SELLING WELLNESS:
AN ANALYSIS OF GOOP AND POOSH'S VISUAL MARKETING ON INSTAGRAM

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Abstract

In conjunction with the rising “self-care” culture, wellness has become a key consumer trend in Western societies. The multi-trillion-dollar industry can, perhaps, thank social media for its significant growth in recent years. With proven benefits pertaining to brand awareness, consumer engagement, and purchase intention, social media has become an integral element of the twenty-first century business, particularly within the wellness industry. However, social media scholars have yet to sufficiently address the corporate approach to *selling* wellness. Engaging with everything from mindfulness and nutrition to fitness and beauty, how do wellness companies market themselves in such a multidimensional industry?

This Major Research Paper explores the Instagram marketing strategies of two globally renowned wellness companies, goop and Poosh. A qualitative content analysis, guided by a visual social semiotic framework, was conducted on 100 of the companies’ most-liked image-based posts from January to May 2021. The findings of this study suggest that goop and Poosh’s content generates more likes on Instagram when it prioritizes the physical wellness domain, emphasizes celebrity affiliation, utilizes high modality, people-centric imagery, incorporates an aesthetic of concealment/fragmentation, and references a “link in bio.”

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Introduction

In conjunction with the rising “self-care” culture, wellness has become a key consumer trend in Western societies (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 463). Promoting “self-responsibility and a holistic, preventative, and positive approach to health,” the wellness sector has recently evolved into a multi-trillion-dollar industry (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 463). Some researchers attribute this apparent “wellness revolution” to the ubiquity of social media marketing (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 464). With proven benefits pertaining to customer loyalty and purchase intention, social media has become an undeniably integral element of the twenty-first century business (Felix et al., 2017; Grénman et al., 2019). However, a mere presence on these platforms does not guarantee success. Current literature indicates that there are specialized tactics, practices, and strategies that must be employed in order to capitalize on social media’s affordances (Wahid & Wadud, 2020).

When considering Instagram’s image-based platform specifically, scholars suggest that content must be visually appealing and aspirational (Leaver et al., 2020). General strategies to create “insta-worthy” posts include “good quality photography, particularity and unconventionality of scenarios, creativity of the visual composition, and images able to convey emotions and feeling” (Leaver et al., 2020, pp. 71, 73). However, the “aesthetic visual communication” that occurs on Instagram’s interface is further dependent on “tropes, genres, and cultural practices” (Leaver et al., 2020, pp. 38, 42). Thus, the “platformed aesthetics” of Instagram are further reliant on the digital communities that one subscribes to, such as dessert-based accounts or those devoted to modern home décor (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 57). While scholars acknowledge the emergence of specialized visual preferences on the app, there is a notable gap in the literature pertaining to the “normalized and expected” aesthetics of the wellness industry (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 62).

Therefore, this Major Research Paper specifically explores the Instagram marketing approaches of two internationally renowned wellness companies, goop and Poosh. Founded by Hollywood actress, Gwyneth Paltrow, and reality television star, Kourtney Kardashian, respectively, goop and Poosh are modern-day wellness and lifestyle companies catered to the female demographic. Through product recommendations and advice segments, these companies seek to provide women with the tools and knowledge needed to live a healthy life, holistically. By critically analyzing each company's top-performing posts on Instagram, this paper will seek to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do wellness companies use Instagram's image-based platform to market their brands and products?

RQ2: What specific aesthetic elements/features of posts promote increased consumer engagement?

Literature Review

To situate the proposed research within the current landscape of social media and the wellness industry, it is necessary to examine existing scholarly work pertaining to the following three topics: 1) Social Media Marketing, 2) Wellness Culture, and 3) The Companies goop and Poosh.

Social Media Marketing

It is often said that successful marketers will go where the customers are (Funk, 2013). Thus, social media has become an integral aspect of the twenty-first century business (Felix et al., 2017). Companies from all industries have turned to social media in hopes of increasing brand awareness, consumer engagement, and, eventually, sales (Funk, 2013). However, a mere presence on these platforms does not guarantee infinite followers and e-commerce success. The reputation Instagram once had as an application inspiring casual photography for instant upload does not accurately represent the efforts behind successful content creation today (Leaver et al., 2020). As simple as these interfaces may initially appear, there are various social media marketing strategies and techniques that must be employed in order to access the benefits (Wahid & Wadud, 2020).

Engagement

When discussing social media from a corporate perspective, existing literature consistently emphasizes the importance of consumer engagement. User interaction in the form of likes, comments, and shares has been proven to strengthen consumer relationships with companies in terms of commitment and loyalty, as well as positively influence purchase intention and sales value (Schultz, 2017). Such engagement further allows companies on social media to capitalize on “pull marketing,” as opposed to traditional “push marketing” (Lagrosen & Grundén, 2014, p. 255). This approach encourages businesses to analyze user engagement in order to obtain

insights on consumer interests, preferences, and values (Lagrosen & Grundén, 2014). The gathered information can then be used to strategically inform future marketing initiatives (Lagrosen & Grundén, 2014).

Post Characteristics

With this knowledge, the question then becomes: How do companies evoke such engagement? Besides a clear brand identity and target audience, existing literature indicates that there are certain “post characteristics” that must be considered in order to facilitate user engagement (Funk, 2013; Schultz, 2017, p. 23). In these discussions, it is often recommended to consider post timing, vividness, and interactivity when strategically crafting content on social media (Schultz, 2017).

First, let us consider post timing. The difference between a high and low engagement rate on a post can be as subtle as the time of day a company chooses to publish their content (Wahid & Wadud, 2020). For example, Wahid and Wadud (2020) found that food-related Instagram posts published on weekdays and during breakfast and lunch hours generated more likes and comments than those shared on the weekend and during dinner hours. Though evidently limited in scope, their study demonstrates that post timing has the ability to influence user engagement and should therefore be considered in the process of content creation.

Post vividness reflects the degree to which content stimulates various senses (Schultz, 2017). Different media types, such as images, videos, and text, represent alternate forms of media richness that appeal to different senses (Schultz, 2017). Vividness can be further analyzed in terms of its breadth and depth; the former referring to the number of senses that a medium can engage and the latter referring to the degree to which these senses can be engaged (Chua & Banerjee, 2015). While the relevance of post vividness is consistently asserted across existing

literature, studies have yet to conclusively determine whether high or low vividness generates greater engagement on social media (Schultz, 2017). This may potentially be a result of varying platform functions, affordances, and expectations, as well as industry-specific preferences.

Post interactivity refers to the degree to which posts motivate users to respond (Schultz, 2017). Examples of interactive characteristics include questions, calls to action, external links, contests, and hashtags (Schultz, 2017). In his study, Schultz (2017) concluded that interactive characteristics were able to activate target audiences and drive likes, comments, and shares. However, Schultz (2017) also acknowledges that interaction forms and degrees will vary across content types and industries. For example, product promotion was found to negatively affect the liking behaviour on apparel retail posts, but positively influence the commenting and sharing behaviour on food retail posts (Schultz, 2017).

Visual Marketing via Instagram

While general social media marketing knowledge will prove helpful in this research, it is important to note that each platform affords different forms of marketing. Since this paper specifically explores Instagram's image-based interface, it is crucial to engage with current literature on visual marketing in particular.

Recent developments in technology have evidently brought forth a new era of social media marketing where images take on a central, rather than supportive, role (Gretzel, 2016). Instagram, specifically, has been identified as a platform for "aesthetic visual communication" (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 38). In order to communicate effectively in this domain, posts must be visually appealing and aspirational, making them "insta-worthy" (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 73). However, it is important to note that factors such as "tropes, genres, and cultural practices" heavily influence how aesthetics are approached on the platform (Leaver et al., 2020). Leaver et

al. (2020) suggest that “different aesthetics apply to different tropes,” meaning that each industry or community will likely have specialized visual preferences (p. 61). With that said, researchers do acknowledge the most common strategies used to achieve aspirational aesthetics on the platform. These strategies include quality photography, unconventionality of scenarios, creativity of the composition, and images that convey emotion (Leaver et al., 2020).

Wellness Culture

With foundational knowledge on social media marketing, it is now necessary to understand the history and current landscape of the wellness industry.

The early 2000s mark the start of wellness gaining traction as an apparent “consumption phenomenon” (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 462). Since then, the pursuit of optimal health through activities, choices, and lifestyles has led to a flourishing wellness movement today. However, the key tenets of wellness, as both holistic and preventive, have a long-standing history of infiltrating Eastern and Western civilization. Some notions of the concept have origins in nineteenth century religious and cultural movements, where health and spirituality became interrelated (Miller, 2005). Such developments led to the practices of yoga and meditation, particularly in China, India, Greece, and Rome (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.). With the progression of time, wellness-focused modalities, such as self-care, nutrition, fitness, and spirituality, have evolved, proliferated, and become mainstream on a global scale (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.). Since as early as the start of the twentieth century, print magazines, newspapers, and, later, television advertisements have heavily addressed the areas of nutrition and fitness, for example, through the excessive promotion of detoxes, diets, and weight-loss exercises (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). In the process, the mass media has defined what bodies constitute as “fit” and desirable through visual representation, as well as verbal commentary (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). As a result, body

image, and the pursuit of an idealized body shape, have become central components of feminine identity in particular (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). When considering the commercialization of cosmetics, such as makeup and skincare products, mass media outlets have similarly imposed the physical standard of who and what is considered attractive (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). As a result of underrepresentation, many identities and attributes have been proclaimed inferior with respect to physical beauty (Wykes & Gunter, 2005).

Foucault further speaks to this notion when addressing the social construction of personal identity. In discussing “technologies of the self,” he proposes that individuals conduct “operations” on their “bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” in order to transform themselves and attain a state of happiness and perfection (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). In contemporary Western culture, representations of such transformations often depict bodies as “improved” only when they adhere to normative constructions of gender, sexuality, race, class, and able-bodiedness (Steinhoff, 2015). According to Wykes and Gunter’s (2005) extensive work on media representation, these bodies have historically belonged to slim, white, and wealthy women. Thus, in today’s visual culture, certain bodies are evidently privileged over others.

Defining and Contextualizing Wellness

At present, wellness can be generally defined as a holistic, preventative, and positive approach to health, driven by self-responsibility (Grénman et al., 2019). Today’s notion of wellness incorporates the active adoption of “attitudes, activities, lifestyle choices, and consumption habits that enable the pursuit of optimal health” (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 461). An important distinction to make here is that wellness is not a fixed state, but rather an active pursuit of maximized vitality (Miller, 2005; Global Wellness Institute, n.d.). Furthermore, the holistic health paradigm embraces offerings that promote wellness, rather than merely respond to

sickness. Thus, on the health continuum, wellness sits on one end, integrating prevention, holistic health, and optimal well-being into one's lifestyle, while the medical paradigm sits on the other end, focusing on the episodic and corrective treatment of illness in order for one to feel better. Examples of wellness offerings include "nutritional supplements, superfoods and juices, pesticide and hormone-free foods, personal trainers, anti-aging therapies, and alternative medicine" (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 464). The wellness industry is therefore unique in the sense that it is multidimensional, covering physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and environmental domains (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.). The Global Wellness Institute (2018), a non-profit organization leading in global industry research, suggests that the wellness economy is made up of ten key sectors: 1) Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging, 2) Healthy Eating, Nutrition, and Weight Loss, 3) Wellness Tourism, 4) Fitness and Mind-Body, 5) Preventive and Personalized Medicine and Public Health, 6) Traditional and Complementary Medicine, 7) Wellness Lifestyle Real Estate, 8) Spa Economy, 9) Thermal/Mineral Springs, and 10) Workplace Wellness. According to 2017 data from the non-profit, Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging make up the most lucrative sector of the industry, with a value of approximately 1,083 billion dollars (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). Physical Activity and Healthy Eating, Nutrition, and Weight Loss are second and third in line, valued at 828 billion dollars and 702 billion dollars, respectively (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). The global wellness market itself represents an estimated 4.5 trillion dollars as of 2017 (Global Wellness Institute, 2018).

Grénman et al. (2019) argue that the wellness industry is integrated into the rising self-care culture, where improving one's health and enhancing one's beauty has become an obligation tied to self-responsibility and self-management, as well as status display. Furthermore, the pursuit of wellness has largely been influenced by the proliferation of social media and its

image-centric nature, making holistic wellness one of the most prominent practices in current Western culture (Grénman et al., 2019).

Wellness as a Means of Self-Branding

Grénman et al. (2019) propose that wellness is not only an individual value, but an asset in both social and professional realms as well. Similar to Marx's work on the commodity, a seemingly healthy human being is often associated with intellectual competence and value (Rojek, 2001). As a result of this, these scholars view wellness as a new means of self-branding, rooted in Goffman's theory of performed identity (Grénman et al., 2019). Self-branding can be defined as the marketization of the self and, much like wellness, is indeed a reflection of Westernized consumer societies (Grénman et al., 2019). Accordingly, "in both wellness and self-branding, important components are the investment in, and communication about, a vital and attractive self" (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 467). Thus, the concept of self-branding is intrinsically linked to social media, as the medium offers individuals the opportunity to create and broadcast an appealing social identity to a vast audience (Grénman et al., 2019). Social media "facilitates identity construction and self-presentation by drawing on advertising and marketing tactics that can be applied to the self" (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 466). Today, social media users share updates and post "insta-worthy" images to broadcast their "optimal self" through their wellness journeys (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 463).

Scholars further note that social media promotes "aspirational labour," where pleasure, autonomy, and income seemingly coexist (Duffy, 2016, pp. 442-443). This ideology proposes that individuals pursue content creation to follow their dreams of conducting enjoyable, self-governed work, with the presumed promise of social and economic capital (Duffy, 2016). However, the reward system for these aspirants is highly imbalanced with respect to race, class,

and gender (Duffy, 2016). While digital media platforms appear to enable “anyone” to become creative producers and earn an income from “doing what they love,” aspirational labour obscures problematic constructions of race, class, and gender subjectivities that hold most people back (Duffy, 2016, p. 441).

Grénman et al. (2019) explore the apparent relationship between wellness and self-branding. Their research was able to uncover which wellness practices and activities contemporary consumers find most valuable (Grénman et al., 2019). After interviewing American and Finnish university students and employees, their empirical data revealed that wellness is pursued and consumed through physical, spiritual, emotional/mental, and intellectual dimensions (Grénman et al., 2019). The most salient sources of personal wellness appeared to involve the pursuit of quality sleep, emotional/mental rest, mindfulness activities, and intellectual stimulation (Grénman et al., 2019). This study demonstrates that personal sources of wellness have evolved beyond the purely physical realm to increasingly include mindfulness, positivity, happiness, and balance (Grénman et al., 2019). The paper concludes by proposing that marketing and brand managers must realize that “in addition to tangibles, they are actually selling mindsets. Corporations which can help consumers find one’s optimal self will experience the greatest success in today’s wellness market” (Grénman et al., 2019, p. 471). With this shift, however, comes a potential marketing challenge with respect to selling an internal mindset, as opposed to a physical product, service, or experience.

goop and Poosh

Founded by Gwyneth Paltrow in 2008, goop is a luxury wellness and lifestyle company that is tailored to women and primarily operated via Instagram, podcast, annual events, and their blog/e-commerce website (goop, n.d.). Promoting their desire to “[test] the waters so you don’t have

to,” goop offers alternative insights and advice on products and habits surrounding nutrition, beauty, mindfulness, spirituality, fitness, sexual health, and more (goop, n.d.). At times, the endorsement of such products has resulted in criticism from health experts, who have proposed that certain items lack evidence of medical benefit (Griffin, 2019). Controversial and potentially unsafe products, like the now infamous “jade egg,” which sparked a lawsuit, have not only raised concerns regarding pseudoscience, but have further cost the company 145,000 dollars in settlement fees (Griffin, 2019). Since this particular lawsuit, stemming from unverified health claims surrounding women’s hormone levels, goop has enlisted an in-house science and research team to provide vetted proof of the quality, safety, and efficacy of all of the company’s offerings moving forward (Griffin, 2019).

While affiliated with numerous external brands, goop recently introduced its own line of dietary supplements, skincare products, jewelry, and apparel, which is said to make up the company’s fastest-growing revenue stream (Berg, 2018). Paltrow’s wellness empire generates an estimated 70 million dollars per year, with a valuation of approximately 250 million dollars (Griffin, 2019). The Instagram business account for goop currently holds 1.7 million followers, while Gwyneth Paltrow’s personal account holds 7.6 million followers (goop, n.d.; Paltrow, n.d.). With nearly five times the follower count, Gwyneth Paltrow’s personal Instagram feed further promotes goop content and products. By adding more personalized captions to the photos and videos, goop-branded posts are seamlessly integrated into her personal page, evoking a sense of authenticity and commitment with regard to her wellness journey and lifestyle.

Launched by Kourtney Kardashian in 2019, Poosh is a digital wellness and lifestyle brand that is catered to women and mainly operated via Instagram and the company’s blog/e-commerce website. Advertised as a “modern guide to living your best life,” Poosh features

informational blog and social media posts offering health-centric tips and product recommendations pertaining to nutrition, fitness, mental and spiritual wellness, beauty, and more (Poosh, n.d.). Poosh does not currently obtain its own line of products, but has partnered with companies, such as Saje and Vital Proteins, to launch various essential oil diffuser kits and collagen powders, suggesting a central focus on the wellness “lifestyle” (Poosh, n.d.).

While Poosh’s revenue is not available to the public, the company currently holds 4.1 million followers on Instagram (Poosh, n.d.). Kourtney Kardashian’s personal account, however, holds 140 million followers, which is just over 34 times that of Poosh (Kardashian, n.d.). For this reason, Kourtney Kardashian’s personal Instagram feed further promotes and amplifies Poosh content and products. Similar to goop, this is executed as a seamless integration by personalizing captions and consequently evoking an authentic commitment to a wellness-oriented lifestyle.

Celebrity Persona

It is no coincidence that both successful wellness companies are founded and managed by two profoundly famous American celebrities. While Gwyneth Paltrow, 48, is a Hollywood actress and Kourtney Kardashian, 42, is a reality television star, both women have leveraged their fame to create their own personal empires outside of such domains. For this reason, celebrity persona must be acknowledged and further explored.

In analyzing the social and cultural implications of stardom, Rojek (2001) suggests that to be a celebrity is to have an “impact on public consciousness” (p. 10). He uses this simplified definition to explain today’s “public addiction to celebrity,” which he claims is based on the celebrity’s constructed image, designed to “generate desire in others and achieve impact in public” (Rojek, 2001, pp. 10, 106). Exuding perfection in every realm, the staged celebrity is not only abstractly desirable, but also an object of consumption (Rojek, 2001). Thus, fan attachment

is manifested through “consuming celebrity products,” adopting celebrity values and style, and even deriving meaning from the celebrity’s perceived “sacred” significance (Rojek, 2001, p. 47).

According to Rojek’s work, celebrity status exists in three forms: ascribed, achieved, and attributed (Rojek, 2001). Given her Hollywood upbringing, Gwyneth Paltrow would then be classified as an ascribed celebrity, as this status concerns one’s lineage (Rojek, 2001). Through her own work in film and now wellness, Gwyneth Paltrow has, of course, added to her ascribed status, but according to Rojek (2001), the foundation of her fame was primarily predetermined. Kourtney Kardashian, on the other hand, would be formally classified as an attributed celebrity, resulting from “the concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy” by “cultural intermediaries” (Rojek, 2001, p. 18). Attributed celebrities are primarily a product of the mass media and can be further broken down into a more compressed and concentrated form, referred to as the celetooid (Rojek, 2001, p. 18). Given the immense impact that the media have had on Kourtney Kardashian’s fame, it is reasonable to suggest that she falls within the sub-category of the media-generated celetooid.

In terms of the relationships we develop with these celebrity figures, Marshall (2014) further notes that social media intensify our parasocial connections by providing a pathway to the celebrity’s seemingly authentic self. Not only do social media offer accelerated access to public figures, but depictions of the celebrity’s online persona are perceived to be closer to the “real” than other representations (Marshall, 2014). What was once handled by the ancillary press of the celebrity industry, now involves the celebrity themselves partaking in the interpersonal flow of communication on their social media channels (Marshall, 2014). However, this perceived authenticity can be quite problematic in terms of the real-life impacts on beauty and lifestyle standards, as well as self-esteem as a result. This notion is further reinforced by the stark increase

in cosmetic surgeries, eating disorders, self-harm, and more that have been directly linked to the unattainable standards depicted in the mass media (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). While social media appear to offer an authenticated and perhaps humanized celebrity presence, they instead promote the portrayal of a highly constructed “public face” (Rojek, 2001, p. 11). For this reason, Instagram, specifically, is increasingly referred to as a highlight reel of one’s life.

Methodology

This research conducts a qualitative content analysis of two globally renowned wellness companies, goop and Poosh, to determine the marketing strategies utilized in their top-performing posts on Instagram. Furthermore, the methodology is guided by a visual social semiotic framework that offers insights into the covert and overt meaning behind the images and text presented within the posts.

goop and Poosh were specifically chosen for analysis because of their established prominence within the wellness industry, as well as their active presence and substantial following on Instagram's platform. Additionally, both companies are founded by female celebrities, produce similar content, sell similar products, and cater to the same demographic. Thus, by reviewing two similarly successful wellness companies, the analysis is able to generate more comprehensive and representative findings than just one company would allow. Furthermore, Instagram was deliberately chosen as the social media platform for analysis due to its increasing prominence as a marketing tool, its ground-breaking attainment of one billion users, and the associated desire for visual communication among contemporary social media consumers (Leaver et al., 2020). Given the scope of this study, the analysis considered the companies' most-liked posts only. This specific form of engagement was chosen over comments and shares, as it is most accurately able to signify a positive response to a post, while the data is also easily accessible to the public.

Data Collection

The research sample consists of 50 image-based Instagram posts directly captured from each company's feed, for a combined total of 100 posts. The selected sample represents each company's most-liked posts from January to May 2021 in order to retrieve the most current and

holistic findings. The sample was collected by manually identifying each company's most-liked posts within the given timeframe and screenshotting the entirety of the content via Instagram's web-browser for stronger visibility. Data was gathered through the use of a predefined codebook to identify general trends within each company's 50 posts, as well as across the combined 100 posts.

Data Analysis

The codebook was developed based on existing literature surrounding visual social semiotics, the wellness industry, and social media marketing. Drawing on these bodies of work, a list of the most prominent visual social semiotic structures, features, and systems was compiled, along with the sectors of the wellness economy and components of textual captions, in order to gather information relevant to the study. The full codebook can be found in Appendix C. The codebook was then entered into two separate sheets in Microsoft Excel, one representing goop and the other representing Poosh. Each company's 50 image-based posts were individually observed and the required information was entered into the corresponding cells. In order to ensure a sufficient level of intercoder reliability, I analyzed each image two times within a five-day interval. If assigned codes did not align after the second round of coding, images were analyzed on a third occasion, five days later, where a consensus was ultimately reached. Once the preliminary analysis was complete, the results were reviewed by section to identify patterns within and between the samples.

Visual Social Semiotics

As discussed, the study of visual social semiotics heavily informed the image analysis. Thus, it is necessary to review the framework in detail.

In today's visual culture, audiences no longer rely solely on written text for comprehension and, instead, absorb and process all that is seen within a document to generate meaning (Harrison, 2003). However, unless trained as artists or art historians, many of us are not practiced in the use of images for rhetorical purposes (Harrison, 2003). Hence the study of visual social semiotics. This framework provides professional communicators with the tools to understand the meaning-making potential of still images, as well as the techniques to sufficiently analyze such content (Harrison, 2003). As explained by Jewitt and Oyama (2001), visual social semiotics are used to describe the semiotic resources available in visual communications and additionally suggest how these resources can be interpreted. Harrison (2003) further notes that social semiotics of visual communication examine how text can both enhance and detract from the images it accompanies, and vice versa.

The first step in understanding this field of study is obtaining knowledge of the three categories of images. First is the icon, which represents an image that "bears a similarity or resemblance to what we already know or conceive about an object or person" (Harrison, 2003, p. 50). An example of a common icon online is the digital house, representing a website's home page (Harrison, 2003). Next is the index, which represents an image that is "recognizable, not because of any similarity to an object or a person, but because we understand the relationship between the image and the concept that it stands for" (Harrison, 2003, p. 50). An example of a common index is the upward-pointing arrow online, indicating the top of a webpage (Harrison, 2003). Last is the symbol, which represents an image that has "no visual or conceptual connection to an object or person" (Harrison, 2003, p. 50). The meaning of such an image, then, derives from convention, as it is learned (Harrison, 2003). An example of a common symbol is

the line beneath a word or phrase online, signifying the presence of an external link (Harrison, 2003).

Furthermore, Kress and van Leeuwen state that an image simultaneously performs three types of meta-semiotic tasks to create meaning, which has primarily informed this research (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The first is the representational metafunction, which acts as the visual equivalent of lexis and emphasizes the syntax of images (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Representational meaning is conveyed through the people, places, and objects depicted within a narrative or conceptual image, referred to as the represented participants (Harrison, 2003). According to Harrison (2003), the representational metafunction answers the question: “What is the picture about?” (p. 50). The basic structures and processes of this metafunction are outlined below in Table 1.

Table 1

Representational Metafunction

Structures	Processes
Narrative: Narrative images allow viewers to create a story about the RPs because the images include vectors.	Action: Created by vectors such as bodies, limbs, tools, weapons, roads, and so forth. Reactional: Created by eyelines (acting as vectors) between RPs.
Conceptual: Conceptual images do not include vectors. RPs tend to be grouped together to present viewers with the “concept” of who or what they represent.	Classificatory: RPs as “kind of” something or some group. Analytical: RPs are displayed in terms of a “part-whole” structure. The “whole” is a Carrier who possesses “parts” called Attributes. Symbolic: RPs are important for what they “mean.”

Note. RP(s) = Represented Participant(s). Adapted from “Visual Social Semiotics:

Understanding How Still Images Make Meaning,” by C. Harrison, 2003, *Technical Communication*, 50(1), p. 51.

Next is the interpersonal metafunction, which represents the relationship drawn between the viewer and represented participants within the image (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Interpersonal

meaning is influenced by the contact, distance, and point of view presented in the visual (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). According to Harrison (2003), the interpersonal metafunction answers the question: “How does the picture engage the viewer?” (p. 53). The basic features and feature processes of this metafunction are outlined below in Table 2.

Table 2

Interpersonal Metafunction

Features	Feature Processes
Image Act and Gaze: The image act involves the eyelines of the RP(s) in relation to the viewer.	<p>Demand: The RP is looking directly at the viewer. A demand generally causes the viewer to feel a strong engagement with the RP.</p> <p>Offer: The RP is looking outside the picture or at someone or something within the image. In this case, the RP becomes an object of contemplation for the viewer, creating less engagement than that of the <i>demand</i>.</p>
Social Distance and Intimacy: Social distance is determined by how close RPs in an image appear to the viewer, thereby resulting in feelings of intimacy or distance.	<p>Close-Up: Head and shoulders or less, suggests an intimate/personal relationship.</p> <p>Medium Shot: Cutting off the human figure somewhere between the waist and the knees, suggests a social relationship.</p> <p>Long Shot: Showing the full figure, whether just fitting in the frame or even more distant, suggests an impersonal relationship.</p>
Perspective–The Horizontal Angle and Involvement: This angle refers to the relationship between the position of the RP(s) and the viewer.	<p>The Frontal Angle: When an RP is presented frontally to the viewer. This angle creates strong involvement on the part of the viewer as it implies that the RP is “one of us.”</p> <p>The Oblique Angle: When an RP is presented obliquely to the viewer. This angle creates greater detachment since it implies that the RP is “one of them.”</p>
Perspective–The Vertical Angle and Power: There are two possible vertical-angle relationships: 1) that of the RP(s) and the viewer, and 2) that between RPs within an image.	<p>High Angle: The RP “looking down” has more power.</p> <p>Medium Angle: The RP “looking horizontally” has equal power.</p> <p>Low Angle: The RP “looking up” has less power.</p>

Note. RP(s) = Represented Participant(s). Adapted from “Visual Social Semiotics:

Understanding How Still Images Make Meaning,” by C. Harrison, 2003, *Technical*

Communication, 50(1), p. 53 and “Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach” by C. Jewitt

and R. Oyama, 2001, *The Handbook of Visual Analysis*, p. 16

(<https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020062>). Copyright 2001 by SAGE Publications.

Last is the compositional metafunction, which is made from the information value, framing, salience, and modality of a given image (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Composition in imagery is described as the visual equivalent of syntax in language, representing a set of rules that allow visual signs to be arranged in a way that make sense to the audience (Harrison, 2003). Elements of composition, such as the focus and use of colour, are said to integrate the representational and interpersonal metafunctions into a coherent whole (Harrison, 2003). According to Harrison (2003), the compositional metafunction answers the question: “How do the representational and interpersonal metafunctions relate to each other and integrate into a meaningful whole?” (p. 55). The basic systems and elements of this metafunction are outlined below in Table 3.

Table 3

Compositional Metafunction

System	Elements
Information Value: The placement of RPs allows them to take on different information roles.	Left/Right: RPs on the left side of an image have the value of being “given” knowledge while RPs on the right are “new.” Given = familiar, common-sense. New = an issue, a problem, a solution.
	Top/Bottom: RPs at the top of an image have the value of being “ideal” while RPs below represent the “real.” Ideal = emotive, imaginary, what might be, often the pictorial elements of an image. Real = factual, informative, down to earth, practical, often textual elements in an image.
	Center/Margin: RPs in the center provide the nucleus of information to which surrounding elements are subservient.
Salience: Salience refers to the ability of an RP to capture the viewer’s attention.	Size: The larger the RP, the greater the salience.
	Sharpness of Focus: Out-of-focus RPs have less salience.
	Tonal Contrast: Areas of high tonal contrast have greater salience.
	Colour Contrast: Strongly saturated colours have greater salience than “soft” colours.

Foreground/Background: An RP in the foreground has greater salience than an RP in the background.		
Framing: How RPs are framed affects whether they are seen as connected or separate.	Framelines: The lines within the image that divide RPs or hold them together. Pictorial Framing Devices: The stronger the lines around the image, the greater the connection.	
	Colour Saturation, Differentiation, and Modulation)	Full Colour: High modality. Black-and-White: Low modality.
	Contextualization)	Fully Conceived Background: High modality. Background Completely Absent: Low modality.
	Depth)	Deep Perspective: High modality. No Perspective: Low modality.
	Illumination)	Fullest Representation of Light and Shade: High modality. Absence of Light and Shade: Low modality.
Modality: Modality refers to how we feel about a message's validity and reliability.		

Note. RP(s) = Represented Participant(s). Adapted from “Visual Social Semiotics: Understanding How Still Images Make Meaning,” by C. Harrison, 2003, *Technical Communication*, 50(1), pp. 57-58.

Findings and Discussion

This section will provide the results of the analysis of goop and Poosh's Instagram posts, presenting the findings from each category of the codebook individually, in order of their appearance. A closing discussion will follow, which will consider the broader trends identified across the codebook and related research.

Wellness Sector

The first category of the codebook, "wellness sector," refers to the specific sub-industry that is most prominently represented within the image. According to the Global Wellness Institute (2018), the "wellness economy" is made up of ten varied and diverse sectors: 1) Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging, 2) Healthy Eating, Nutrition, and Weight Loss, 3) Wellness Tourism, 4) Fitness and Mind-Body, 5) Preventive and Personalized Medicine and Public Health, 6) Traditional and Complementary Medicine, 7) Wellness Lifestyle Real Estate, 8) Spa Economy, 9) Thermal/Mineral Springs, and 10) Workplace Wellness. Thus, given that wellness is such a multidimensional industry at large, it is important to understand which specific sectors are generating the most interest and engagement. While reviewing the sample, it became apparent that there were two niche areas that were not explicitly captured in the Global Wellness Institute's breakdown. For this reason, two additional sectors were created and utilized in the codebook: 11) Mental Wellness and Spirituality, and 12) Healthy Relationships and Sexual Wellness.

goop

After reviewing goop's dataset, it was clear that the most visually represented wellness sectors within the company's most-liked posts were Healthy Eating, Nutrition, and Weight Loss (n=16), Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging (n=12), and Mental Wellness and Spirituality (n=11). On

average, these categories generated 18,711 likes, 21,682 likes, and 19,045 likes, respectively. Interestingly, there was only one prominent overlap observed between both companies.

Poosh

Poosh's dataset revealed that Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging (n=16), Fitness and Mind-Body (n=13), and Healthy Relationships and Sexual Wellness (n=11) were the most visually recognized sectors within the company's most-liked posts. For Poosh, these categories generated an average of 36,550 likes, 39,593 likes, and 30,268 likes, respectively.

Both companies therefore achieved similar success when prioritizing the sector of Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging, but were otherwise able to engage consumers in alternate ways. While both companies found additional success through wellness sectors commonly associated with physical appearance, such as weight loss and fitness, each account was also able to engage consumers through content pertaining to mental, emotional, and spiritual domains. Such knowledge can be gathered by observing each company's third most represented sector: Mental Wellness and Spirituality, and Healthy Relationships and Sexual Wellness, respectively. This finding aligns with current literature on the industry at large, which suggests that consumers are increasingly interested in prioritizing their mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness (Grénman et al., 2019). While it is certainly interesting to note such a shift in the Western consumption of wellness, it is no surprise that Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging was a highly visible sector in both datasets, given Gwyneth Paltrow and Kourtney Kardashian's involvement. For goop, these posts incorporated many bathroom/bathtub shots, images emphasizing clear, glowing skin, and photos of Gwyneth Paltrow modelling her clothing line, G. Label. For Poosh, these posts mostly depicted Kourtney Kardashian posing with her hair and makeup professionally styled and applied.

While it is beneficial to attempt to uncover trends pertaining to this category of the codebook, it is also necessary to recognize that there were, at times, discrepancies between the images and captions presented within the observed posts. Since this particular section pertained to purely visual representation, the aforementioned results were based off of the images alone. However, when the captions were analyzed in a later category of the codebook, there was a clear disconnect observed between some of the images and accompanied text in terms of the represented wellness sectors. For example, one post from goop's sample featured an image of oranges, which was categorized within the Healthy Eating, Nutrition, and Weight Loss sector. However, the caption for this post referred to the benefits of topical vitamin C for the skin, which would technically fall under the category of Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging. Therefore, it is necessary to further consider the results of the final category of the codebook, "caption."

Table 4

Results of the Wellness Sector Analysis

Wellness Sector	goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging:	12	16	28%
Healthy Eating, Nutrition, and Weight Loss:	16	5	21%
Wellness Tourism:	1	-	1%
Fitness and Mind-Body:	4	13	17%
Preventive and Personalized Medicine and Public Health:	-	-	-
Traditional and Complementary Medicine:	-	-	-
Wellness Lifestyle Real Estate:	1	-	1%
Spa Economy:	-	-	-
Thermal/Mineral Springs:	-	-	-
Workplace Wellness:	-	-	-
Mental Wellness and Spirituality:	11	4	15%
Healthy Relationships and Sexual Wellness:	5	11	16%
Unclear From Image Alone:	-	1	1%

Representational Metafunction

The second category of the codebook, "representational metafunction," refers to the image structure and represented participants within the visual. According to Harrison (2003), an image

can have a narrative or conceptual structure. Narrative images include vectors of motion, which can be achieved through action, such as a person walking, or reaction, such as two people looking at each other (Harrison, 2003). Alternatively, conceptual images do not include vectors, and instead portray represented participants grouped together as a “concept” of who or what they might represent (Harrison, 2003). This can be achieved through the process of classification, analysis, or symbolism (Harrison, 2003).

Image Structure

goop

Within goop’s dataset, both narrative (n=26) and conceptual (n=24) structures were identified, with narrative images representing the majority of the company’s most-liked posts. Furthermore, the narrative images were most commonly achieved through action (n=25), while the conceptual images were most frequently achieved through analysis (n=17), meaning the represented participants were portrayed in a “part-whole” structure (Harrison, 2003). The narrative structures identified within the posts typically presented themselves as human beings holding an object, such as a wine glass, or performing an action, such as hugging. According to Harrison (2003), the vectors of motion within narrative images allow viewers to create a story about the represented participants. In goop’s case, such narration could be as simple as imagining a loving relationship between two people after viewing a photo of a man and woman kissing. On the other hand, the conceptual structures identified within the posts typically presented themselves as meals on a plate or food items in a fridge/on a countertop. Harrison (2003) suggests that the primary purpose of conceptual images is to communicate social/cultural concepts, evoking different types of conventional thinking. In goop’s case, it appears as though the conceptual images achieved through analysis aimed to signify a “clean,” nutrient-dense approach to eating, given the visual emphasis on healthy food.

Poosh

Within Poosh's dataset, both narrative (n=37) and conceptual (n=13) images were found, once again. However, this sample contained a considerably larger amount of narrative posts in comparison to conceptual posts. Similar to goop, the narrative images in Poosh's dataset were most commonly achieved through action (n=32), such as walking, and similarly highlighted human beings in the process. In contrast, the conceptual images were most frequently achieved through symbolism (n=7), which suggests that the represented participants hold value for what they signify (Harrison, 2003). An example of such a post from Poosh's sample is a photo of a naked woman holding a croissant in front of her private area, thus symbolizing her reproductive organ. With that said, because there were only a small number of images with conceptual structures, it is difficult to extract general trends from such data. It is perhaps more informative to note the clear emphasis on narrative structures containing people within both samples, suggesting the importance of human-centered storytelling in goop and Poosh's posts.

Table 5

Results of the Image Structure Analysis

Image Structure		goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Narrative)	Action:	25	32	57%
	Reactional:	1	5	6%
Conceptual)	Classificatory:	4	4	8%
	Analytical:	17	2	19%
	Symbolic:	3	7	10%

Represented Participants

Within the representational metafunction are the represented participants, which pertain to the people, places, and objects within an image (Harrison, 2003). Thus, this section may be considered the most revealing within the codebook, as it uncovers what the most-liked posts are physically depicting.

goop

goop's dataset, composed of a relatively even number of narrative and conceptual images, revealed that Gwyneth Paltrow (n=10) and food (n=14), shown separately, were the most common represented participants. When combined, these two represented participants made up approximately half of the sample, generating an average of 27,655 likes and 17,092 likes, respectively. The posts featuring Gwyneth Paltrow typically appeared in one of three forms: a professional photo of her modelling G. Label (Figure 1), a selfie showcasing her clear, glowing skin (Figure 2), or a computer-generated image of her and another celebrity with overlaid text (Figure 3).

Figure 1, Figure 2, & Figure 3

Gwyneth Paltrow's Presence on goop's Instagram

The first two scenarios seemingly serve the purpose of selling products, namely Gwyneth Paltrow's clothing and skincare line. In doing so, Gwyneth Paltrow is pictured flawlessly, whether she is wearing a stylish outfit or flaunting her smooth, radiant skin. The third scenario may aim to reinforce the brand's status and social capital by featuring other famous figures, such as Brad Pitt, Ben Affleck, and Jimmy Kimmel. It is also likely that the old photos of Gwyneth Paltrow with her now ex-boyfriends, Brad Pitt and Ben Affleck, are meant to induce a sense of

nostalgia amongst her long-time fans to enhance that parasocial connection. The food-related posts also appeared in one of three ways: plated meals, neatly packaged/organized food in a fridge, or food spread out on a countertop.

Figure 4, Figure 5, & Figure 6

goop's Food-Related Instagram Posts

The first and second scenarios were mostly used to share healthy recipes or provide knowledge on a food-related topic, such as dairy-free alternatives to cheese. The third scenario did not appear to reference any products for sale or incorporate any external links and, for these reasons, seemingly served as colourful “filler” to brighten up the account’s feed and ideally drive engagement.

While the rest of the posts portrayed a more randomized mixture of people, places, and objects, there were still several subtle commonalities identified across the sample. Amongst them was an emphasis on hegemonic aspirations, such as luxury and whiteness, along with nudity and a “clean” aesthetic.

Figure 7, Figure 8, & Figure 9

goop's Spa-Like Instagram Posts

For example, the five bathroom shots within the sample pictured luxurious, spa-like scenes, featuring elegant free-standing bathtubs, breathtaking window views, and pristine decoration. When human beings were shown inside of the bathtubs, they were pictured in the nude, surrounded by bubbles, with a lavish drink in hand. Out of the images that did contain a human presence ($n=15$), all but two featured white women, and all but one featured visibly slim women. Interestingly, unless Gwyneth Paltrow or another famous celebrity physically appeared in the image, goop's most-liked posts did not contain the faces of those within the photos. Such posts featured women, usually naked or dressed in minimal clothing, photographed from behind, from the waist down, or with their face concealed by an object, by another person, or through motion. On average, these images generated 16,703 likes, whereas images containing Gwyneth Paltrow generated an average of 27,655 likes. While clearly producing lower engagement rates than images featuring a celebrity, these posts still represented 15 percent of the sample, and it is therefore necessary to consider their implications. Thus, these posts may be intended to encourage viewers to visualize themselves in the position of those within the images. With no faces to engage and perhaps distract viewers from other represented participants, these images might allow them to more effortlessly envision themselves as the agent of the action. In addition

to this, these images are arguably quite important for the company's overall Instagram aesthetic, which appears to portray a sense of glamour and mystery through such concealment. Wilson (2007) notes that through "[deceiving] the sight," represented participants are able to "cast a glamour over the eyes of the spectator" (p. 96). She goes on to propose that the emotions associated with glamour, such as desire, are actually dependent on "what is withheld, on secrecy, hints, and the hidden" (Wilson, 2007, p. 100). In addition, according to Khan's (2012) work in fashion, film, and feminism, fragmented body parts become objects with "fetishistic value" (p. 240). Because we recognize these segmented objects, Khan (2012) suggests that such images invite viewers to "bring the body part[s] to life," thus creating moving photographs (p. 240). Through this movement, viewers are said to experience a "pleasure in looking," which may further explain the higher engagement rates of such images in goop's sample (Khan, 2012, p. 240). From a business perspective, these images may help viewers form a closer connection to the visual, while evoking desire and instilling the motivation to read more/make a purchase. The shots of famous figures, on the other hand, are likely able to do so through pure aspiration and celebrity fixation. As uncovered in Marshall's (2014) work, social media, in particular, are able to intensify our connections to such figures by providing consumers with the perception of a more authentic celebrity portrayal. Therefore, images of Gwyneth Paltrow on goop's Instagram feed are likely able to steer consumers in a given direction due to increased desire stemming from the celebrity's digital presence.

While it is certainly interesting to note what is physically shown in the company's 50 most-liked posts, it is sometimes just as revealing to acknowledge what is absent. From scrolling through months of content on goop's feed, it was evident that the company frequently posts about goop-branded products, such as the company's skincare line, goop Beauty. Aside from

promoting Gwyneth Paltrow's clothing line, G. Label, the 50 most-liked posts did not visually picture any of goop's products, such as the seemingly popular GOOPGLOW drink mix or the GOOPGENES face oil. This might suggest that consumers are less interested in product-only posts, meaning that a human being, namely Gwyneth Paltrow, is not also featured. When her clothing line was being promoted, Gwyneth Paltrow was pictured front and center, modelling the outfits herself, which further reinforces the impact of her presence.

Poosh

Poosh's dataset, composed mostly of narrative images, revealed that Kourtney Kardashian and her famous sisters, Kim, Khloe, Kendall, and Kylie, were the most common represented participants within the posts (n=30). When combined, these represented participants, depicted both separately and together, made up 60 percent of the sample, and generated an average of 39,811 likes. In fact, Kourtney Kardashian alone was featured in exactly half of the images and generated an average of 40,674 likes, indicating the significance of her presence within the company's posts. After further observation, it is apparent that the Kardashian-Jenner sisters are primarily pictured in bathing suits.

Figure 10, Figure 11, & Figure 12

Celebrity Presence in Poosh's Instagram Posts

The presence of these incredibly famous women, combined with their flat, defined stomachs and beautiful beach/backyard views behind them, makes for a particularly aspirational image in terms of bodily appearance and physical environment. Similar to goop, while other humans/bodies are featured in the company's images, the only people whose faces are shown are celebrities. Such images include reposted/repurposed photos of Kourtney Kardashian, her four sisters, her son, Hailey Bieber, Julia Roberts, the Spice Girls, and Kamala Harris.

In terms of the more subtle commonalities observed within the rest of the dataset, there appeared to be a general emphasis placed on nudity and sexual relationships.

Figure 13, Figure 14, & Figure 15

Poosh's Suggestive Instagram Posts

For example, ten images within the sample portrayed a woman in the nude, or wearing lingerie, or a bathing suit, either alone or hugging, kissing, or touching a man. After critical analysis of the images themselves, along with the accompanied captions, the overarching theme of these posts appears to be female empowerment and sex positivity, particularly from a gender-affirming, heterosexual perspective. The nudity and physical intimacy appear to serve the purpose of empowering women to take control of their bodies and relationships, and feel confident in their skin, all while reproducing hegemonic aspirations of heterosexual desirability

and whiteness. An example of such a post from Poosh's sample is a photo of a white woman wearing pink lingerie in bed, accompanied by a caption directing viewers to an external link for professional advice pertaining to sexual intercourse. As mentioned, unless Kourtney Kardashian or another famous celebrity physically appeared in the image, Poosh's posts did not contain the faces of those within the photos. These individuals were, once again, shown from behind, from the waist down, or with their face concealed by an object, by another person, or through motion. On average, these images generated 29,270 likes and represented 10 percent of Poosh's sample. As previously discussed, this may be intended to emphasize celebrity presence across the brand, while simultaneously allowing viewers to more easily transport themselves into the aspirational scenes within the posts. These images also appear to be quite important for the company's overall aesthetic, which incorporates glamour through artful concealment, as well as an element of pleasant movement through stylized fragmentation.

Interpersonal Metafunction

The third category of the codebook, "interpersonal metafunction," refers to the contact, social distance, and perspective of the represented participants in relation to the audience. Firstly, contact describes the eyeline of the represented participants in relation to the viewer, which can result in a visual demand or an offer (Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Social distance, then, is determined by how close the represented participants appear to the viewer, which can result in a close-up, a medium shot, or a long shot (Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Horizontal perspective refers to the horizontal-angle relationship between the represented participants and the viewer, which can result in a frontal angle or an oblique angle (Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Finally, the vertical perspective refers to the vertical-angle relationship between the represented participants and the viewer, as well as between the

represented participants within the image, which can result in a high angle, a medium angle, or a low angle (Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001).

Contact

goop

Within goop's dataset, offer images (n=13) were more common than demand images (n=7). In fact, images with no direct eye contact between the represented participants and viewer made up approximately twice as many posts. In the study of visual social semiotics, it is said that a lack of demand results in the represented participant becoming an object of contemplation for the viewer, creating less engagement as a result (Harrison, 2003). As uncovered in the previous subsection, "represented participants," the faces of those within the images were not revealed, unless they belonged to famous celebrities, namely Gwyneth Paltrow. When the goop founder was featured in the images, a strong visual demand was recorded, meaning Gwyneth Paltrow was pictured looking directly at the viewer. It is possible that a strong visual demand was only observed when Gwyneth Paltrow was featured, not just to represent the face of the brand, but to also address viewers with a specific purpose, such as selling her clothing or skincare line. Harrison (2003) states that a visual demand creates strong viewer involvement. Thus, these promotional demand images may serve to capture the viewer's attention in order to persuade them to purchase products and live/look like Gwyneth Paltrow. Without a celebrity presence, and no direct eye contact, individuals within the posts were possibly meant to stimulate the viewer's mind by emphasizing a scenic view, for example, and evoking certain thoughts and feelings, like peace and harmony. This notion seemingly aligns with findings recorded in the first category of the codebook, "wellness sector," which revealed that Mental Wellness and Spirituality was goop's second most visually represented industry within the sample. As previously mentioned,

these posts are also important for what they offer to the company's overall aesthetic, which seemingly includes elements of glamour and movement through concealment and fragmentation.

While the number of offer images surpassed that of demand, posts reflecting no visual contact of any kind (n=29) actually made up the majority of the sample. Almost two-thirds of the posts did not incorporate any form of visual contact, suggesting that there were either no human beings pictured in the images or their heads were simply cut out of the frame. Seeing as though the two most represented wellness sectors within goop's sample were Nutrition, Healthy Eating, and Weight Loss, and Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging, this finding could be a partial result of numerous food-based and spa-like posts. Regarding the images that did contain a partial human presence, this apparent denial of access is possibly meant to, once again, add to the visual aesthetic of glamour and mystery, thus evoking desire and aspiration. When specifically considering the posts that contained fragmented body parts, excluding the model's head entirely, further implications may be drawn. As previously mentioned, Khan (2012) proposes that fragmentation invites audience members to "bring the body part[s] to life," creating movement, and resulting in a pleasurable viewing experience (p. 240).

Poosh

Contrarily, Poosh's dataset revealed a relatively even split between demand (n=18) and offer (n=21) images, while exactly one-fifth of the sample did not reflect any form of visual contact at all (n=10). It is possible that because almost three-quarters of Poosh's sample featured a famous celebrity, there would inevitably be more eye contact involved. This could also partially explain why there was a significantly lower number of posts reflecting no visual contact at all, when compared to goop's sample. Like goop, though, Poosh's images that did reflect a visual demand solely featured famous figures, namely Kourtney Kardashian and her four sisters. These posts

were often accompanied by captions that referenced external links to beauty “tips” and “secrets” pertaining to makeup, hair, and skin. Like goop, when an offer image was observed in Poosh’s sample, it was often to emphasize another aspect of the visual scene, such as a flat stomach and defined abdominals. While goop may have attempted to evoke different thoughts and feelings through accentuating nature-filled backdrops, for example, Poosh appeared to evoke desire through emphasizing aspirational physiques, such as Kim Kardashian’s infamous body. It is important to note here that while the Kardashian-Jenner sisters have represented a variety of physiques over the years, they all appear to obtain flat, defined stomachs at present, which is emphasized as the focal point of these images.

Table 6

Results of the Contact Analysis

Contact	goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Demand:	7	18	25%
Offer:	13	21	34%
Both:	1	1	2%
N/A:	29	10	39%

Social Distance

goop

Within goop’s dataset, both medium (n=22) and long (n=22) shots evenly represented almost all images within the sample. According to Harrison (2003), space is closely tied to emotions of intimacy and distance. Therefore, the large amount of medium and long shots within the sample might suggest that there is a greater emotional distance between the represented participants and viewers of goop’s posts. As mentioned previously, such images may serve the purpose of stimulating the viewer’s mind, perhaps through more spiritual content, rather than addressing them in such a direct manner. The visual social semiotician’s perception of emotional distance, however, is also able to achieve an aesthetic of glamour and mystery, which is necessary to

evoke desire and aspiration, according to Wilson (2007). Interestingly, out of the few posts that did include close-up images (n=6), all but one featured Gwyneth Paltrow. While it is very possible that she also appeared in long shots in order to adequately model her clothing line, these close-up images of Gwyneth Paltrow may serve to create a strong sense of viewer affinity, as visual social semiotics suggest.

Poosh

Transitioning into Poosh's dataset, medium shots (n=25) represented exactly half of the sample, while close-up (n=11) and long shots (n=14) evenly made up the other half. Given these results, it is interesting to consider the rather stark increase in close-up images, when compared to goop's sample. This increase may be a potential result of the higher number of selfies taken by Kourtney Kardashian, her famous sisters, and her celebrity friend, Hailey Bieber. These photos often featured their clear, glowing skin or a full face of perfectly applied makeup, which could work to develop an intimate connection with the viewer, while simultaneously inspiring them to achieve a similar appearance with Poosh-recommended products and tips.

Table 7

Results of the Social Distance Analysis

Social Distance	goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Close-Up:	6	11	17%
Medium Shot:	22	25	47%
Long Shot:	22	14	36%

Horizontal Perspective

goop

In terms of horizontal perspective, goop's dataset revealed that approximately three-quarters of the images displayed an oblique angle (n=38), while the remaining quarter displayed a frontal angle (n=12). In visual social semiotics, it is said that the horizontal angle encodes whether or

not the viewer is emotionally “involved” with the represented participants (Harrison, 2003). The frontal angle implies that the represented participant is “one of us” and therefore reflects stronger identification (Harrison, 2003, p. 53). On the other hand, the oblique angle implies that the represented participant is “one of them” and consequently creates greater detachment (Harrison, 2003, p. 53). With this knowledge, it appears as though goop’s posts reflect an overall detachment between the represented participants and viewer.

Poosh

Contrarily, Poosh’s dataset revealed an equal presence of frontal (n=24) and oblique (n=26) angles, meaning that the posts embody an even amount of detachment and involvement when considering the relationship between the represented participants and the audience. Again, the significant increase in selfies observed within Poosh’s sample could potentially explain the higher number of frontal angles, when compared to goop’s posts. This finding may also be associated with the aspirational appeal of Poosh’s brand, which seemingly works to evoke desire in others. Given their frontal angles, the represented participants come across as “one of us,” perhaps suggesting that by purchasing Poosh-recommended products and engaging in Poosh content, viewers can attain the flawless skin and flat stomachs pictured in the company’s aspirational posts. As noted by Kress and van Leeuwen, though, “the relation between human participants represented in images and the viewer is once again an imaginary relation. People are *portrayed* as they are friends, or as *though* they are strangers” (as cited in Harrison, 2003, p. 54). Therefore, it is important to recognize that while Kourtney Kardashian, for instance, might appear to be “one of us” in Poosh’s Instagram posts, she may embody an unrealistic physical standard in actuality.

Table 8

Results of the Horizontal Perspective Analysis

Horizontal Perspective	goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Frontal Angle:	12	24	36%
Oblique Angle:	38	26	64%

Vertical Perspective

goop

In terms of vertical perspective, goop's dataset revealed that low (n=23) and medium (n=25) angles represented almost all images within the sample. More specifically, low and medium angles were evenly identified within the posts, whereas high angles (n=1) were rarely observed. While the horizontal perspective is associated with audience identification, the vertical perspective is indicative of equality (Harrison, 2003). According to visual social semiotics, represented participants looking upwards create a low vertical angle that results in them holding less power (Harrison, 2003). Represented participants looking downwards, then, create a high vertical angle that results in them holding more power (Harrison, 2003). Finally, represented participants looking horizontally create a medium vertical angle that results in them holding equal power (Harrison, 2003). With this knowledge, it is apparent that the represented participants in goop's images predominantly reflect both equal and less power than that of the viewer. However, it is important to acknowledge that approximately half of goop's posts do not contain a human presence and, instead, feature healthy meals and luxurious bathrooms, for example. Therefore, it is not necessarily accurate to suggest that Gwyneth Paltrow and other human beings within the posts hold less power than the viewer, half of the time. It is also generally understood that selfies and photos taken of people from a lower angle are less flattering than those from medium or high angles, while food-based photos are also typically taken from a

higher angle. Using visual social semiotic terminology, these photos would classify as low vertical angle shots, which appear to represent almost half of goop’s sample.

Poosh

After reviewing Poosh’s dataset, it was found that medium angles (n=31) represented over half of the images within the sample. The remaining images reflected an even split between both high (n=10) and low (n=9) angles. When combining the findings from both the “vertical perspective” and “horizontal perspective” sub-sections, it appears as though Poosh’s posts promote equality in terms of power and personal identification. The increase in both medium vertical angles and horizontal frontal angles, when compared to goop, may demonstrate an attempt to portray a greater sense of unity and emotional involvement amongst viewers and represented participants.

Table 9

Results of the Vertical Perspective Analysis

Vertical Perspective	goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
High Angle:	1	10	11%
Medium Angle:	25	31	56%
Low Angle:	23	9	32%
All Angles:	1	-	1%

Compositional Metafunction

The fourth category of the codebook, “compositional metafunction,” refers to the information value, salience, and framing of the represented participants within the posts, as well as the image modality. Firstly, information value refers to the placement of represented participants, which can result in a left/right, top/bottom, and/or center/margin system, allowing the people/places/objects to take on different information roles (Harrison, 2003). Salience, then, refers to the represented participant’s ability to capture the viewer’s attention, which can be achieved through size, sharpness of focus, tonal contrast, colour contrast, and foreground/background (Harrison, 2003). Furthermore, framing refers to the way that

represented participants are framed within an image, which can result in division or harmony (Harrison, 2003). Finally, image modality refers to the visual message's validity and reliability, which is accomplished through colour saturation/differentiation/modulation, contextualization, and illumination (Harrison, 2003).

Information Value

goop

After reviewing goop's dataset, it was clear that the center/margin system (n=19), as well as the simultaneous use of all three systems (n=22), represented the majority of the company's sample. In fact, the left/right (n=3) and top/bottom (n=6) systems only accounted for approximately one-fifth of goop's posts. In visual social semiotics, it is said that represented participants in the center of an image provide "the nucleus of information to which surrounding elements are subservient" (Harrison, 2003, p. 57). This information suggests that approximately half of goop's posts have a central focal point, while the other half present multiple areas of information, such as the collage of women in lingerie found in goop's sample. This result seemingly aligns with findings from the second category of the codebook, "representational metafunction," which revealed consistent themes of Gwyneth Paltrow, food, and spa-like bathroom scenes across goop's sample. While Gwyneth Paltrow clearly represented the focal point in all of the images she was featured in, many of the food-based and spa-like images showcased multiple sources of information scattered throughout the photo.

Poosh

Similar to goop, Poosh's dataset also appeared to reflect a large amount of center/margin systems (n=23), accounting for almost half of the images within the sample. However, the other half consisted primarily of an even split between the top/bottom system (n=11) and all three systems

combined (n=11). According to the study of visual social semiotics, represented participants appearing at the bottom of an image symbolize the “real,” as opposed to the “ideal” (Harrison, 2003). Harrison (2003) further describes such people/places/objects as “factual, informative, down to earth, and practical” (p. 57). While only about one-fifth of Poosh’s posts incorporated represented participants located near the bottom of the image, it is fascinating to think that photos of Kourtney Kardashian, for example, might symbolize the “real” within this framework. Interestingly, this knowledge aligns with findings from the previous category, “interpersonal metafunction,” which revealed that Poosh’s posts generally convey an increased sense of identification and connection when compared to goop. Poosh’s most common system, however, was the center/margin system, which suggests that the company’s posts typically feature a main focal point, acting as the central source of information. Given the high number of celebrity shots within Poosh’s sample, this finding is certainly not surprising.

Table 10

Results of the Information Value Analysis

Information Value	goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Left/Right System:	3	5	8%
Top/Bottom System:	6	11	17%
Center/Margin System:	19	23	42%
All Three Systems:	22	11	33%

Salience

goop

In terms of salience, goop’s dataset portrayed represented participants as mostly medium-sized (n=29) and in-focus (n=48), composed of soft colours (n=32) with a medium tonal contrast (n=50), and positioned in the foreground (n=29) or middle ground (n=21). According to the study of visual social semiotics, a represented participant has greater salience when it is large in size, in-focus, of high tonal contrast, composed of strongly saturated colours, and positioned in

the foreground (Harrison, 2003). While goop’s sample exemplifies various degrees of salience, it is reasonable to suggest that the company’s most-liked posts are generally of normal to high salience. The one sub-category that was, on average, less salient than the rest also demonstrated greater salience approximately two-fifths of the time, making it somewhat on the cusp. This was the “colour contrast” section, which revealed the use of mostly soft colours with some saturation (n=18), typically observed in colourful food-related posts.

Poosh

Similarly, Poosh’s dataset depicted represented participants as mostly medium (n=23) or large (n=27) in size, in-focus (n=48), composed of soft colours (n=37) with a medium tonal contrast (n=47), and positioned in the foreground (n=34). Like goop, it can be said that Poosh’s most-liked posts are generally of normal to high salience. The “colour contrast” sub-category was, again, the one section that revealed a lower salience than the rest. However, Poosh’s sample revealed a greater use of soft colours when compared to goop, with saturation (n=13) observed only about one-fifth of the time. This particular finding may suggest that Poosh’s team and customers associate wellness with soft, neutral shades, as opposed to bright, saturated colours. With goop’s data offering a similar result, it may be that a paler colour palette represents an industry-specific preference. Leaver et al. (2020) further note that among many other “tropes, templates, and clichés ... muted pastel palettes” have become “common, normalized and expected” aesthetics on Instagram, in general (p. 62). Such aesthetics engrain their affective and inspirational appeal, as the visual becomes aspirational, both for recreating a look and obtaining a feeling (Leaver et al., 2020).

Table 11

Results of the Salience Analysis

Salience		goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Size)	Small:	10	-	10%
	Medium:	29	23	52%
	Large:	11	27	38%
Focus)	In-Focus:	48	48	96%
	Out of Focus:	2	2	4%
Colour Contrast)	Soft Colours:	32	37	69%
	Saturated Colours:	18	13	31%
Tonal Contrast)	Low Tonal Contrast:	-	3	3%
	Medium Tonal Contrast:	50	47	97%
	High Tonal Contrast:	-	-	-
Foreground/ Background)	Foreground:	29	34	63%
	Middle Ground:	21	16	37%
	Background:	-	-	-

Framing

In terms of framing, goop and Poosh's datasets revealed almost identical results. In both samples, the images mainly incorporated framelines that held the pictorial elements together (n=44, n=43), as opposed to creating division (n=6, n=7). Visual social semiotics suggest that such framing promotes continuity and connection, which enables viewers to observe the piece as a "coherent whole," rather than a "hodge-podge" of elements (Harrison, 2003, p. 55). It can be said, then, that both goop and Poosh's most-liked images generally aim to provide viewers with clear imagery through the use of unifying framelines. While it was previously suggested that some of goop's posts, for example, may attempt to evoke different thoughts and feelings through conceptual images or the absence of eye contact, this finding indicates that the company still depicts connected visual scenes that do not result in unintended confusion.

Table 12

Results of the Framing Analysis

Framing	goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Divide:	6	7	13%
Hold Together:	44	43	87%

Modality

goop

In terms of modality, goop's dataset is composed of images that are mostly presented in full colour (n=48), depicting fully conceived backgrounds (n=41), deep perspectives (n=49), and a full representation of light and shade (n=44). Like salience, the visual cues that indicate modality typically run along a spectrum of possibilities (Harrison, 2003). According to the study of visual social semiotics, an image has a higher modality when it is presented in full colour and depicts a fully conceived background, deep perspective, and a full representation of light and shade (Harrison, 2003). Therefore, it is reasonable to propose that goop's most-liked images are typically of high modality, meaning that their visual messages appear to be valid, reliable, and "real."

Poosh

Interestingly, Poosh's dataset revealed almost identical results with respect to modality. The company's images were mostly presented in full colour (n=46), depicting fully conceived backgrounds (n=35), deep perspectives (n=47), and a full representation of light and shade (n=48). Therefore, like goop, one can accurately claim that Poosh's most-liked images are of high modality, evoking validity, reliability, and "realness." With two similarly definitive results, it is worth considering the broader implications of these findings, which might suggest that wellness content flourishes when it is seemingly realistic. This may indicate that wellness consumers are attracted to products, recipes, guides, etc., that appear to be easily integrated into their lifestyles, whether that be tangibly, emotionally, and so on. It can perhaps be said, then, that abstract or seemingly unclear/intangible visual content does not necessarily entice wellness consumers or drive engagement in this space.

Table 13***Results of the Modality Analysis***

Modality		goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Colour Saturation/ Differentiation/ Modulation)	Full Colour:	48	46	94%
	Black-and-White:	2	3	5%
	Sepia Tone:	-	1	1%
Contextualization)	Fully Conceived Background:	41	35	76%
	Partially Conceived Background:	8	14	22%
	Absent Background:	1	1	2%
Depth)	Deep Perspective:	49	47	96%
	No Perspective:	1	3	4%
Illumination)	Full Representation of Light and Shade:	44	48	92%
	Partial Representation of Light and Shade:	6	2	8%
	No Representation of Light and Shade:	-	-	-

Caption

The final category of the codebook, “caption,” refers to the textual content of the post and considers its relationship to the visual imagery. While Instagram is primarily considered an image-based platform, it is important to recognize that accompanied text, through the use of captions, can contribute to the overall message communicated within the post. When considering Instagram specifically, there are several phrases and symbols that are heavily affiliated with the platform. This includes “link in bio,” user tags (@), “photo credit/” the camera emoji, and hashtags (#). On top of accounting for the presence of these phrases/symbols and determining the relationship between the textual and visual content, goop and Poosh’s captions and external blog post titles were collected and entered into Voyant Tools to uncover the most commonly used words.

Relationship to Image***goop***

Firstly, after reviewing goop's dataset, it became apparent that the post captions exhibited both direct (n=27) and indirect (n=23) relationships to the images they accompanied. Approximately half of the captions directly related to the image, while the other half indirectly related to the image. An example of a direct relationship from the sample is goop's post featuring a plated meal of shrimp and vegetables, with a caption reading, "We're not gonna lie, we have cooking fatigue. That's why we keep coming back to this easy shrimp stir-fry: It comes together quickly and it's totally riffable. Link in bio for the recipe." Contrarily, an example of an indirect relationship from the sample is goop's post picturing a balcony dinner set-up, with a caption reading, "Mother's Day is coming, and we have gift ideas for you: dove-grey Italian cashmere, luxe smoothing eye masks, a bidet seat, and more...link in bio for the full guide. 📷:

@angiesophie." As observed with this second example, the caption does not explicitly reference any of the represented participants seen within the post. Therefore, the caption does not intimately relate to the image and thus represents an indirect relationship.

Poosh

Poosh's dataset also revealed both direct (n=19) and indirect (n=31) relationships between the captions and images, however, indirect relationships accounted for about two-thirds of the posts. While Poosh's sample clearly represented three main wellness sectors on a visual level, it might be that the captions of these posts did not necessarily align with these same sectors. With such a large portion of both samples exhibiting indirect relationships between the visual and textual content, it is worth considering the broader implications of such a finding. Given that the majority of posts are associated with an external blog article, and these pieces require effort/research to create, one could likely gather that the blog articles are typically written first. If the Instagram images are chosen afterwards, it could be that certain blog topics are more difficult

to match with a visual. This could be for various reasons too, as the topic might not easily align with an image, or the topic might not be captivating enough in visual form. Therefore, it is beneficial to gain a general understanding of the content covered in these captions, which will be the focus of the next sub-section, “keyword tracking.”

Table 14

Results of the Caption Analysis

Caption		goop	Poosh	Total Percentage
Relationship to Image)	Direct:	27	19	46%
	Indirect:	23	31	54%
Inclusions)	Link in Bio:	42	43	85%
	User Tag:	7	20	27%
	Ad:	-	-	-
	Photo Credit:	35	39	74%
	Hashtag:	9	50	59%

Keyword Tracking

goop

After entering goop’s captions into Voyant Tools, the system generated the following key words: bio (n=42), link (n=42), skin (n=11), new (n=10), read (n=9), and sex (n=9). Evidently, from this data, one could infer that the large majority of posts mentioned a “link in bio,” meaning that the caption and image were associated with an external blog post or e-commerce website. However, it is interesting to note that approximately eight posts were not affiliated with an external link, suggesting that they were not intended to sell product or share additional knowledge. After entering goop’s external blog titles into Voyant Tools, the system generated the following key words: skin (n=5), sex (n=4), beauty (n=3), clean (n=2), detox (n=2), and gp’s (n=2). From this combined data, it is apparent that both “skin” and “sex” were consistently two of the most commonly used words within the associated text of goop’s most-liked posts. While the frequent mention of skin is relatively expected given the prominent visual representation of the Personal

Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging sector, the use of the word “sex” is somewhat surprising. Since only five of goop’s images were categorized as belonging to the Healthy Relationships and Sexual Wellness sector, this could be a potential result of some of the company’s visual imagery not clearly aligning with the textual captions, whether that was intentional or not.

Poosh

After entering Poosh’s captions into Voyant Tools, the system generated the following key terms: #pooshtheboundaries (n=49), bio (n=43), link (n=43), @kourtneykardash (n=21), poosh (n=17), and kourt’s (n=8). Again, from this data, it is evident that the majority of posts referenced a “link in bio,” meaning that they were further affiliated with an external blog post or e-commerce website. Similar to goop, there were approximately seven posts that were not associated with an external link, suggesting that they may represent “filler.” After entering Poosh’s external blog titles into Voyant Tools, the system generated the following key words: kourt’s (n=6), kourt (n=4), makeup (n=4), poosh (n=4), drop (n=3), and shop (n=3). From this combined data, it is clear that Kourtney Kardashian is consistently mentioned in the text associated with Poosh’s most-liked posts. This finding is certainly not surprising, though, as Kourtney Kardashian was proven to be physically present in exactly half of the sample’s images. In addition to this, the company’s name, “Poosh,” and signature hashtag, “#pooshtheboundaries,” are consistently cited across the text as well. The widespread mention of “Poosh” may indicate that consumers are not just passively accepting of the Poosh brand, but may actually be influenced by content attached to the company’s name, such as a post sharing “Poosh-approved” products, for example. In terms of the hashtag, it is clear that “#pooshtheboundaries” is explicitly referenced in almost every single caption. Poosh’s commitment to its hashtag suggests that the

company is attempting to truly brand its content and, perhaps, create a specialized community on Instagram dedicated to Poosh consumers.

One last finding that surfaced from both datasets was the significant use of the camera emoji, followed by a colon and a user tag, which symbolizes and provides “photo credit” to the original photographer. It was rather surprising to discover that almost all 100 images, from both goop and Poosh’s samples, were not taken by the companies themselves. This means that the majority of images were not exclusively photographed for each company’s use and were, instead, retrieved from another account’s public feed. This finding suggests that, for the most part, goop and Poosh were both unable to physically customize the images that appeared in their most-liked posts. However, with that said, one billion global users make Instagram an incredibly popular platform, resulting in a vast array of content to handpick from. Therefore, while goop and Poosh’s social media teams do not explicitly create the visual content they publish from scratch, they still have the ability to search for the images that best fit their posts and overall brand.

Table 15

Results of the Keyword Analysis

Keyword Tracking	goop	Poosh
Captions:	bio (42), link (42), skin (11), new (10), read (9), sex (9)	#pooshtheboundaries (49), bio (43), link (43), @kourtneykardash (21), poosh (17), kourt’s (8)
External Blog Posts:	skin (5), sex (4), beauty (3), clean (2), detox (2), gp’s (2)	kourt’s (6), kourt (4), makeup (4), poosh (4), drop (3), shop (3)

Discussion

Having presented the results of the analysis, it is now beneficial to return to the original research questions:

RQ1: How do wellness companies use Instagram's image-based platform to market their brands and products?

RQ2: What specific aesthetic elements/features of posts promote increased consumer engagement?

While the analysis revealed both similarities and differences between each company's approach to Instagram marketing, goop and Poosh were mutually able to capitalize on the platform's reputation for aspirational aesthetics.

One of the overarching themes noted throughout the analysis was the general emphasis on celebrity. As we know from Rojek's (2001) work, celebrities are fundamentally designed to generate desire and achieve impact in public. Thus, the staged celebrity is quite literally a symbol of aspiration, exuding perfection in every realm. From the analysis, and even a scroll through the company's feed, it is clear that both goop and Poosh's Instagram accounts heavily draw on their celebrity affiliation by placing Gwyneth Paltrow and Kourtney Kardashian at the forefront of their brands. Out of the combined 100 posts that made up the study's sample, 46 images included a visual representation of a famous celebrity, indicating a clear strategy on the companies' behalf, as well as an apparent interest amongst consumers. Through such visual representation, goop and Poosh consistently leverage the "public addiction to celebrity" that Rojek (2001) speaks of in order to capture the audience's attention, drive engagement, and motivate viewers to read on and perhaps make a purchase (p. 10). While both goop and Poosh heavily incorporate their female founders and famous friends/family into their visual marketing on Instagram, each company does so in a slightly different way, based on the celebrity's personal reputation. For example, Gwyneth Paltrow was mostly featured in an elegant, demure, and lavish manner, exemplified in the photos of the founder modelling her line of tasteful, but costly, clothing.

When other celebrities were featured, it was via old photos with previous romantic partners, likely for the nostalgic appeal that it offers her fans.

Figure 16, Figure 17, & Figure 18

Gwyneth Paltrow Modeling G. Label on goop's Instagram

Kourtney Kardashian, on the other hand, was mostly shown in a bold, sensual fashion, exemplified in the photos of the founder wearing revealing attire and a full face of makeup. When other celebrities were featured, it was usually her famous sisters, who are all heavily associated with their popular reality television show, “Keeping Up With The Kardashians.”

Figure 19, Figure 20, & Figure 21

Kourtney Kardashian's Presence on Poosh's Instagram

Both companies were therefore able to visually draw on the aspirational facets of each celebrity that make them desirable to the public in order to capture their existing fanbase and, ideally, translate admiration into revenue. For wellness companies that are not directly affiliated with a prominent celebrity, this finding might suggest the benefits of partnering with influencers, perhaps on the micro-level, who are able to promote external products and brands to their following.

In addition to leveraging Gwyneth Paltrow and Kourtney Kardashian's celebrity personas, both goop and Poosh appeared to place an emphasis on physical wellness domains within their posts. Given Gwyneth Paltrow and Kourtney Kardashian's prominence within the beauty industry, it is no surprise that both companies visually prioritized the Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging wellness sector within their posts. As we know from research conducted by the Global Wellness Institute (2018), this particular sector represents the most lucrative of the wellness industry, accounting for approximately 1,083 billion dollars of the global market. In goop and Poosh's sample, skincare and makeup, specifically, appeared to represent the majority of posts categorized under this sector, exemplified in both visual and written content. In addition, goop placed a clear emphasis on the Healthy Eating, Nutrition, and Weight Loss sector, while Poosh prioritized the Fitness and Mind-Body sector. Not only are these sectors identified as the second and third most profitable of the industry, but they also all appear to prioritize the physical component of wellness, making them aspirational at their core. This finding therefore demonstrates that physical appearance continues to play a central role in wellness production and consumption, despite the increased interest in mental, emotional, and spiritual health, as proposed by Grénman et al. (2018). While the latter realms did, indeed, generate engagement in both goop and Poosh's samples, it was proven difficult to compete with the overwhelming

themes of physical beauty surrounding skin, makeup, nutrition, fitness, and weight loss. There are, of course, internal benefits that may come with using natural skincare products or losing weight, for instance. However, the captions that accompanied such posts within the physical wellness realm tended to promote products and share knowledge purely for external value. While it cannot necessarily be proven in this particular study, it seems that consumers would likely engage with products in this realm, for example, as a means of self-branding. By losing weight and posting the physical transformation online, consumers are able to gain a new form of social capital, as suggested by Grénman et al. (2018). It is important to further acknowledge that while physical appearance seemingly remains at the forefront of the industry, the standards depicted through both visual and written content are far from inclusive. Through promoting different products and tips to achieve a “rounder butt,” “tight and toned abs,” “clear, luminous skin,” and “glossy, luscious locks,” certain bodies are evidently privileged over others, as previously noted by Wykes and Gunter (2005), as well as Foucault (1988) (Kardashian, n.d.). Based on the study’s sample, the most prominent physical appearance involved a white woman with bronzed skin, a flawless complexion, a flat, toned stomach, and long hair, implying that hegemonic desirability somehow indicates optimal well-being.

Furthermore, it was clear that both goop and Poosh consistently aimed to drive traffic to external webpages by referencing a “link in bio” within their captions. In fact, the use of the phrase “link in bio” was detected in exactly 85 captions. This means that 85 posts were affiliated with a specific blog article or e-commerce webpage located outside of the Instagram app, offering further information on a topic or an opportunity to shop for products. According to Schultz (2017), the “link in bio” represents a form of interactivity, namely a “call to action,” which is able to activate target audiences and drive engagement. He does note, however, that

interaction forms and degrees are likely to vary across content types and industries. Given the aforementioned numbers, it appears that the “link in bio” feature is not only a deliberate inclusion, but also a standard maintained by both wellness companies. It is reasonable to suggest, then, that goop and Poosh consumers both expect and enjoy engaging in additional content delivered by each company, considering the amount of likes attained on posts including the mention of a “link in bio.” Given the exploratory and sometimes scientific nature of the wellness industry, it may be that consumers are generally more interested and willing to read further information that Instagram is not able to provide, given the space restriction and general platform expectations. While the specific reasoning for increased engagement can be explored with further research, it is apparent that both goop and Poosh consistently incorporate the mention of a “link in bio” in order to drive consumers to an external link.

In terms of specific aesthetic elements/features that appeared to drive engagement, there were several consistently identified across the sample. Both goop and Poosh’s most-liked posts appeared to incorporate high modality images, most often depicting a person or multiple people. Within the combined sample, 72 images included the presence of a human being, indicating the seemingly large impact that people have on the liking behaviour of wellness content. In addition to this, 79 posts included “realistic” visual content, meaning that the images did not undergo noticeable modifications through the use of filters, overlaid text, photoshopped elements, etc. From browsing each company’s Instagram feed, it is apparent that both accounts do not solely feature this type of content, meaning that product shots and animated images, for example, are also found on each company’s page. From these observations, it is apparent that both goop and Poosh’s content generates greater engagement when it incorporates photographs of human beings that come across as “real” rather than abstract, for example. Shapiro (1988) notes that “of

all modes of representation, [photography] is the one most easily assimilated into the discourses of knowledge and truth for it is thought to be ... a copy of what we [consider] the 'real'" (as cited in Harrison, 2003, p. 56). As mentioned in the "findings" section, it might be that consumers associate "realistic" and people-centric imagery with content that is familiar to them and therefore more easily translated into their own lifestyles. When a human being, for instance, is pictured within a "realistic" visual scene, viewers are likely able to relate the content to their own lives somehow, making the post feel more applicable to them than a collage, drawing, or painting might. While it may be assumed that such posts were successful simply because they featured famous celebrities, it was apparent from the sample that even the images with out-of-frame or concealed faces were able to drive engagement as well. Thus, it can be said that "realistic" and people-centric images seem to generate likes in the wellness space.

This leads to the final aesthetic elements that appeared to drive engagement within the sample: artful concealment and stylized fragmentation. The analysis uncovered that posts concealing non-celebrity faces were able to drive likes, while posts featuring Gwyneth Paltrow and Kourtney Kardashian's faces evidently did the same. This finding not only reinforces the apparent fixation on celebrity figures, but it also indicates a specialized aesthetic preference. While the general flow of each company's Instagram feed does not prove to hide every model's face, the most-liked posts presented a clear visual trend of concealment, indicating a consumer, and perhaps an industry, preference. According to Wilson (2007), such artful concealment allows the exotic "Other" to evoke a sheen of glamour, beauty, and emotional power. She further notes that the elitism of glamour suggests that "we cannot all be glamorous," but "we can aspire to [be]," thus highlighting the aspirational appeal of these particular images (Wilson, 2007, p. 100). With exactly 26 posts reflecting "a mysterious blend of accessibility and distance ... neither

transparent or opaque ... [but] translucent” (as cited in Wilson, 2007, p. 100), it appears as though goop and Poosh consumers, and perhaps wellness consumers at large, are attracted to the aesthetic of seamless perfection, stemming from glamour through concealment. In addition to the artful concealment of non-celebrity faces, stylized fragmentation of non-celebrity body parts appeared to play a foundational role in the visual aesthetic of both company’s most-liked posts. According to Khan (2012), fragmentation depicts “what is no longer present, but already familiar” (p. 240). By dividing the body into segments, viewers are invited to bring the parts to life, creating the illusion of movement out of still imagery. It is through this movement that viewers create meaning and experience a fetishistic pleasure in looking, which may explain the increased like count observed within these particular posts.

Conclusion

The aim of this research paper was twofold: first, to assess the overall content that wellness companies use to market themselves on Instagram, and second, to determine what specific aesthetic elements promote increased user engagement. From general observance, it was clear that both goop and Poosh consistently emphasized their celebrity affiliation and promoted physical wellness domains within their published content, while regularly directing consumers to their blog articles and e-commerce websites through the use of captions. Based on the visual social semiotic analysis, it was determined that each company's most-liked posts were composed of high modality and people-centric imagery. Finally, from thinking outside of the visual social semiotic box concerning what was, or was not, represented within the image frame and considering the broader visual and social implications as tied to fashion studies, it was discovered that artful concealment and stylized fragmentation remained integral aesthetic elements of each company's most-liked posts.

This conclusion generally affirms much of the existing literature pertaining to the wellness economy, social media marketing, health-centric advertisements, and celebrity persona. Moreover, this study was able to fill a gap in the literature with respect to wellness marketing on Instagram, specifically. While goop and Poosh evidently make up a niche community within the wellness industry, this study was able to bring these previously researched areas together and confirm that certain elements hold true in this uniquely layered space. In addition, this study was able to contribute new findings pertaining to enhanced engagement within the industry, such as the artful concealment of non-celebrity faces, the stylized fragmentation of non-celebrity bodies, and the emphasis on realistic, human-centric photographs.

Limitations and Further Research

The biggest limitation for this research stems from the pure vastness of the wellness industry. As previously addressed, the wellness industry encompasses a variety of domains and consequently covers a wide range of products, services, and experiences. As a result, there are many different companies with distinct offerings that exist within the industry. This research specifically considers two wellness companies that are inherently linked to major female celebrities. Because this is a niche area within the industry, the findings from this study may not necessarily be applicable to wellness companies without a celebrity affiliation or a similar offering. While it is simply not possible to capture every single type of wellness company in one study, future research on this topic might consider analyzing similar female-owned and operated wellness companies that are not directly associated with globally recognized celebrities. This may further validate the findings, introduce new marketing methods, or provide a combination of the two.

Another limitation for this research surrounded the approach to measuring user engagement. Looking at Instagram specifically, there are multiple ways to interact with a post: it can occur in the form of a like, a comment, a share, a save, or even a click. Given the scope of the paper, this study aimed to detect the most-liked posts only. However, it is possible that other forms of engagement may be more valuable to these companies from a corporate perspective, whether that entails direct profit, increased exposure, and so on. Without more specialized knowledge on user analytics in this space, it is difficult to determine the most impactful form of engagement for these companies. Therefore, further research could explore user analytics more thoroughly and attempt to identify which form of engagement these companies primarily aim to receive on Instagram. Alternatively, future studies could attempt to calculate overall engagement rates to generate more holistic findings. With the continuous development of technology and the

ever-growing demand from digital consumers and marketers, it is also important to note that Instagram is constantly changing its algorithm. As a result, companies on the platform must remain current with the new measurements of engagement in order to fully benefit from their online presence.

Overall, this paper was able to provide insight into the seemingly under-researched area of wellness marketing. While the industry is comprised of numerous distinct sectors, this study was able to demonstrate that celebrity affiliation, the physical wellness domain, “link in bio” references, high modality, human-centric photographs, and an aesthetic of artful concealment and stylized fragmentation all consistently contributed to goop and Poosh’s marketing strategies on Instagram. While the prioritization of mental, emotional, and spiritual health may be on the rise in Western societies, this study ultimately reveals the unwavering power that the physical realm, in terms of outward appearance, continues to hold over wellness consumers in today’s visual, digital culture.

Appendices

Appendix A: goop's Five Most-Liked Posts From Sample

1.

2.

3.

4.

When you get to
day 11 of dry January.

5.

Appendix B: Poosh's Five Most-Liked Posts From Sample

1.

2.

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poosh

poosh Look and feel your best this summer with our top workouts to help build a six-pack. Get toning and tightening at the link in our bio.
: @kourtneykardash
#pooshtheboundaries
#pooshthemoves

6w

aliceandolivia This is #GOALS

5w 1 like Reply

neikks she is the moment 🥵🥵

6w 41 likes Reply

— View replies (1)

Liked by alexiparente and 57,862 others

APRIL 26

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Appendix C: Codebook

Category	Definition + Sub-Categories	Example	Code Source
Wellness Sector	<u>The 10 Industries of the Wellness Economy:</u> Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging; Healthy Eating, Nutrition, and Weight Loss; Wellness Tourism; Fitness and Mind-Body; Preventive and Personalized Medicine and Public Health; Traditional and Complementary Medicine; Wellness Lifestyle Real Estate; Spa Economy; Thermal/Mineral Springs; or Workplace Wellness	Photo of Skincare Products (Personal Care, Beauty, and Anti-Aging)	Global Wellness Institute, n.d.
Representational Metafunction	<u>What the Picture is “About:”</u> Image Structure: Narrative (Vectors of Motion) or Conceptual Represented Participants (RPs): People, Places, and/or Objects	Photo of a Fitness Class (Narrative - Action); Fruit Smoothies (Conceptual - Classificatory) Photo of Gwyneth Paltrow (Person); Grocery Aisle (Place); Supplement Bottle (Object)	Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001
Interpersonal Metafunction	<u>How the Picture Engages the Viewer:</u> Contact (RP): Demand (Direct Eye Contact) or Offer Social Distance (RP): Close-Up (Head and Shoulders or Less), Medium Shot (Cut Off Somewhere Between Waist and Knees), or Long Shot (Full Figure) Horizontal Perspective (RP): Frontal Angle or Oblique Angle Vertical Perspective (RP): High Angle, Medium Angle, or Low Angle	Photo of Two People Looking at Each Other (Offer) Photo of Kourtney Kardashian Modelling Athletic Wear (Long Shot) Photo of a Book From the Side (Oblique Angle) Photo of a Salad Shot From Above (Low Angle)	Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001
Compositional Metafunction	<u>How the Representational and Interpersonal Metafunctions Integrate into a “Meaningful Whole:”</u> Information Value (RP): Left/Right, Top/Bottom, and/or Center/Margin System Salience (RP): Size, Focus, Tonal Contrast, Colour Contrast, and/or Foreground/Background Image Framing: Connect or Divide Image Modality: Colour Saturation/Differentiation/Modulation, Contextualization, Depth, and Illumination	Centered Photo of a Dumbbell (Center System) Photo of a Small Avocado (Size); Out-of-Focus Runner (Focus); Clear Blue Sky (Tonal Contrast); Bright Pink Bikini (Colour Contrast); Blurred Background (Foreground) Collage (Divide) Black-and-White Photo (Colour); Beach in the Background (Contextualization); Valley (Depth); Light Coming Through Window (Illumination)	Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001
Caption	<u>How the Text Contributes Rhetorically to the Image</u> Relationship: Direct or Indirect Inclusions: Link in Bio, User Tag, Ad, Photo Credit, and/or Hashtag Keyword Tracking (Captions + External Links)	Photo of an Apple, Caption Describing Health Benefits of Apples (Direct) Caption Links to Blog Post: “5 Exercises You Should Be Doing Every Day” (Link in Bio) Insert Caption Here, Insert Blog Title Here	Harrison, 2003

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