 13.

The IG post showing the New York Times article detailed and informative mention of objects also lets the post stand alone, conforming to the Smithsonian's recommendations: "Each label should offer enriching information independently. Visitors can encounter labels in any order, and we can't guarantee that they'll read any given label before encountering the next (or that they'll read that label at all)." (Donnelly-Smith et al. (2021), 32). The museum environment can be as distracting, as the experience of Instagram content on a smartphone, and the narrative sequence is not a linear one. Just like museum labels, each Instagram post must therefore be able to stand alone.

The least engaging post, on the contrary, does not fulfill museum label guidelines. It does not, as the V&A guidelines suggest, engage with the object: "A good label should address the object. It should encourage visitors to look, to understand and to find their own reward, whether aesthetic, intellectual or personal... The first and most obvious aim of a label is to explain anything that might be puzzling in the object." (V&A (2018), 30). The combined results of the eye-tracking study, ratings, and

FIGURE 13:

Diana Vreeland: (installation photographs, wall text) *Immoderate Style* exhibition, December 6, 1993-March 20, 1994. Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



comments show that users responded most positively to posts that were visually easy to process and supported by easy-to-understand and captivating information. The results are triangulated by the engagements of the curator's followers on Instagram.

6.1 Research limitations

This study has numerous limitations. Firstly, it is an exploratory study with a limited number of participants. It is also limited to English-language content. Future research can include larger and more multicultural datasets, including a museum documentation from the Global South, and a wider multicultural array of participants. In this context, it should be noted that museum labels have become a contested topic in the context of museum inclusivity and the decolonization of museums (MacDonald (2022)). New processes of extended and visitor created labels are being developed (e.g., Rijksmuseum (2020), Nashashibi (2003)). Labels are also being increasingly mediatized, with additions such as QR codes, while museum mediatization has resulted in virtual museums and physical museums offering digital tours and exhibitions. How museum inclusivity and mediatization are entwined reaches beyond the scope of this study, but merits further research.

Furthermore, this research focused on only six different *Snapshots of Text* formats. An in-depth study may further use A/B testing to, for example, compare different caption options, still and moving versions of the same image, or different color schemes for the same posts. These may narrow indications for font size, contrast, spacing, and color. Complementary to the above, this study could be extended to consider the familiarity with typography of different audiences in different locations.

As the posts were selected from a 3-year dataset, future research could consider how content aligns with Instagram trends and practices over time. Finally, although the viewing took place in the "native" environment of the Instagram interface, namely on smartphones, the participants were not engaging with the content within their own Instagram feed on their personal phones. The posts were therefore missing the context of personalized algorithmic feeds as well as possible distractions from direct messages, notifications, and interferences by other smartphone apps and functions. However, this set-up increased internal validity by unifying the conditions for participants' attention. While future research is needed to expand this exploratory study, it nevertheless opens the door to previously unexplored parallels between museum visitor and social media audience communication strategies, as well as Instagram research and multimodal communication.

6.2 Practical and theoretical implications

The main contribution of the study is to provide deeper insights into engagement with text as image in digital fashion communication. The results can assist fashion curators in promoting their exhibitions and for self-branding purposes. The findings also indicate that digital fashion communication can draw on museum studies, in particular the in-depth visitor studies investigating text and image engagement in a distracting environment. Museum object label research may inform Instagram practices beyond this specific domain. Their review also reveals that these museum guidelines necessitate updates to reflect recent sociotechnical developments, including museum mediatization. Furthermore, this study contributes to theoretical literature by addressing the research gap between multi-modal communication analysis and communication design.

7. Conclusion

This paper contributes to the understanding of the design perspective in multimodal Instagram fashion communication. It provides insights into how images of texts may generate higher levels of engagement on Instagram. Participants viewing patterns, ratings, and interviews indicated a clear preference for larger fonts, preferably familiar fonts. Serif fared slightly better than sans-serif, although more importantly, black, and white or high contrast text fared better than colored fonts. The preferred format of text as image was in a carousel, which allows for additional context and viewer agency through swiping. The preferred number of carousel images was three. It was visually well organized, with a larger headline, a subheader, and an image, followed by more images in the carousel.

The caption text was, however, key in determining engagement. The highest rated post caption contained a word count under 250 words, and an enthusiastic and explanatory text with a call to action. Significantly, the preferred post not only garnered high ratings with participants from outside the fashion field, but also high engagement among the curator's own followers. In conclusion, although a previous study showed low audience engagement for image as text, their use can elicit high engagement when following visual guidelines and when paired with a clear, explanatory, and captivating caption.

A comparison with museology research indicates that the best practices align with interpretive sign design guidelines regarding the conceptual component and the artistic component (Ham (1992)). Results confirm higher engagement with content that

surprises, informs, and is relatable—also from a design perspective. This study examined the design attributes of *Snapshots of Text* such as typography, proportion, and color as a complement to factors such as the length, tone, and style of the captions and the number of hashtags, handles, and emojis.

More importantly, it indicates that fashion curators, exhibition institutions, and overall social media marketing experts can draw on the wealth of museum labeling guidelines regarding content and content design. While museum studies have a history of engagement research which can benefit digital fashion communication, the museology domain could benefit from digital fashion communication research, especially regarding the participatory nature of social media. Expanding the investigation with richer sets of data - including perceptions of text in multicultural environments - is an important goal. Nonetheless, the correlations in the preliminary and present studies highlight both the importance of a design perspective and the relevance of museum studies research for digital fashion communication. Overall, this study contributes to the literature regarding fashion curator content and audience engagement.

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