

المعايير الحاكمة للمحتوى لسرديات القصص المرئية للماركة على منصات التواصل الاجتماعي

"دراسة تجريبية مع طلاب تصميم الجرافيك وبناء الماركة"

## Content Criteria for Brands' Visual Storytelling Narratives on Social Media Platforms

"An Experimental Study with Graphic Design & Branding Students"

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### ملخص البحث

تناقش الورقة البحثية موضوع القصص المرئية للماركة على منصات التواصل الاجتماعي، وكيف يمكن توظيفها وتقييمها والتوصل إلى المعايير الحاكمة التي يمكن من خلالها تقييم المحتوى الخاص بتلك السرديات من حيث الفاعلية والكفاءة. البحث قائم على تجربة عملية في مقرر السرد القصصي البصري لطلبة الفرقة الثانية، الفصل الدراسي الرابع، ببرنام تصميم الجرافيك وبناء الماركة، كلية الفنون والتصميم، جامعة الملك سلمان الدولية بشرم الشيخ. قامت التجربة على المشروع الثاني للمقرر والذي يستهدف ماركات محلية من البيئة المحيطة بمدينة شرم الشيخ، حيث يتعامل معها الطلاب تقريبا بشكل يومي ولديهم مخزون عاطفي تجاهها.

قام الطلاب بالتواصل مع أصحاب الماركات، وتجميع المعلومات المطلوبة، ثم بدأت مرحلة التصميم للسرديات القصصية المطلوبة، وجاءت متنوعة على النحو التالي: ملصقات فوتوغرافية، ملصقات كولاغ فوتوغرافي، ملصقات رسومية، ملفات نقطية GIF، ميمز Memes، بالإضافة إلى التصميمات الخاصة بملفات التقديم PowerPoint Presentations. من خلال متابعة المحتوى الذي أنتجه الطلاب تم التوصل إلى مجموعة من المعايير وجاءت كالتالي: محتوى مقارب أو مناسب، قادر على جذب الناس وربطهم بالمضمون، تعليمي بمعنى قادر على توصيل المعلومة للجمهور، قادر على توليد التعاطف، مشجع لتجربة النسخ المتطابق، أخلاقي، له رسالة قابلة للقراءة الواضحة، له محتوى اقناعي، محفز بقوة. وقد أوصى البحث بتدريس مقرر التصوير القصصي السردى للعلامات الجارية في أقسام الإعلان وبناء الماركة حيث لا يدرس في معظم الأكاديميات بمصر، كذلك أوصى البحث بتبني الماركات المصرية في مشروعات المقررات استجابة لخطة مصر للتنمية المستدامة.

### Keywords

Visual Storytelling, Content Criteria, Social Media Platforms, Visual Storytelling Narratives.

## 1. Introduction

As a result of the continued evolution of social media platforms in the period amid 1990s and mid-2000s, Businesses needed new channels for visual engagement. Sites such as; blogging platforms, Myspace, Delicious, Flickr, and Facebook created early opportunities for brands to obtain such engagement with customers and potential customers. Myspace, for instance, offered users various opportunities to personalize their profiles, allowing them to customize backgrounds, music and content shared. The main advantage of such platforms was their ability to bring like-minded individuals together online. The key factor here, was to identify what brings people to a social media platform, and what value they derive from the platform, and accordingly, determine how businesses shall design their social-media communications and promotions.

It is quite challenging for brands to understand that people don't go on social media sites to view brand-generated content, meaning that brands have to strive to be a welcome interruption in the News Feed of the public. Brands' visual content has to be attention-grabbing, and emotionally compelling, as well as, relevant in order to avoid the risks of being unliked. Sadly for brands, Facebook users can hide any unwelcomed content from their News Feed, which is, in fact, worse than the unlike.<sup>1</sup> The only way for brands to avoid such forfeiture is by creating images that compel viewers to think and feel in a certain way, and this specifically is the core objective in business strategies on social media. Dexterous brands don't hesitate to pay high amounts of money on their images on social media. In 2001, Pepsi budgeted over \$1 billion on its image, while, in the same year, Coca-Cola budgeted \$1.4 billion for its image in response.<sup>21</sup>

This research paper introduces an academic experiment with students of Level 2; 4<sup>th</sup> semester, Program of Graphic Design and Branding, Faculty of art & Design, King Salman International University, Egypt. The experiment was designed in the form of a given-project under the course name Visual Storytelling (VCD234), where the students were asked to create a social media ad campaign for a local brand in Sharm El Sheikh. The main objective of the campaign was to generate brands' engagement and likability amongst social media population. In advance, the main objective of the experiment was to conclude the content criteria for a successful branding visual storytelling content.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter, Ekaterina and Gioglio, Jessica: The Power of Visual Storytelling; How to Use Visuals, Videos, and Social Media to Market Your Brand, McGrawHill Education, USA, UK, Spain, Madrid, Italy, India, Singapore, Australia, Canada, 2014, P:p. 9:13.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The problem of this paper can be stated in the research question as follows:

- What are the content criteria for visual storytelling narratives, and how can they be fulfilled in brands' visual storytelling designs created by the students?
- How to produce students' visual storytelling narratives aiming to leverage local brands' images on social media platforms, such as; Facebook and Instagram?

## **3. Aims and Objectives**

This research paper shades the light on an educational experiment conducted with students of Graphic Design and Branding Program. The students were fully devoted to the process, and showed interest and enthusiasm during the stages of gathering information and creating the content. This paper's main objective is to conclude a sufficient set of criteria for visual storytelling content that can be incorporated in academic curriculums and research works of the profession.

## **4. Hypothesis**

The research paper suggests that visual storytelling on social media platforms faces lots of challenges due to a multitude of risk factors, such as; the plethora of like-contents, the speedy atmosphere, and the technicalities and algorithms of social media platforms. Therefore, a visual storytelling content, in order to fulfill its role in leveraging brands' images has to attain a set of principles, forming a full range of criteria. The most important criterion is for the content to be engaging, and hence, generating likes and, hopefully, go viral.

## **5. Significance and Importance**

As a result of brands' vicious competition and over-exposure on social media platforms, it became a must for brands to delve for more and more compelling visual narratives that are capable of generating engagement, likability and loyalty. Hence academic students are the future of the profession, it is very necessary to deliver them such knowledge in both of its theoretical, as well as, academic forms.

## **6. Delimitations and Scope**

This research paper is restricted to the subject matter of "content criteria for brands' visual storytelling narratives on social media platforms; an experimental study with Graphic Design and Branding students". The project is restricted to only local brands in Sharm Elsheikh.

## **7. Research Methodology**

The study adopts a descriptive approach in describing and analyzing the theoretical framework. Samples of five students' responses are included. The sample consists of (2 photographic posters, 2 Photo-collage posters, 2 illustration posters, 2 Memes, 2 GIFs, and one video narrative).

## 8. Literature Review

The concept of Brand Storytelling is relatively new in businesses' literature, it is concerned with the emotionally-fulfilling brand stories being told on media platforms, especially those of social media. Brand stories are carefully articulated and boosted in order to generate audience's engagement, likability, and eventually, if undisturbed, sincere brand loyalty.<sup>2</sup>

**Brand Storytelling.** Can be identified as; “a brand’s narrative aimed for generating engagement and likability among its audiences, by incorporating stories such as; founders, origin, product, customer...etc.”<sup>3</sup>

In the same sense, **Brand Visual Storytelling** can be defined as; “a brand’s narrative aimed for generating engagement and likability among its audiences, by incorporating visual content, e.g.; images and videos created mainly for being boosted on social media platforms”<sup>4</sup>

There are a multitude of narratives on social media platforms that can be incorporated in brands' visual storytelling efforts, each narrative has its own technicalities and specifics, yet, their contents share the same principles and, therefore, rubric of criteria. The ever-evolving changes, or enhancements, on social media technicalities and algorithms makes it challenging for brands to determine which narrative to be prioritized over the others. Social Media narratives list includes; Photographic posters, photo-collage posters, illustration posters, memes, GIFs, videos...etc.

### 8.1. The Power of Social Media Platforms

One example that would demonstrate how social media can hurt a brand's reputation is what happened with Proctor & Gamble's Pampers Dry Max diapers.

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<sup>2</sup> Miller, Donald: Building a Story Brand, Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen, Harper Collins Leadership, 2017, e-book published on June, 11, 2023 by Life Feeling.

<sup>3</sup> Definition articulated by the researcher.

<sup>4</sup> Definition articulated by the researcher.

The power of social media population is showed in the case of Proctor & Gamble’s Pampers Dry Max diapers when some moms on Facebook started believing that the diapers caused rashes and even chemical burns on their babies.

The case started with one mom initiating a page with the headline “P&G, Bring Back the Old Cruisers/Swaddlers” and described her baby’s rashes laying blame on the brand’s new diapers. Lots of women signed on the page and posted similar complaints, and the demand that “P&G must recall the diapers” gained traction.<sup>1</sup>

Soon, the Facebook page had over 11,000 “friends”, and as a reaction, P&G had expanded research to prove that the rashes were not due to the new diapers. P&G tried to defend itself in the media, then invited a group of moms, including some who were involved in the Facebook page, to a personal meeting and shared the company’s research findings and listened to the moms’ complaints.<sup>6</sup>

The case of P&G informs brands that social media platforms can eradicate a company’s reputation that could have taken years to be built. On the other hand, they can also leverage companies’ client bases, generate engagement, likability and loyalty among online populations.

## 8.2. Challenges on Social Media Platforms

The more frequently users reward a brand’s posts with positive engagement, the better chance for those posts to reach their fans’ News Feeds, in a technical phenomenon called, the “friend-of-friend” effect. The friend-of-friend effect allows people to post on their friends’ walls, and when tagging someone in a post, expanding it to include the tagged person and his friends.<sup>7</sup>

EdgeRank is an algorithm on Facebook that magnifies the reach of a visual content according to its affinity, weight and decay. The higher each of these factors is, the more people will see



Picture No.1 A Facebook post accusing P&G of causing rashes to babies.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://gillin.com/blog/2012/08/attack-of-the-customers-the-pampers-dry-max-crisis/>

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Kaputa: Breakthrough branding: how smart entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs transform a small idea into a big brand, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, UK, USA, 2012, P.p. 19, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Walter, Ekaterina and Gioglio, Jessica: The Power of Visual Storytelling; How to Use Visuals, Videos, and Social Media to Market Your Brand, McGrawHill Education, USA, UK, Spain, Madrid, Italy, India, Singapore, Australia, Canada, 2014, P. 13.

them. In a way, EdgeRank decides what people see or not see, laying much more challenge on brands to maintain their presence on the platform. Brands have always complained that they work very hard to grow their Facebook fans base to large numbers, only to have the algorithm select whom to serve the relevant content to, thus allowing only a small fraction of fans to see each single update brands post.<sup>15</sup>

Brands now are compelled to develop their specific visual languages if they want to preserve a meaningful and proliferate presence among the plethora of visual contents on the various social media platforms. Such presence that would support its branding strategies by creating a vast clientele base that sustains loyalty and sincerity to the brand and its core values.

### **8.3. The Experimental Study**

#### **8.3.1. Course Structure**

##### **8.3.1.1 Course Description (as per the university bylaw)**

Visual storytelling course focuses on the new media and the cultural narratives that shape it, stories appropriate for modern society and how people communicate their story using visuals and digital media such as video, graphics, and photography. It also the art of telling your brand's story using visual media as it can humanize the business, giving the target market a way to relate to the business and their story.

##### **8.3.1.2. Course Overall Aims of the Course**

- This course focuses on the new media and the cultural narratives that shape it, stories appropriate for modern society and how people communicate their story using visuals and digital media such as video, graphics, and photography.

#### **8.1.3. Course Intended Learning Outcomes:**

##### **A- Knowledge and Understanding:**

- 1- To recognize the significance of brand storytelling in today's market.
- 2- To understand the key concepts and approaches of brand storytelling.
- 3- To identify the different visual narratives of brand storytelling (photography – graphics – video).

##### **B- Intellectual Skills:**

- 1- To classify the visual narratives of brand storytelling (photography – graphics – video), and be able to determine which is the best use in a specific situation.
- 2- To analyze brand stories in today's market, and compare them in a cultural context.

- 3- To develop a critical approach towards the way brands tell their stories to their audience.
- 4- To examine different approaches of visual brand storytelling and evaluate their impact on audience-brand engagement.

**C- Professional and Practical Skills:**

- 1- To apply the key attributes and techniques of brand storytelling in the production of visual storytelling narratives (photography – graphics – video).
- 2- To be able to produce brand storytelling narratives that are creative and visually persuasive.

**D- General and Transferable Skills:**

- 1- Work in a group
- 2- Use computer software in graphic design
- 3- Life-long self-learning

### 8.3.1.4. Course Content Topics

**Introduction: The Rise & Evolution of Visual Storytelling** (The introduction of Facebook and other platforms -the Newsfeed -the Mini-feed -the Timeline -introduction of edgerank -Mobile use -B2B and B2C use of social media - Key stats)

**Types of Images Used for Visual Storytelling** (Types of Visual Content: Images -Cartoons -gifs -Infographics -Videos -Presentations -Aggregators)

**Keys to Photographic Storytelling** (Examples of photographic Storytelling-Keys to obtain powerful storytelling photography -Elements of a good storytelling photo)

**Using animated graphics in brand storytelling** (Why use motion graphics -The process of creating animated brand story)

**Brand Storytelling Through Video Production** (What is video storytelling? -traits of a good brand storytelling video -advantages of video marketing -corporate video storytelling - types of videos in marketing -types of video storytelling (formats)- process of video storytelling-video storytelling techniques and tips)

**Visual Storytelling Best Practices** (Examples of photographic storytelling- examples of brand storytelling static graphic ads -examples of brand video storytelling -examples of brand storytelling animated graphic ads -future of brand storytelling).

### 8.3.1.5. Teaching and Learning Methods

Student-based learning is the core teaching method applied at this course. It is integrated with project-based learning while working on their projects. Groups are being constructed to integrate efforts for the completion of the group project. Self-study and self-learning are also encouraged in order to enhance the overall teaching experiment. Critical thinking and free opinion demonstration are highly appreciated during classes and project implementation.

### 8.3.1.6. Course Project Description

The course practical part entailed two projects; they were graded of 20 Marks each. In the first project, students were asked to create a visual storytelling social media campaign for a global brand. The projects items were:

- Photographic poster
- Photocollage poster
- Illustration poster
- Short video narrative
- Themed PowerPoint presentation.

In the second project, students were asked to create a visual storytelling social media campaign for a local brand. The projects items were:

- Photographic poster
- Photocollage poster
- Illustration poster
- Meme
- GIF
- Video narrative
- Themed PowerPoint Presentation.

Starting with global brands was planned in order to make it easier for students to relate to the brands' visual identities and get the visual feeding needed. Then the students were asked to repeat the process, only with a slight addition, on the local brands chosen by the students.

Students were advised to contact the businesses personally, gathering data and testimonials, in order to attain an in-depth understanding of brands' essences. Students were also informed that they are not allowed to use visuals other than those generated by themselves. They can use photos from the internet only as references for their illustrations, as for photography, they are obliged to take their own photos, as well as, pose and act for each other.

### 8.3.2. Students' Responses Samples

#### 8.3.2.1. Student Project N0.1 (Santorini Restaurant and Caffè)

**Brand Background** (as written by the student)

Santorini opened in 2020 in Corona, and they just liked the Greece Santorini style, so they just opened (you only live once), their hidden gem is the restaurant style itself no one can create a piece of Santorini just like that and don't forget about mountain view the sky and the sea there. Their number 1 customers are Italians. And when they opened, they were Ukrainians, Russians and Turkish, and their most working hour is between 5 and 6 and their most working day is Sunday.

- Photographic poster



- Photocollage poster



- Illustration poster



- Meme

mix sea food  
pizza



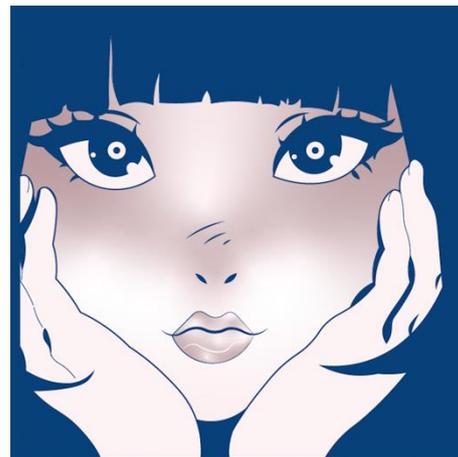
Santorini  
pizaa



=What is your best cocktail?  
-Santorini virgin  
=and your alcoholic?  
-Santorini  
=pizza?



- GIF

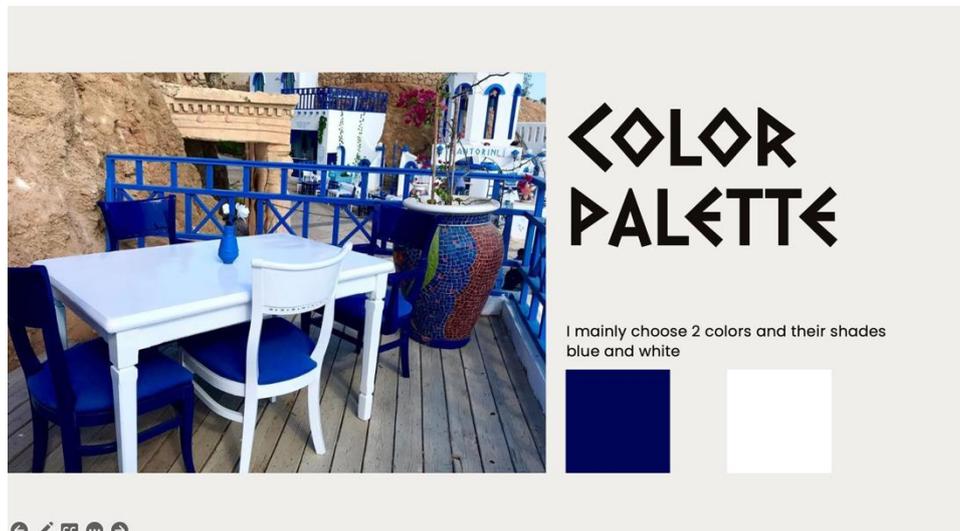


- Video narratives



The video is a narrative content, as the student narrator reviews the place's features and multiple easthetics.

- **Themed PowerPoint Presentation.**

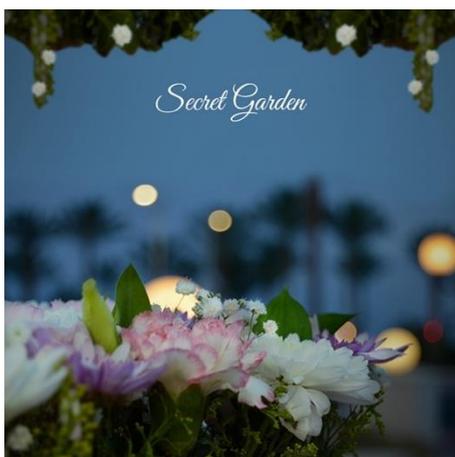


**8.3.2.2. Student Project N0.2 (Secret Garden)**

**Brand Background** (as written by the student)

This shop has been established since 1998, it has two branches (in Al-Gharqana, Neama Bay). It targets tourists and large hotels, and has very rare and distinctive types of roses. The shop is characterized by a luxurious style that makes people attracted to it.

- **Photographic poster**



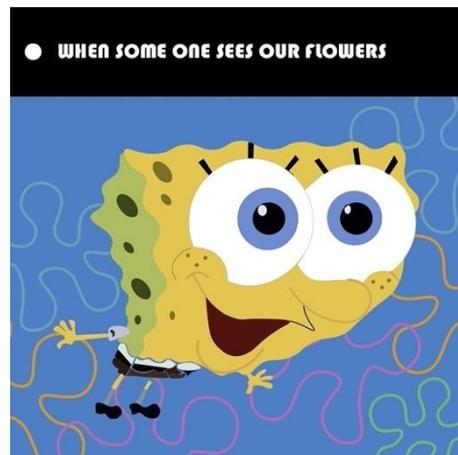
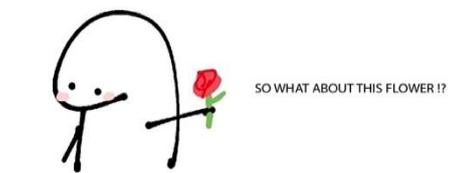
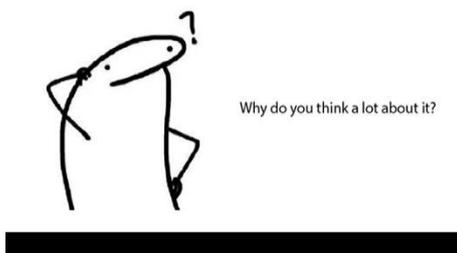
- Photocollage poster



- Illustration poster



- Meme



- GIF



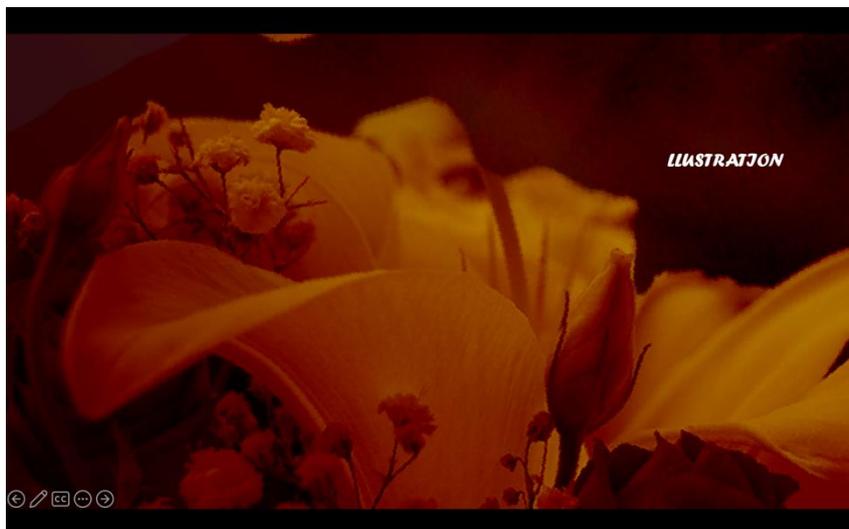
- Video narrative





The video is a romantic-story content, where the young man fails to delight his girlfriend until he presents her some flowers from the Secret Garden. The music used is up-beat and cheerful.

- **Themed PowerPoint Presentation.**



**8.3.2.3. Student Project N0.3 (Trendy store)**

**Brand Background** (as written by the student)

Started two years ago since, 2021, online at first. They started with selling outlets and cheap brands outfits. Like Zara, American eagle, and H&M. They wanted to reach audience that have no ability to buy clothes from these brands. They wanted everyone to enjoy wearing something expensive with cheaper price. At the beginning, they didn't have a good profit, they wanted to make people happy. They created the name of trendy store that means on trend and that they



- Meme

My face when my mum tells me you have lots of clothe

VS

How it is going in my room



How i look when i buy tons of clothes and try to hide from my dad



- GIF



- Video narrative



The video is an emotional content, as the student features herself while exploring her beloved things and people. The music used is emotional and melancholic.

- **Themed PowerPoint Presentation.**

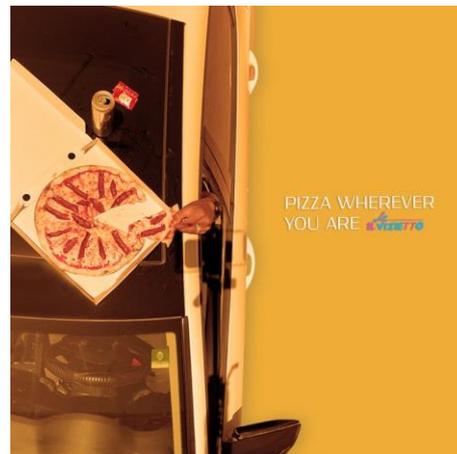


**8.3.2.4. Student Project N0.4 (Il Vizietto)**

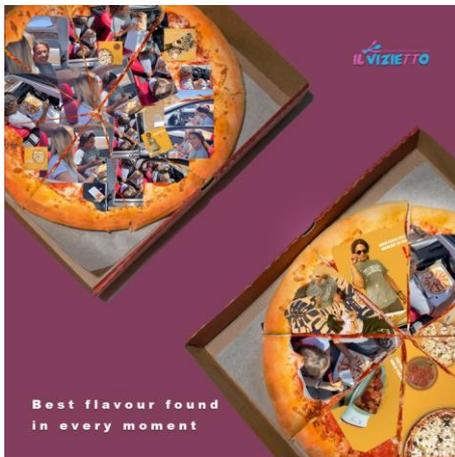
**Brand Background** (as written by the student)

Il-Vizietto is an Italian restaurant specialized in Italian food. And is owned by an Italian woman married to an Egyptian man who cares a lot about the Italian style and the Italian Actress Sophia Loren in particular.

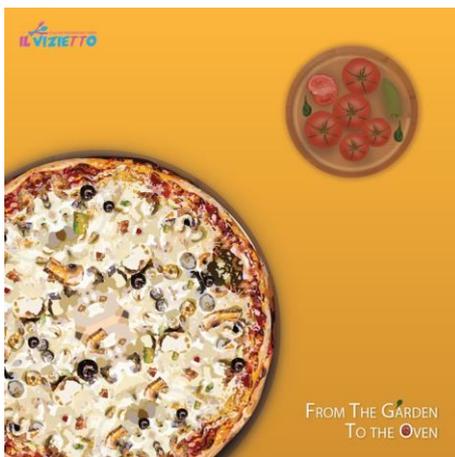
- **Photographic poster**



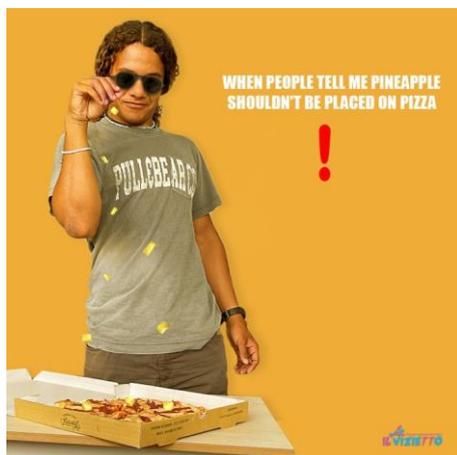
- Photocollage poster



- Illustration poster



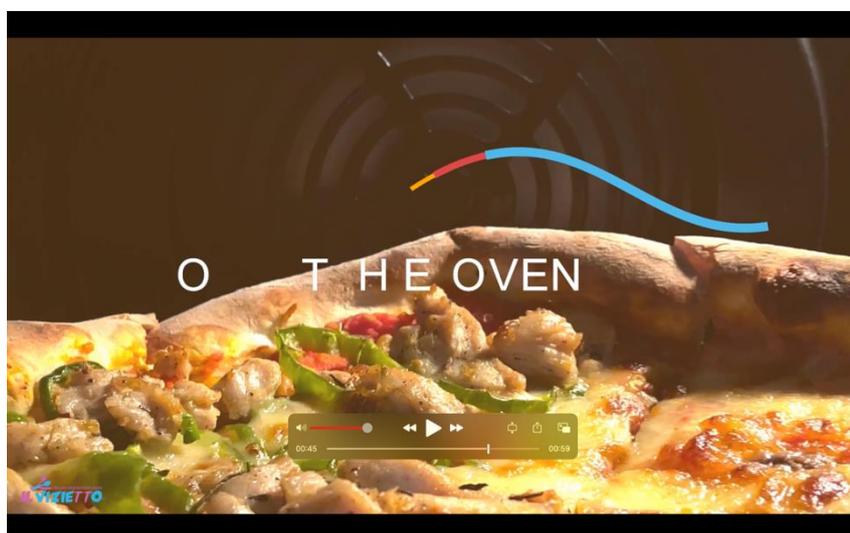
- Meme



- GIF

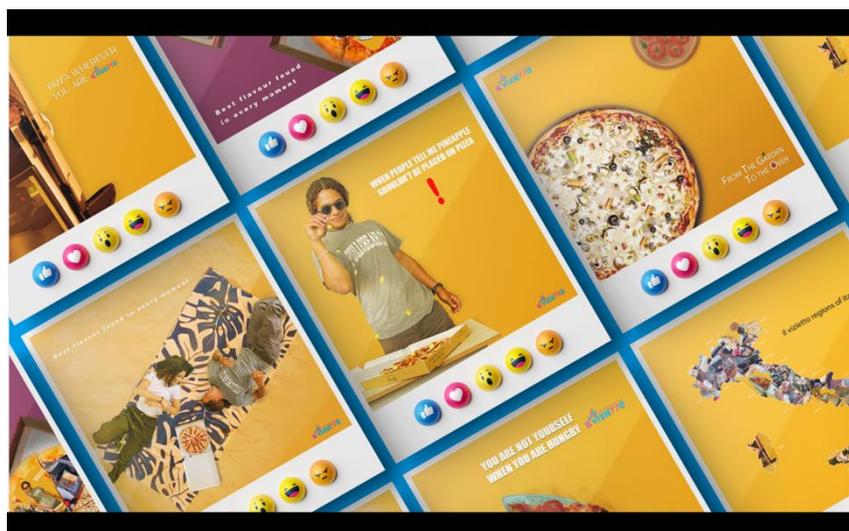
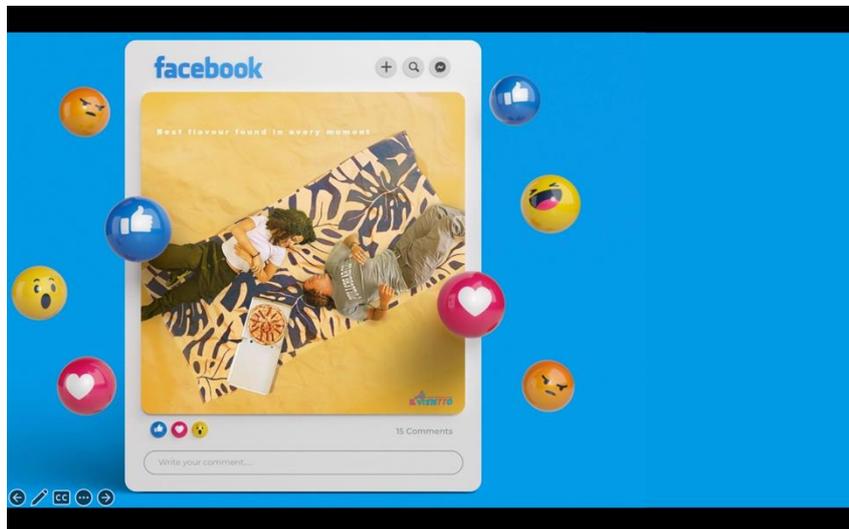


- Video narrative



The video is a commercial content, exploring the gourments and how they are delightfully made. The music used is up-beat and cheerful.

- **Themed PowerPoint Presentation.**

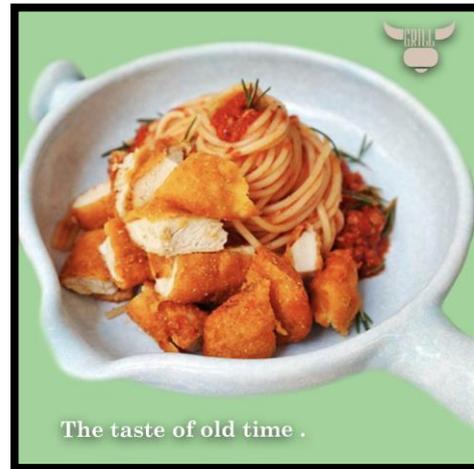


**8.3.2.5. Student Project N0.5 (El-Hossieny Restaurant; Authentic Food)**

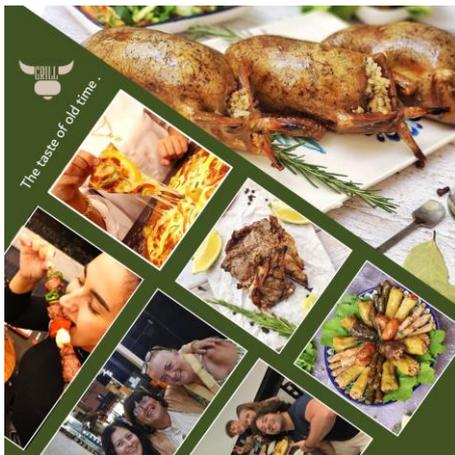
**Brand Background** (as written by the student)

"Since 1981 El-Hossieny Grill Restaurant is Famous in Sharm el-Sheikh... Daily and only fresh meat!". This restaurant provides food delivery for the convenience of its customers. A number of guests say that the staff is creative at El Hossieny. Cool service is something that people note in their reviews. Prices at this place claim to be affordable. You will definitely like the quiet atmosphere.

- Photographic poster



- Photocollage poster



- Illustration poster



- Meme



- GIF

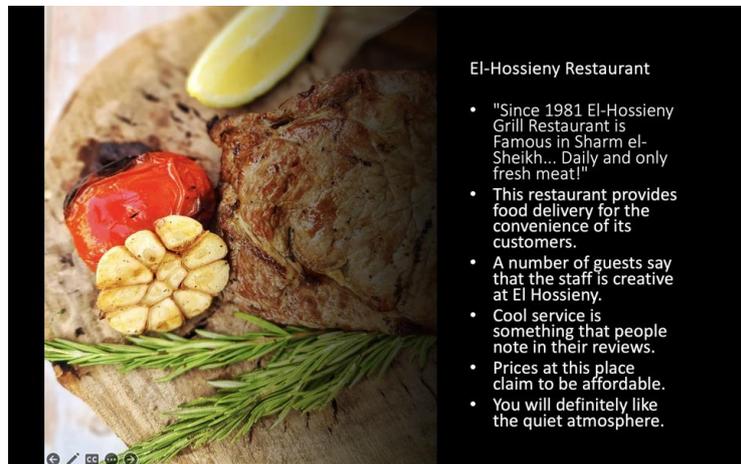


- Video narrative



The video is a commercial content, exploring the place and foods. The music used is up-beat and cheerful.

- **Themed PowerPoint Presentation.**



**8.3.3. Students' Responses Samples Reviews**

Students' responses showed a sound creativity and in-depth understanding of the role of social media narratives. Students felt close to the brands as they are both located in Sharm Elsheikh and in-direct content most of the time. Brand owners also showed a great deal of cooperation during the process; offering data and welcoming students' frequent visits.

Most of the students could capture brand's spirits, as their narratives came on brand, hence, with youthful energetic ethos. When brand owners boosted some of the works on their social media pages, they generated likes and support from youth population located in Sharm Elsheikh. Student's narratives came relevant and engaging, and on brand in most cases.

## 9. Conclusion

### Suggested Content Criteria for Visual Storytelling Narratives

In order for visual storytelling to be a successful branding strategy, the researcher suggests a set of 9 principles of visual storytelling content on social media platforms. They are<sup>8</sup>:

- **Relevant.** The first key attribute of any visual storytelling content is to be relevant, in the sense of; meaningful and related to the brand, the product or service and most importantly, to the consumer. A nonrelevant narrative will generate audience's indifference and most probably, will go unliked or blocked.
- **Engaging.** A visual storytelling content has a significant role to engage audiences. That means to grab their attention and keep them interested for as long as it takes. Positive engagement helps brand messages to be conceived in a more propitious atmosphere.
- **Educational.** In order for a visual content to keep its audiences' interest, it has to educate them about something they either don't know, or know a little, about. This informative behavior helps brands communicate with their customers while, simultaneously, adding value to their lives.
- **Generating Empathy.** The feeling of empathy is a core objective for visual storytelling content. When feeling empathized, people become more obedient and more likely to respond to brand messages and call to actions.
- **Encouraging mirroring experience.** Mirroring experience refers to the ability to see oneself in the situation given, or in place of the character(s) of the visual narrative. In order for mirroring to occur, the customer must identify some resemblance between him and the character, in terms of gender, age, social status, and hopefully for brands, physical features.
- **Ethical.** For a visual content, to be ethical means not to break the law, or to commit a mistake in terms of religion and societal values. Honesty and integrity help brands gain their customers respect and loyalty. Ethical behavior does not require the explicit use of resonant terms, but instead, being simply honest.
- **Legible copy.** Clear direct messages surpass obscure complex ones. Using a clear copy with a unified language and a close meaning helps visual content to attain customers' interest and respect. People are used to get bored of what they don't understand.
- **Persuasive narrative.** In order to achieve its goals, visual storytelling content must be persuasive. To persuade audiences, brands need to incorporate evidences, logical assumptions and perhaps endorsements and testimonials.
- **Motivating and Compelling.** The ultimate objective of visual storytelling content is to motivate audiences' buying behavior, or to compel action. Achieving such goal requires

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<sup>8</sup> Classification and definitions articulated by the researcher.

a dexterous employment of tools such as music, copy and camera angles. Brands may exploit some call-to-action phrases to motivate their audiences' positive responses.

## 10. Research Recommendation

This research paper recommends the course of Visual Storytelling to be incorporated in the academic curricula for Branding and Advertising departments. The paper also proposes that students' projects to be, partially, addressing local brands as a response of Egypt's sustainable development plan.

## 11. Research References

1. Walter, Ekaterina and Gioglio, Jessica: The Power of Visual Storytelling; How to Use Visuals, Videos, and Social Media to Market Your Brand, McGrawHill Education, USA, UK, Spain, Madrid, Italy, India, Singapore, Australia, Canada, 2014.
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