Queer Love in Social Media Marketing

A Case Study of Same-Sex Couple Representations in Watch Brand Daniel Wellington’s Social Media Channels

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Abstract

On Valentine’s day 2018, Swedish watchmaker Daniel Wellington posted a photo of a gay male couple followed by a caption celebrating the love between the two subjects. The photo was posted to the brand’s Instagram account reaching an audience of four million followers. The brand’s followers responded with great amounts of engagement ranging from excitement and support for featuring a same-sex couple, to almost equal amounts homophobic disapproval. This thesis, a case study of Daniel Wellington’s social media and social media staff, examines the effects of including same-sex couples in social media marketing.

Previous research on LGBTQ+ representation in advertising has identified the polarizing reactions same-sex couples in marketing usually evoke. Using existing literature on the subject as a theoretical framework, this thesis analyzes the effects of including two photos of same-sex couples, one male-male couple and one female-female couple, in Daniel Wellington’s Instagram account. A statistical analysis of the reactions to these photos on Instagram will be followed by interviews with the brand’s social media staff in order to explore the corporate response to the reactions to the social media representations of same-sex couples.

This thesis will suggest, partially in line with previous research, that the social media content featuring same-sex couples created a lot of engagement among its followers, with comparatively high levels of polarization. The data identified a significant difference between how the gay male couple and the same-sex female couple were evaluated. Additionally, the interviews with the social media staff suggest that, despite the high levels of negative reactions, including same-sex couples in their social media channels did not have a deterring effect on their commitment to include more types of diversity in the brand’s social media feeds. The interviews with the social media staff indicate that the experience of including same-sex couples in the brand’s social media marketing efforts had the effect of raising awareness of issues of homophobia among the staff members.

Key words: LGBTQ media representation, inclusive marketing, social media marketing, Daniel Wellington
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1. Introduction

With nearly two and a half billion people using social media, scrolling through social media feeds has quickly become a daily habit for many around the world (Statista 2018a). In only a little more than a decade, social media platforms have become a common source of news, a means to stay in contact with friends, and more recently, a hub for consumerism and shopping. Market research conducted in the United States has found that 58% of consumers follow brands on social media, whereas 18% of internet users have used social media for shopping (Statista 2018b; LaMontagne 2015). As a result, having a presence and a large following on social media has quickly become an important marketing tool for retailers and fashion brands in order to increase visibility and brand awareness. However, despite the novelty of corporate brand building exercises on social media, little research has thus far been conducted in this area. In this thesis, I will explore the effects of the presence of visual representations of same-sex couples in a fashion brand’s own social media channels.

Previous research (see, for example, Baker Netzley 2010 and Angelini & Bradley 2010) has mainly focused on traditional media and found that representations of LGBTQ+ individuals in advertising is lacking in general. It has also revealed that a measured reaction to LGBTQ+ themed advertising among a heterosexual audience tends to be polarizing, at times negative. This thesis will consider the existing body of research and will build on the current literature surrounding issues of minority representation, extending it further to the realm of social media marketing.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

This thesis will explore the reactions and the effects of including gay and lesbian themed content in an international fashion brand’s social media channels. This study will take the form of a case study of the Swedish watchmaker Daniel Wellington. In order to conduct this research, I will be analyzing the effects of including two representations of same-sex couples on their Instagram account. I will do this by collecting data measuring the reactions on social media to these representations. Additionally, by interviewing the employees working with social media in the company, I will be able to get an insider’s perspective on the social media team’s motivation to
include gay and lesbian themed content, as well as learning about how they as a team were affected by the reactions to the same-sex couples pictured. My main research questions concern the reactions to these photos of same-sex couples posted on Instagram. I intend to firstly explore how the external reactions, those by Daniel Wellington’s Instagram followers, compare to reactions of same-sex couples in advertising as identified in existing literature. Secondly, I will use the data collected from the reactions to the Instagram posts on Daniel Wellington’s account to explore how these affected the brand’s social media staff. Did the reactions from the Instagram followers in any way affect the social media team and their decision to include content featuring same-sex couples? Did uploading these posts and the reactions to them have an effect on the company’s brand building on this social media platform? Before I continue my exploration of these main research questions as outlined above, I will provide a background on Daniel Wellington and the brand’s presence on social media.

### 1.2 Background

Daniel Wellington is a Swedish watchmaker founded in 2011. It quickly made a name for itself by selling one million timepieces in less than three years (Wallenberg 2016). Between 2013 and 2015 the company was listed as the fastest growing company in Europe, with a staggering 4700% growth (Pechter 2017). The company’s extreme growth and success have often been attributed to early adoption within the field of social media marketing and advertising (Wallenberg 2016; Pechter 2017). Daniel Wellington’s social media marketing strategy can be divided into a few different focus areas: the purchase of paid ad space on a diverse array of social media platforms, influencer marketing (the promotion of the brand’s products through so-called ‘influencers’, i.e. social media profiles with a big following) and brand building through its own social media channels. This thesis will see an exclusive focus on the brand’s social media marketing efforts on Instagram, more specifically, the brand’s own account. With 4.2 million followers, the brand has a large community with which it frequently engages via the uploading of brand-related content. In an interview with a social media staff member, it was explained that the main purpose of the brand’s Instagram account is to increase brand awareness, further the brand’s visibility to more social media users, and to continually engage the global community of Daniel Wellington followers.
To the casual visitor, Daniel Wellington’s Instagram account is particularly active with posts on average three times daily, the majority of which being user generated content (UGC). UGC could be described as “pictures that consumers or influencers upload to Instagram and that we get sent to us, or find through hashtags”, according to a social media staff member. It is among this pool of user generated content, featuring Daniel Wellington watches, that the social media team selects appropriate content to upload to the brand’s own account. Due credit is given to the Instagram users behind the original post. A visit to the brand’s Instagram feed reveals an abundance of photos of Daniel Wellington watches featured on the wrists of users. Creativity is championed with photos featuring beautiful natural scenery, well-known tourist attractions and close ups of the brand’s watch models to name a few examples. Looking into the diversity of human subjects found in the photographic content, which is the main scope of this thesis, it is clear that conventionally beautiful, white, able-bodied individuals and heterosexual couples represent a clear majority of Daniel Wellington’s Instagram feed.

More specifically, in direct relation to my thesis topic: reactions to gay and lesbian themed imagery in social media marketing, Daniel Wellington’s social media team has in the past few years posted content portraying non-heterosexual couples to the brand’s Instagram account. On Valentine’s Day 2018, a picture of a gay male couple portrayed in an intimate and close embrace was posted. The photo created high levels of engagement, with many of Daniel Wellington’s followers liking the photo and leaving a comment. Many followers expressed support for the company’s decision to include a queer couple and conversely; many users expressed the opposite. It was seeing these reactions that sparked my interest in an exploration of this topic. In collaboration with the company’s social media team, I assisted in finding one more representation of a same-sex couple that would later provide the basis for my analysis.

1.3 Positionality and Situated Knowledge

Following the recommendations of feminist scholar Donna Haraway’s (1988; Lykke 2010, p. 159) concept of situated knowledges, it is important for a researcher to acknowledge the ways in which a researcher’s identities and positions may influence the research process. Writing this thesis about same-sex couple representations in Daniel Wellington’s Instagram account, it is
worth noting that I find myself in a position of identifying as LGBTQ as well as being an employee at Daniel Wellington. This means that I have a close personal connection to both the academic topic of LGBTQ+ inclusive media representations as well as to the company, on which I am basing my research¹.

The situation of being a researcher doing research on one’s own employer is not completely uncomplicated. An important tool that I will be using throughout this research process is that of reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the processes in which a researcher maintains an awareness of how one’s own personal biases based on identities such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class may affect the research process (Aull Davies 2002, p. 27; Denscombe 2007, p. 69). Following the recommendations of Aull Davies (2002), Denscombe (2007) and Haraway (1988) will also help me in mediating the so-called interviewer effect. The interviewer effect refers to the set of ways in which an interviewer’s identities and presentation may affect the ways in which interviewees respond (Denscombe 2007, p. 185). The way the researcher presents and interacts are considerations the researcher need to keep in mind throughout the research process. This will be especially important in this case study in which I, as the researcher, will have had an existing relationship as coworkers with the interviewees prior to the conducting of this research project.

To conclude this section on my positionality in this research project, it is worth repeating that undertaking ethnographic research on one’s own employer exploring a subject matter with which the researcher has a close personal affinity is not completely uncomplicated. Throughout this research project, I will follow the advice of Aull Davies (2002, p. 101) and Ramazanoglu & Holland (2002, p. 155) in problematizing and analyzing all statuses and identities and how these may influence the research. With this said, I would also like to point out that my position is a privileged one. Enjoying an insider’s status within the company, means that the issue of accessibility to insightful informants is lessened and our common knowledge of the brand researched makes finding a common understanding of the subject slightly easier (Aull Davies 2002, p. 78; Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002, p. 157). Having explained my positionality vis-à-vis the research, I will now outline the theory that will lay the framework for this thesis.

¹ I should note here that as an employee of the company studied, I have not received monetary compensation for this research project, nor is the purpose of this research to increase the company’s profits. The choice to conduct this research within my employment has been solely based on my interest in exploring this topic. My privileged access to Daniel Wellington’s social media team has been of great value.
2. Theoretical Framework

Previous research and theory will provide the framework on which I will base my analysis. Issues of minority group representations in media in general, and marketing and advertising in particular, have been researched intensively during the latter half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century until today. In this section, I will outline an overview of parts of this body of literature in order to effectively situate this study in a scientific context. I will begin with a very brief general overview of some important literature on minority representations in media, marketing and advertising. A deeper dive into the topic of gay and lesbian representation in marketing and advertising will round off this section. This will include the historical background of the emergence and segmentation of the gay and lesbian market. I will then turn to a discussion of the various rationales for gay and lesbian themed advertising before providing an overview of studies analyzing gay and lesbian themed advertising content.

2.1 Previous Research: Gay and Lesbian Themed Advertising

The topic of gay and lesbian themed advertising fits partially in a larger discussion of representations of minorities in media, culture and advertising, and the effects of these. The topic of representations in culture and media have been studied from several theoretical points of view and it has been a research interest for many prominent scholars in a variety of academic fields, from cultural studies (Hall 1997) to marketing (Um 2012). While the field of research that covers all different aspects of representation issues is too large to summarize in this literature review, I will start by introducing a few influential scholars’ work on minority group representations in the media to set the stage for the narrower field of research that covers gay and lesbian themed advertising. Previous scholarship has identified representations of social groups as powerful tools that can reinforce values and ideals as well as inform (and not uncommonly, misinform) the public about minority groups. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) argued that the ways through which different social groups are represented are imbued with power. Through processes such as othering and stereotyping, Hall wrote that an opposition of what is to be deemed normal and deviant is generated. Hall further argued that stereotyping in representations most commonly
occur where structures of inequality exist, adding that the power of stereotyping often target marginalized minority groups (1997, p. 258). A similar line of thought has been argued by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who claims that representations of social groups always take place in a “specific social context in which it frequently reinforces patterns of social power” (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1293). In this study of the intersecting identities of women of color, Crenshaw suggests the centrality of how representations in media and culture reinforce stereotypes and contribute to the marginalization of women of color. Beyond representations of women of color, previous research has addressed various aspects of issues of representations within other intersections. Previous studies on said representations include those on gender (Wood 1994), class (Kendall 2011), disabilities (Burns 2016) and refugees (Sou 2017). While these studies differ in many ways, they all highlight the importance of representations in our mediated culture and their power to reinforce and challenge stereotypes. While providing a further discussion on representations of other minorities is beyond the limits of this study, I find it important to include a sample of existing studies of representations of other minorities to demonstrate how this study of gay and lesbian themed advertising fits into a larger discussion.

As consumerism increasingly has become a cornerstone of billions of people’s daily lives, research has highlighted the ability of representations in advertising to shape attitudes, norms and values. In his famous article on advertising’s unintended consequences, Pollay (1986) outlines a long list of possible consequences for advertising’s prevalence in society. Pollay repeatedly returns to the theme of representations in advertising. He underscores advertising’s capacity to reinforce problematic stereotypes of women, the elderly, ethnic minorities and certain professions (1986, p. 21, 27). The reason it is such a powerful mechanism in molding the audience’s attitudes and values, Pollay argues, is the pervasiveness and repetitiveness of advertising’s emotionally charged messages (p. 21). In short, advertising is a powerful tool, and has the potential to reinforce certain norms on social groups and minorities, excluding and further marginalizing others. Given advertising’s capacity in molding attitudes and norms, it is important that researchers and marketers alike be aware of the effects of representations of social identity groups in advertising. This literature review will now continue with a brief historical background of gay and lesbian themed advertising.

In the present day, homosexual imagery and gay and lesbian themed advertising is no longer a
complete rarity in certain geopolitical locations, but it often provokes strong reactions amongst its audience (Angelini & Bradley 2010; Um 2014). In this section, I will turn to a discussion of how marketers with an increasing frequency choose to include gays and lesbians in marketing campaigns. I will subsequently summarize some consumers’ reactions to the inclusion of homosexual imagery in advertising. Before I proceed to a discussion of gay and lesbian themed advertising, I will introduce the most fundamental premise of how advertising works, which has in part paved the way for the inclusion of gay and lesbian representations in advertising. As advertising is a social communication, it is only effective as long as marketers can communicate through content that is familiar to and relatable for the intended audience (Lee & La Ferte 2004, p. 46). The consequence of this premise is that marketers and advertisers need to be aware of different social groups and their characteristics, in order to effectively communicate to different target audiences and markets. In order for marketers to identify different market segments, it requires that these potential groups are visible, accessible and large enough (Peñaloza 1996; Lee & La Ferte 2004, p. 46). In the following section, I will outline the historical context in which a process of market segmentation has enabled a proliferation of gay and lesbian themed advertising.

In the wake of the gay and lesbian rights movements in the period following the Stonewall riots, the gay and lesbian community gained the visibility required to be regarded as an important market segment. It was this process that eventually emboldened marketers to pursue explicitly gay and lesbian themed advertising in a variety of media. In her 1996 article We’re Here, We’re Queer, and We’re Going Shopping! Lisa Peñaloza argues that gays and lesbians have become a feasible market segment in the period following the Stonewall riots of 1969. Peñaloza neatly summarizes that “there is a close temporal relationship between social movement gains and market targeting” (1996, p. 19). The newly found market segment of gays and lesbians was quickly dubbed a “dream market” by industry professionals (Peñaloza 1996, p. 24; Sender 2001). Early industry reports listed high spendable incomes, strong brand loyalty and big spending habits as rationales for marketers to pursue this “dream market” (Peñaloza 1996, p. 26; Oakenfull & Greenlee 2004, p. 1276). While the initial view of gays and lesbians as dream consumers has been challenged (see, for example, Kates 1999, p. 25), it has had the effect of arousing the interest of marketers in targeting the new segment.
As the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights movements have increased visibility and acceptance of the LGBT community, the visibility and scope of gay and lesbian themed advertising has changed dramatically. In the early days of advertising targeting gays and lesbians, it was most often found in gay and lesbian friendly establishments and small-scale print media with the content conveying covert and implicit messages (Peñaloza 1996, p. 10; Nölke 2017, p. 224). In recent decades, explicitly gay and lesbian characters can be found filling advertising space in mainstream publications and television (Nölke 2017, p. 225).

After this short historical background of gay and lesbian advertising, I will now proceed with an overview of some literature analyzing the contents of gay and lesbian themed advertisements. In Summarizing existing studies analyzing the content of gay and lesbian themed advertisements, some trends emerge as to what types of representations are most common. As suggested by Nölke (2017), with more frequent gay and lesbian representations in advertisements, it will be important to analyze the representations through an intersectional lens to better understand which intersections within this community are highlighted and which remain invisible. In her recent study of LGBT ads, Nölke (2017) analyzed the contents of 350 LGBT characters in ads placed in mainstream publication, using intersectionality as an analytical tool. Out of all LGBT characters represented in the ads, young and middle-aged, middle to upper class, white, gay men represented a majority, with 52% (2017; p. 235-237). This dominant intersection, which Nölke calls “The Neil Patrick Harris type”, is described as “stylish and successful, […] well-groomed, lean, and confident ‘metrosexuals’” (2017, p. 236). Out of all characters identified in the ads, gay men were featured twice as many times as lesbians, over 80% were white and virtually all characters were middle or upper class (2017, p. 233). The lack of diversity in representations of gays and lesbians has been supported in other studies suggesting that great majorities of representations fit in the categories described above (Um 2012, p. 142-143; Baker Netzley 2010). This leaves older, working class, non-white, bisexual, trans and non-binary characters nearly unrepresented in these ads.

Looking into the most common portrayals of lesbians, representations of femme lesbians “in a committed, loving relationship with another femme” make up a majority of all lesbian characters (Nölke 2017, p. 239). The second most common category of lesbian representations is the so-called “lipstick lesbian”, which is described as “hypersexualized” and “hyperfeminine” (ibid., p.
Several other studies have identified the character of the lipstick lesbian as a common representational trope (e.g. Gill 2009; Oakenfull & Greenlee 2004). The character of the lipstick lesbian has been analyzed in multiple studies as it deviates from many other representational tropes found in gay and lesbian themed advertising. The most common representational tropes of gay and lesbian characters in advertisements have been noted for their deemphasized sexuality and for seemingly mirroring heteronormative ideals with representations of couples in committed relationships, family life and conventional ideals of beauty (Gill 2009, p. 152; Kates 1999). The lipstick lesbian trope, however, has been noted for its hypersexualized representations. Interestingly, Gill (2009, p. 152) notes how the character of the lipstick lesbian is portrayed “within conventional norms of heterosexual feminine attractiveness” that seemingly appears to be catering mostly to the straight male gaze rather than being a queer representation for a queer audience. To conclude this content analysis of gay and lesbian characters in advertisements, a few trends and standard tropes emerge. Representations of white, middle to upper class gay men and femme lesbians are heavily overrepresented, while many segments and intersections of the LGBTQ+ community are excluded in advertisement representations. Representations of explicit queer sexuality most commonly fit within the representational trope of the lipstick lesbian, in which case these hypersexualized portrayals appear to target the straight male gaze. This literature overview will now shift focus to studies that have analyzed reactions to gay and lesbian portrayals in advertising and the ways in which these representations may or may not affect brand perception.

2.2 Previous Research: Reactions to Gays and Lesbians in Ads

As previously discussed, after early reports indicating a sizeable pink economy, many companies have included gay and lesbian themed advertisements in their campaigns in order to better target the gay and lesbian market. I will now turn to a discussion of existing studies analyzing the reactions to gay and lesbian themed marketing and advertising and their effects on the attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand. Previous studies have indicated both strong benefits of gay and lesbian themed advertisements in marketing campaigns as well as some risks associated with gay and lesbian inclusive marketing. In the following section I will summarize the findings of some existing studies highlighting both benefits and risks of advertising containing
homosexual imagery. Before I turn to discuss the potential material benefits of gay and lesbian themed advertising from a marketing and business point of view, I would like to once again highlight the potential societal benefits of more diverse representations in media and advertising. Recalling the prominent works discussed above, such as Crenshaw (1991), Pollay (1986) and Hall (1997), representations in media and advertising hold tremendous power in molding values and norms. They thus provide powerful and influential businesses with an effective tool to contribute to change and work for more inclusive and socially just societies. As for the measurable material benefits of gay and lesbian themed advertising, it is important to recall that marketing and advertising are forms of social communication. In order for marketing campaigns to work most effectively, marketers need to produce content that is relatable and identifiable for the intended audience (Lee & La Ferte 2004, p. 46). This would imply that the main benefit of gay and lesbian themed advertising is the effective targeting of gay and lesbian individuals. While it is difficult to know exactly how big the LGBTQ+ community is, recent reports have shown that 6% of Europeans identify as either lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) (Dalia Research 2016). In a recent Gallup survey, it was reported that in the United States, 4.5% of adults identify as LGBT (Newport 2018). This data coming from phone interviews conducted in 2017, show an increase of LGBT identifying Americans, an increase from 3.9% the year before. Both of these reports show that Millennials increasingly identify as LGBT. In some European countries, such as Spain and the United Kingdom, the percentage of LGBT Millenials is as high as 12-14% (Dalia Research 2016). In the United States, 8.2% of American Millenials identify as LGBT (Newport 2018). Not only are young people more likely to identify as LGBT, they are also significantly more likely to be allies of the LGBT community (GLAAD 2017). This statistic is especially significant in this study on reactions to same-sex couple representations in social media advertising, as young people are the most frequent users of social media. In a 2018 Pew Research Center report, it was found that 88% of American Millenials are social media users, whereas only 69% across all age groups in the U.S. use social media (Pew Research Center 2018). Based on these figures, the market segment of LGBTQ+ individuals using social media is a sizeable one. As previously discussed, gays and lesbians as a market segment have been described as a ‘dream market’ with high spendable incomes and with high levels of brand loyalty (Peñaloza 1996; Um 2012, p. 134; Oakenfull & Greenlee 2004, p. 1276). Existing research on reactions to gay and lesbian themed advertising has indicated that gay and
lesbian consumers highly approve of advertising content that directly targets them. Oakenfull & Greenlee (2005, p. 432) found that homosexual consumers liked advertisements containing gay and lesbian themed imagery significantly more than advertisements containing heterosexual themed imagery. Gay and lesbians’ commitment to and approval for gay and lesbian themed advertisements have been identified in several other studies. Tracy Tuten (2005; 2006) has found that gay and lesbian consumers champion companies that position themselves as gay-friendly through gay and lesbian themed advertising campaigns, amongst other things. Gay and lesbian consumers are not only inclined to support brands that are perceived as gay-friendly, they have even been found to be willing to pay a higher price for a brand that they recognize as gay friendly (Tuten 2006, p. 92). While previous studies clearly suggest that gays and lesbians highly approve of gay and lesbian inclusive advertisements, some studies also suggest that this type of advertising may indeed evoke positive reactions among a heterosexual audience. In a study of advertisements portraying same-sex couple families, Borgerson, Schroeder, Blomberg & Thorssén (2006, p. 967) found that a majority of heterosexual respondents who had reported that they would be affected by the homosexual themed advertisement, were in fact positively affected. These respondents considered it positive that companies show their support for non-normative family constellations (p. 968). In a recent study, Holz Ivory (2017, p. 14) found that participants in the study with low anti-homosexual attitudes actually reacted more positively to an advertisement portraying a gay couple than an advertisement containing a heterosexual couple. Taken together, these examples indicate that homosexual imagery in advertisements may evoke strongly positive reactions not only among lesbian and gay consumers, but also among tolerant heterosexual individuals.

Some studies have identified certain risks with including gay and lesbian themed imagery. A number of studies have found heterosexual audiences’ reactions to explicitly gay and lesbian themed advertisements to be polarizing, or worse, negative. Angelini & Bradley (2010) found that advertisements containing homosexual imagery caused more negative emotional response than advertisements with heterosexual imagery. In this experimental study of ads in print media, it was found that while participants in this study spent more time processing the homosexual imagery ads and participants could recall them better, participants reported more negative emotional responses to the gay and lesbian themed advertisement (2010, p. 495-496). These participants were also penalizing brands featuring homosexual imagery in their advertisements by
translating their negative feeling toward the ad into negative feelings toward the brand (ibid.). Other studies have given support for Angelini & Bradley’s (2010) findings. Um (2014) analyzed a sample of university students’ reactions to gay-themed ads in print magazines compared to their reactions to non-gay-themed ads. Um’s findings are in line with Angelini & Bradley’s; subjects exposed to gay-themed advertising reported more negative attitudes both toward the gay-themed ad but also the brand behind the ad (2014, p. 822). Um’s study also adds some more nuanced insights by controlling for the effects of the subjects’ gender and tolerance toward homosexuality. Um (2014, p. 823-824) found that male subjects reported more negative attitudes toward the ad and the brand than female subjects exposed to the gay-themed advertisement. In contrast to Angelini & Bradley (2010), however, Um’s study did not find that subjects with lower tolerance toward homosexuality translated their negative attitudes toward the ad into more negative attitudes toward the brand (2014, p. 823). As indicated above, from a business point of view there are some studies that have found that gay-themed advertisements may cause negative reactions to the ad, which may or may not translate into negative attitudes toward the brand.

Existing studies have highlighted the importance of differing levels of tolerance toward homosexuality as a determining factor in how an audience will react to gay and lesbian themed advertising. Similar to Um’s (2014) findings, other studies have also identified that the reactions to homosexual imagery in advertisements will depend largely on the audience’s attitudes toward homosexuality. In their study of heterosexual subjects’ emotional responses to male homosexual imagery in advertisements, Bhat, Leigh & Wardlow (1998) found that subjects with less tolerant attitudes on homosexuality reacted more negatively compared to those subjects with more tolerant views on homosexuality. In this early study on the subject, the authors added to the literature a more nuanced understanding that significant differences among a heterosexual audience exist, and that these differences may be attributed to “a priori attitudes” toward homosexuality (Bhat, Leigh & Wardlow 1998, p. 12). Like Um (2014), the authors found support for their hypothesis that negative reactions to the homosexual imagery advertisements sometimes translate into more negative attitudes toward the brand behind the advertisement (Bhat, Leigh & Wardlow 1998, p. 22). Other studies have supported Bhat, Leigh & Wardlow’s findings that the audience’s attitudes toward homosexuality will affect the response toward homosexual imagery in advertising. In a recent study, Adrienne Holz Ivory (2017) explored how same-sex couple representations in print media advertisements affected attitudes toward the ad, the brand and the
purchase intentions. Comparing the reactions to two ads for a chewing gum brand, one ad featuring a heterosexual couple and one featuring a homosexual couple, Ivory found that levels of anti-homosexual attitudes had a significant effect on the subjects’ reactions. Holz Ivory (2017, p. 16) found that subjects with lower anti-homosexual attitudes reacted more positively to the ad featuring a same-sex couple than subjects with higher anti-homosexual attitudes. Interestingly, and significantly for this study, it was identified that subjects with low anti-homosexual attitudes actually preferred the ad featuring the same-sex couple over the ad featuring a heterosexual couple (2017, p. 19). Similar to Um (2014), the results of Holz Ivory’s (2017, p. 22) analysis do not indicate that the subjects responding negatively to the homosexual imagery translate their negative reactions to worsening attitudes of the brand. While some studies have suggested that homosexual imagery in advertising generally evokes negative reactions, the works of Bhat, Leigh & Wardlow (1998), Um (2014) and Holz Ivory (2017) nuance this assertion by adding that the audience’s attitude on homosexuality will regulate the reactions to this type of advertisements.

When it comes to reactions to homosexual imagery in advertising, several studies have suggested that gender matters in more than one way. Firstly, previous scholarship has found that heterosexual women react more positively to homosexual imagery in advertising than heterosexual men. Um (2014, p. 815) indicated that this gender gap can in part be explained by women’s higher tolerance to homosexuality compared to that of men, who tend to showcase higher levels of homophobia in general. It has been suggested that the heterosexist nature of western societies underpins this gap between men’s and women’s tolerance of homosexuality (Um 2014; Oakenfull & Greenlee 2004). This claim is further nuanced by Oakenfull & Greenlee (2004, p. 1279), in their suggestion that heterosexuality has traditionally been viewed as an essential part of masculine identity. As a result, men perceive the need to reject homosexuality, and those that violate the norms of heterosexuality, in order to affirm their masculinity. Conversely, women are less likely to regard heterosexuality as an integral part of their gender identity and are thus less likely to reject homosexuality and non-heterosexual individuals (2004, p. 1279). This tolerance gender gap has been explored in studies looking at how heterosexual men and women respond to gay and lesbian themed advertising. Um (2014, p. 827) reported that heterosexual men evaluate gay-themed advertising significantly more negatively than heterosexual women, a claim further supported by Oakenfull & Greenlee (2004). This reveals another way in which gender matters in gay and lesbian themed advertising: lesbian imagery is
overall better evaluated than gay male imagery.

Some studies have indicated that the gender of the subjects pictured in homosexual imagery affects the audience’s reaction to this type of advertisement. It has been suggested that advertisements depicting lesbians evoke less negative reactions and carry smaller risks for advertisers compared to advertisement portraying gay men. While this is not to say that lesbian-themed advertisements come with zero risk of backlash from a heterosexual audience, existing literature on the subject has found that lesbian-themed ads tend to receive less negative reactions than gay-themed ads. Holz Ivory (2017, p. 16) found that participants overall approved significantly more of an ad featuring a lesbian couple than they did of an ad featuring a gay couple. Holz Ivory (2017) suggested that marketers who are interested in including gay and lesbian themed advertising, but worried about a potential backlash, would be wise considering lesbian-themed ads rather than gay-themed ads. Oakenfull & Greenlee’s (2004) findings also support this argument. As similar to Holz Ivory’s study, the authors found that subjects overall evaluated advertisements with representations of lesbians more positively than advertisements with gay male imagery. While there was no difference in women’s reactions to overtly lesbian imagery compared to overtly gay imagery, male subjects reacted very differently to the two advertisements with significantly more positive reactions to the overtly lesbian-themed advertisement (Oakenfull & Greenlee 2004, p. 1282). This finding is in line with the previous discussion on lesbian-themed content in advertisements and media more broadly. Representations of lesbians have been found to be of erotic value to heterosexual males, as a significant proportion of representations of lesbians seem to be constructed with the heterosexual male gaze in mind (Oakenfull & Greenlee 2004; Gill 2009). These studies point to a clear trend that advertisements portraying lesbians are evaluated more positively by a heterosexual audience than gay male-themed advertisements.

2.3 Previous Research: Knowledge Gaps

Having identified some key themes in previous studies analyzing reactions to gay and lesbian themed advertisements, some knowledge gaps in the current body of literature emerge. Firstly, the existing literature on gay and lesbian themed advertisements focuses mostly on traditional
media, with an emphasis on print media advertising (e.g. Sender 2001; Kates 1999; Nölke 2018). Little literature, if any at all, has fully focused on representations of gays and lesbians in social media advertising. This is significant for two major reasons.

Firstly, and most importantly, total global spending on internet advertising and social media advertising has increased exponentially in the past few years. Since the advent of the internet, spending on online advertising has quickly risen to the top of global advertising investment. Having outpaced all other media, online advertising today accounts for 38 per cent of total spending (Zenith 2018). While ad spending on social media certainly does not make up 100% of online advertising, it does make up a significant portion of it. It is projected that social media ad spending will overtake that of television by 2020 (Sweney 2018). These numbers indicate a clear shift in the focus of advertising investment.

Secondly, the nature of social media advertising makes it an interesting phenomenon to explore academically. Whether it is a paid ad space or a paid ad posted by a social media influencer, social media platforms enable their users to directly engage with the advertisements. Through likes and comments, advertisers and regular social media users alike can get a direct sense of what types of reaction the advertisement in question evokes. Additionally, as previously discussed, the heaviest social media usage is found among Millenials. This generational cohort, born in the interval in between 1980 to 1999, is overall more LGBTQ+ friendly and more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ when compared to other generational cohorts. As with any other new social phenomena, the shift in advertising and the nature of social media advertising, are phenomena worthy of academic exploration. This thesis will explore this area, as I will analyze reactions to representations of same-sex couples in social media advertising.

While doing research for this thesis, I noticed that while many studies referenced numerous companies’ lesbian and gay inclusive advertising campaigns, seemingly little attention has been paid to corporate responses to the outcomes of these campaigns. The existing body of literature has mainly focused on the audience’s reactions to gay and lesbian inclusive advertising. It is here that I would like to contribute to filling this gap in the existing body of literature, by exploring the response within a company following the implementation of social media advertising featuring same-sex couples. Existing literature has identified certain risks as well as benefits associated with the reactions to gay and lesbian inclusive marketing, but little attention has been paid to the
potential effects of the reactions within the company. What happens within these companies that have decided to include lesbian and gay themed advertising in their marketing strategies? What are their motivations? Do the negative reactions, as identified in existing scholarship, have a deterring effect on companies who have tried to include LGBTQ+ themes in their marketing? Answering questions such as these would help paint a more complete picture of issues surrounding LGBTQ+ themed marketing. In this thesis I aim to explore these questions and as a result contribute to a better understanding of issues surrounding this subject. Because of my privileged position of access to Daniel Wellington’s employees, I will easily be able to gain insight in to the dynamics of the brand’s social media marketing team, and analyze the experience of posting same-sex couple themed pictures within this organization.

2.4 Theory: Social Constructionism

This thesis’ starting point, both methodologically and theoretically, is based on the theories of social constructionism. As a group of theories, social constructionism refers to the view that social realities are constructed by different types of discourses (Lykke 2010, p. 88; Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002, p. 153). An influential scholar in this field of research was Michel Foucault. In a discussion of Foucault, Dmitriadis & Kamberelis (2006, p. 112) argued that Foucault viewed discourses as knowledge producing phenomena and as such are instilled with power. These power-filled discourses regulate what is to be seen as normal and deviant, right and wrong (ibid, p. 113). This process is achieved through the repetition of discourses that naturalize and essentialize norms, ideas and values (Lykke 2010, p. 91). What this also means then, is that discourses are constitutive and that “changes in discourse are a means by which the social world is changed” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 9). Jørgensen & Phillips liken one type of discourse, language, to a machine that produces and generates meanings and understandings (ibid). Jørgensen & Phillips also highlight that people, producing new types of discourses, have the potential to act as “agents of discursive and cultural change” (ibid, p. 17). In a similar vein to the above Lykke (2010, p. 90), in a discussion of the research of influential scholar Judith Butler, highlighted Butler’s interpretation of discourses as producers of social realities. In Lykke’s (2010, p. 90) exploration of these issues she expands on Butler adding that these “reality-
producing” discourses also create and regulate identities and identity categories, such as gender and sexuality.

In the case of this thesis, social constructionist scholars’ thoughts around discourses are useful in many different ways. Firstly, the discursive repetition of heterosexuality, both linguistically and through visual imagery, can in part explain why heterosexuality has traditionally come to be seen as natural and normative. On the other hand then, these theories may be of use in understanding the polarizing reactions homosexual imagery provokes as identified in the existing research discussed earlier in this thesis. The view of discourses as constitutive and powerful can then help explain how visual representations of same-sex couples, as a form of discourse, matter. It can also help explain how Daniel Wellington’s social media staff, by including representations of same-sex couples and therefore disrupting hegemonic heteronormative ideas about sexuality, may act as agents of change.

3. Research Design & Methods

The analysis in this thesis centers around a series of three similar depictions of romantic couples posted to Daniel Wellington’s Instagram account. These three photos depict a male-female couple, a male-male couple and a female-female couple. This analysis will mostly concern the reactions to the same-sex couples, but I will also include the portrait of the different-sex couple in the analysis as a control to gauge whether the reactions differ between those to the heterosexually coded couple and those to the same-sex couples.
Before I proceed any further, I should add that while there are no explicit references made to the subjects’ gender and sexual identities in the photo posted in November 2017, the subjects in these couple portraits have some key features in their physical appearances that would be read as conventionally and traditionally masculine and feminine traits. One individual has long hair and no facial hair whereas the other individuals sport a short hair style and has a beard. As a feminist and queer researcher, it may certainly be seen as a problematic aspect of this research risking to reinforce the gender and sexual binaries by assigning assumed and fixed gender and sexual identities of the subjects in the photos. However, in order to contextually situate this study, enabling an analysis of the difference in reactions to a couple that could be read as heterosexual and to two couples that could be read as queer. For that reason, I will refer to this couples in a way that goes in line with the way this couple would be read according to the dominant discourses around gender identities and sexualities. While this might be interpreted as a problematic essentialization of discourses around gender and sexual identities, echoing Spivak’s ideas about strategic essentialism, a strategic embrace of essentialist identity categories may be useful as a means to disrupt hegemonic understandings of these (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis 2006, p. 188; Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007 p. 74-75). With this said, it is important to point out, that there is no way of knowing for certain that, for example, the couple that could be read as
heterosexual are in fact heterosexual; one or both of the two individuals could potentially identify as LGBTQ+².

These three photos share some key characteristics making them very similar in terms of photo composition. In all photos the subjects are in the center of the photos, shown from the side. They are half body images in which two subjects are the only people in the photos. The subjects stand close together in an intimate pose facing each other. In all three photos, the person to the right holds their hand over their partner’s cheek. The person on the left embraces the other partner. The subjects of the photos smile and look at ease in each other’s presence. All subjects are white, lean, well-dressed, seemingly able-bodied and conform to conventional beauty standards. This is a negative aspect of choosing two of these photos from a pool of user-generated content, where choice is limited as the representations of these same-sex couples mirror some of the most common representational tropes of gays and lesbians in media (Nölke 2017; Baker Netzley 2010). In order to gather as much valuable and rich data as possible, I will be using a mixed method approach. In the following section I will explain my choices of methods, including the chosen methods’ limitations and associated potential ethical issues.

3.1 Data Collection from Social Media

Firstly, I will be gathering some numbers and statistics from the three Instagram posts on Daniel Wellington’s official account. Through a variety of data, I will be able to gather some information about how the watch brand’s followers reacted to the three photos. The intention with this method is therefore to gauge the external reactions, i.e. those of Daniel Wellington’s followers on Instagram, to the three photos portraying the three different couples. This data will then be used to contextually situate the reaction of the Daniel Wellington social media staff.

According to Daniel Wellington’s social media staff, the main key performance indicators

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² The sexual and gender identities of the two same-sex couples are in fact known to the author. The creator of the gay male couple photo has on multiple occasions on his Instagram account positioned himself as a gay man, making explicit references of being a “man who loves another man” (https://www.instagram.com/p/Bkp1AXkB Kwq/?taken-by=ilmondodisalvo). For this reason, I will refer to this couple as a gay couple. The female same-sex couple’s gender identities are known to the author through personal relationships to both of the subjects in the photo. Both of the subjects identify as cis women. Whereas the sexual identities of the subjects are different, I will refer to this couple as a same-sex female couple in order to not conflate their differing sexual identities.
(KPIs) that measure reactions and success on Instagram are the engagement rate (which measures the number of likes and comments) as well as the follower growth (a parameter that measures an account’s average growth in the number of followers over a period of time). I will make use of these measurements in order to evaluate the reactions to these photos and relate them back to the main themes of the existing scholarship on gay and lesbian themed advertising. Before delving into the analysis of the reactions to the photos, I will further explain how likes, comments and average follower growth will help me to gauge the feedback Daniel Wellington received posting the three depictions of romantic couples. The number of likes will be used as an indicator of how many of Daniel Wellington’s followers chose to interact with the photographic content by pressing the like button, and therefore showing their appreciation for the post’s content. The number of likes for each of these posts will be contrasted to Daniel Wellington’s average number of likes (a number based on the twenty latest posts prior to the post analyzed). This will indicate how well the posts fared in terms of engaging followers who chose to actively engage with the post via a like, compared to the average of the account’s posts. Additionally, it will assist in investigating one of the main research questions of this thesis; how the brand’s followers reacted to each representation of same-sex couples. This will be done by measuring the numbers of likes and thus exploring how well-liked or disliked the representations of same-sex couples are.

An analysis of user comments left for the three photos is the second social media KPI that will provide data for this thesis. As a social media staff member at Daniel Wellington explained in an interview, comments are interesting and useful as they represent a type of interaction that requires more from the user when compared to a like. By coding the sentiment of each comment on a binary scale, according to whether a user expresses approval or disapproval of the content, I will be able to measure how the followers engaging in this high-level interaction are reacting to the content. Comments that express neither approval or disapproval, are ambiguous in their meaning or express something unrelated to the post’s content or the brand behind it will be excluded from the study. Examples of comments coded as expressing approval of the content include: “OMG it’s just SO SWEET” and “Awwww love has no boundaries! Amazing post!” (Daniel Wellington 2018a). Comments such as “Boycott” [my translation] and “Faggots” [my translation] were coded as expressions of disapproval (ibid.). “Hhahahahahahaha.” is an example of a comment that was excluded due to its ambiguous and unclear nature, not fitting in to any of the above categories (ibid.).
Finally, the third KPI used in this thesis is the measurement of follower growth, a measurement that can indicate how well an account’s activity attracts new followers. From a business point of view, as further explained by Daniel Wellington’s social media staff, follower growth is important in order to increase visibility and brand awareness. Practically, this will be done by using readily available online software that tracks social media accounts’ exact daily changes in follower numbers. I will analyze whether the posting of pictures featuring same-sex couples had any short or long-term effects on Daniel Wellington’s Instagram follower growth. Follower growth will be studied in the days and weeks after each same-sex couple photo is posted. This will then be compared back to the average follower growth for the Daniel Wellington account. By doing this I will be able to get an indication of whether or not the account experiences a significant change in follower growth after the pictures of the same-sex couples are posted. Including follower growth as a source of data may in this way help explore this thesis’ second research question; whether Daniel Wellington’s gay and lesbian inclusive marketing may have any measurable effect on brand-building efforts in social media.

More general, as the analysis of this thesis is centered around three Instagram posts, the research design of this thesis comes with some interpretative limitations and challenges. Firstly, it is important to consider that the research conducted is focused on social media users in general and Daniel Wellington’s Instagram followers in particular. The demographics of Daniel Wellington’s followers is not necessarily representative of the general public. This could also imply that the reactions measured in this thesis may be affected due to the demographic nature of the account’s followers. In terms of gender, the account has an imbalanced gender ratio, with more female followers than male followers, which also has the possibility of impacting the results. As indicated by Um (2014), women tend to showcase higher levels of acceptance toward homosexuality. Additionally, as discussed in the previous research section, social media users tend to be found at a higher extent among the younger, more LGBTQ+ friendly generations, which could further lend bias, shifting the reactions away from that of a hypothetical larger population. Another key demographic feature to keep in mind is that of the consideration of class. Being a jewelry manufacturer and a luxury brand, Daniel Wellington’s products are not accessible to people from all socioeconomic strata. This means that the reactions to these posts cannot necessarily be seen as representative as that of the general public. With that said, the potential lack of representativity in the findings should not provide a limitation too significant for
this thesis. As this is a case study, finding representativity should not be seen as one of the main aims. In addition to this, the virtual community being studied is comprised of over four million followers. This makes it an interesting microcosm of its own, one worthy of academic research even without the opportunity to make generalizations.

Furthermore, it is also worth noting a significant challenge of observational research conducted on a social media platform. This online community is everything but a controlled research laboratory environment. It is firstly important to point out, that given the observational nature of the research, interpretative limitations will exist. The data gathered measuring the reactions to the representations of the same-sex couples will not be able to conclusively assert that the reactions occurred due to the subjects’ interpreted gender and sexual identities. However, the data will still be able to outline a description of the quantities and qualities of the engagement the visual content evoked. Given that one of this thesis’ main research questions is whether these same-sex depictions have an effect on the company’s brand building project on social media, this data will be able to gauge how the content performed from a business point of view.

Another noteworthy challenge is the use of algorithms by the major social media platforms. Many social media platforms use algorithms to filter and order what content will appear in a user’s feed (Riley 2016). These algorithms are known to be well-kept secrets only known to a selected few in tech companies such as Facebook. This provides a significant challenge for a researcher as it is impossible to know exactly how the algorithm, in this case on Instagram, may or may not affect the outcomes of the research. A mediating effect, however, is the fact that these three photos were posted by the same account, featuring very similar photographic content and using the same type of photo caption. We could therefore reasonably expect that given the similarities of the three posts, the algorithm used by Instagram should have a similar impact.

3.2 Semi-structured Interviewing

The second method for this study, interviewing, will be used in order to capture internal reactions to and the potential effects of the three Instagram posts within Daniel Wellington’s social media staff. Interviewing fits within the larger framework of ethnographic research. The common denominator of ethnographic research is found in the definition of the word, “the study of culture
and groups” (Denscombe 2007, p. 62). Ethnographic research seeks to understand the point of view from the subjects involved in the study (2007, p. 63). Paraphrasing Aull Davies (2002, p. 4), ethnography refers to a variety of fieldwork-based research techniques including interactions with the subjects being studied. While interviewing might seem like a formulaic method in which the researcher asks the questions and the subjects answer, ethnographic researchers suggest that interviewing is much more dynamic than that. Interviewing as an ethnographic method allows the researcher to explore the topics studied together with the subjects. The researcher together with the subjects is involved in a process of “constructing their knowledge of the social world” (Aull Davies 2002, p. 97-98). Interviewing, as similar to other ethnographic methods, is a particularly good option when a researcher is trying to capture more complex and nuanced data, such as motivations, feelings and opinions (Denscombe 2007, p. 174). This makes it a suitable choice of method for this thesis, as understanding the feelings and opinions inside Daniel Wellington’s social media team is a key part of the research. Interviews range from conversation-like unstructured interviews to structured interviews that resemble a survey (Denscombe 2007). In between these two extremes we find the semi-structured interview, in which the researcher brings an agenda of topics to be covered rather than a rigid list of questions to be covered in a predetermined order (ibid., p. 176). The nature of semi-structured interviewing makes it possible for interviewees to give elaborate and open-ended responses. This will be an important advantage in this study, where I am looking to get an insight into the elaborate thoughts and experiences of the social media staff throughout this project.

Certain challenges are associated with this choice of method. A major challenge using interviews as a data collecting method is the question of whether or not interviewees are providing the researcher with a truthful account of their story. As Denscombe (2007, p. 200-201) mentioned, there are no undisputable way of knowing whether the informant is speaking truthfully. Certain strategies, however, exist to crosscheck the interview data in order to evaluate its validity. In order to do this, the researcher can come back to a certain topic, ask the same question again with different wording, and control the information against other data sources (Aull Davies 2002; Denscombe 2007). Being aware of these strategies will be important in this thesis, as I will research a small group of people with only two informants as a data source. Conducting two interviews can arguably be seen as limiting. Given the limited format of this thesis, as well as the addition of alternative data sources supplementing the interviews, I have decided to utilize a
small sample in order to give room for more elaboration in the analysis of each interview.

Another common criticism of interviewing as a method is the limited possibility the researcher has to gather generalizable results. As this thesis presents a case study of a small department within one company, a lack of generalizable results does not present a problem as finding them has not been identified as one of the objectives. Furthermore, as Lykke (2012) recommends, rather than trying to find generalizability when conducting ethnographic research, attention should instead be paid to the uniqueness of the experiences of the individuals or groups studied.

3.3 Ethics

As with any choice of method, my choice of ethnographic interviewing and the gathering of data from social media comes with certain important ethical considerations. Important ethical considerations associated with ethnographic research are the issues of informed consent and confidentiality (Aull Davies 2002, p. 46-53). The first of these two considerations, informed consent, concerns the ethical need to inform research participants about the nature of their participation and the importance of obtaining the participants’ consent. Aull Davies (2002, p. 47) recommends “informing participants of the nature and likely consequences of their participation in the research” in accessible language. Aull Davies further advises researchers to ensure that participants partake in the research free of coercion (ibid.). The second consideration regards the researcher’s commitment to protecting the privacy of research participants’ personal information (Aull Davies 2002, p. 51; Swedish Research Council 2017, p. 40). While the Swedish Research Council (2017, p. 40) cautions researchers not to promise that what they cannot deliver to participants in terms of confidentiality. The council does however urge the researcher to protect participants’ privacy to the highest degree possible (ibid.). This can be done by removing personally identifiable information related to the participants. For the research conducted for this thesis, these above recommendations have been followed. Participants were given an informed consent form before starting the interview. The participants were also promised to not have any personally identifiable information, such as names or exact professional titles, published in the thesis. After the interviews, the participants were given the transcripts and offered the opportunity to elaborate, clarify or change their responses. Being aware of the exercise of power involved in
interpreting an interviewee’s accounts, I wanted to make sure the interviewees were comfortable with the accounts given to me as the researcher (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002, p. 161).

It is important to also consider some of the ethical considerations surrounding the collection of data from a publicly accessible internet platform. The data collection method used for this thesis fits into a method called *blog and buzz mining*. This method is described as a technique in which researchers collect data by “mining” and “scraping” information accessible on blogs, online forums and other social media platforms (Poynter 2010). In Poynter (2010), it is highlighted that while no clear and exact guidelines exist regarding the ethics in blog and buzz mining, some general guidelines exist. The most important guidelines for this research project are those regarding the type of online community from which the researcher is collecting data, as well as the nature of the data gathered (ibid.). Poynter (2010) underscores the difference between information accessible on a public domain compared to information which requires a membership or registration in order to access it. If the information is not accessible without registering or joining the community, then consent from the authors should be obtained before using the information for research purposes. However, according to Poynter (2010), if the information is freely accessible in the public domain, as is the case in my research as it is conducted on a public Instagram account, it should be considered available for use by the researcher.

Secondly, Poynter (2010) emphasizes that personally identifiable and sensitive data requires informed consent before its use. According to EU definitions, sensitive data includes, but is not limited to, information that references the author’s racial and ethnic origins, political opinions and health status (ibid.). This guideline has been followed throughout this research project, by anonymizing all data. All Instagram user handles have been removed and mentions of data that could be seen to be of sensitive nature, following the EU definition as outlined by Poynter (2010), have been omitted. This thesis will now proceed to analyze both the collected data from the Instagram posts as well as the ethnographic data from the interviews.
4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Results and Analysis of Social Media Posts

This section will begin with a statistical analysis of follower reactions to the three photos of romantic couples posted. This will then provide a backdrop to the results of the interviews with the social media staff members, as the interviewees’ accounts are partially dependent on the results of the follower reactions. In my analysis, I will present the results thematically according to the KPIs of the social media staff. Once again, the KPIs used for measuring the results of Daniel Wellington’s Instagram content include the number of likes for each photo, the quantity and quality of user comments and the follower growth rates after each posted photo. I will now begin my analysis with the first KPI, a measurement of the number of likes given to each of the three photos.

As discussed previously, the number of likes provides a measurement of how many of an account’s followers choose to interact with the content by clicking the like button, an action through which they show their appreciation for a posted image. This number will be contrasted to the average number of likes, which is calculated based on the average number of likes for the twenty posts published prior to the post analyzed. I will analyze the photos in chronological order, starting with the first post, i.e. the photo depicting a straight couple as posted to Daniel Wellington’s Instagram on November 21st of 2017. This photo received 36,355 likes as of July 11 2018 (Daniel Wellington 2017). Comparing this number to the average number of likes for the posts prior to this one, it is clear that this photo garnered less likes than the average for the period. The average number of likes in this period was 56,200, which means that the photo of the straight couple reached 64.7% of the average number of likes. Moving on to the second photo, i.e. the photo portraying a gay male couple as posted on February 14th of 2018 to the brand’s Instagram account. This photo attracted a total of 85,911 likes. The average number of likes in the period prior to that post was 61,100, which means that the photo of the gay male couple garnered 140% of the average number of likes. The third and final photo, as published on May 17th of 2018, portrays a same-sex female couple. This post received, as of July 11, a total of 47,011 likes. Comparing this number to the average number of likes for the period preceding this post, 49,900, this photo reached 94% of the average number of likes. To make a quick conclusion on the first KPI, it is evident that the photo of the gay male couple was the most well-liked, both in absolute
terms as well as comparatively to the respective weekly averages, when compared to the photos of the straight and same-sex female couples. The number of likes for the photo of the same-sex female couple was nearly on par with the average number of likes for the period. Meanwhile, the photo of the straight couple received only 64.7% of the average number of likes. Before analyzing these results in light of the findings of the existing scholarship, I will present the results from the other two KPIs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI 1: Likes</th>
<th>Straight</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Female-female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of likes</td>
<td>35,355</td>
<td>85,911</td>
<td>47,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. no. of likes</td>
<td>56,200</td>
<td>61,000</td>
<td>49,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of avg.</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>140%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second KPI used for this analysis regards the user comments for each of the three posts. As discussed earlier, I have coded the comments on a binary scale to examine the characteristics of the reactions. I have also looked at the sheer number of comments, in order to get another data point measuring the quantity of the engagement created by the visual content. Similar to the number of likes, I will contrast the number of comments to the respective average number of comments. The first photo of the straight couple received a total of 156 comments. The average number of comments for the period prior to this post was 195, meaning that the first post’s total number of comments accounted for 80% of the period’s average. Looking at the content of the comments, that I have coded on a binary scale, it is clear that the comments for the straight couple were overwhelmingly expressing approval. Out of all comments, 43.6% expressed approval whereas there were no comments expressing disapproval for the post. The rest, 56.4%, were excluded as they expressed neither approval nor disapproval, or were ambiguous. For the second post, the portrayal of a gay male couple, there were a total of 1164 comments, compared to the average number for the period of 343. The post thus received 339% of the average number of comments, clearly indicating this post evoked a lot of engagement among the brand’s followers. Exploring the quality of these comments, it is evident that this post provoked much more negative engagement when compared to the post portraying the straight couple. For this post, the disapproving comments, accounting for 28.9% of all comments, outnumbered the approving comments. The approving comments made up 23.5% of all comments, meaning that for every approving comment there was 1.22 disapproving comments. The third photo, of the
same-sex female couple, received a total of 252 comments. This number accounts for 122% of that period’s average number of comments, 206. As for the character of the comments, this photo sparked an overwhelmingly positive engagement among the brand’s followers. A majority, 52.8%, of all comments expressed approval for the post. Only 14.3% of the comments expressed disapproval, giving the post’s comments an approval/disapproval ratio of 3.7 to 1. To conclude, in a comparison between the three photos using the second KPI, quality and quantity of comments, some themes are evident. The photo of the straight couple sparked little engagement comparatively, enjoyed mostly approving feedback through the comments with a complete lack of disapproving comments. The second post, of the gay male couple, triggered significantly higher levels of engagement among the brand’s followers compared to the average. Compared to the other posts, this photo received the highest number of disapproving comments. The post featuring the gay couple was the only post in which the disapproving comments outnumbered the approving comments. The third post, featuring the same-sex female couple, also sparked high levels of engagement. This post was unique in the sense that it was the only post that enjoyed a majority of explicitly approving comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI 2: Comments</th>
<th>Straight</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Female-female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of comments</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>1164</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. no. of comments</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of avg.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>339%</td>
<td>122%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% approval</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% disapproval</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% excluded</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appro./disappro. ratio</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third and final KPI will measure follower growth. As discussed above, this KPI is used to explore whether the posting of these photos was followed by a significant change in the follower growth compared to the average follower growth. The average weekly follower growth of the period between the posting of the first and last photo analyzed was 0.61% (Influencer DB 2018). The average daily growth during this period was 3,187 followers. The posting of the first photo was followed by a weekly follower growth significantly higher than the average, with a 1.96% growth (ibid.). The second photo, featuring the gay male couple, was followed by a week of low follower growth for the account, seeing a growth of 0.26% (ibid.). Studying the daily follower growth for the account during the days following the posting of the photo of the gay couple, some
dramatic changes compared to the daily average growth of 3,187 are visible\(^3\). The day following the posting of this photo, the account saw a rare net loss of followers, losing 324 followers (ibid.). The second day following the posting also saw a growth significantly lower than the average, with a growth representing only 27\% of the daily average growth. Continuing with the third photo featuring the same-sex female couple, a similarly slow weekly growth followed the posting of this photo, in which the account experienced a weekly growth of 0.25\% (ibid.). The changes in the average daily growth during the days after the posting of the photo follow a similar, but less dramatic, pattern to that seen of the photo featuring the gay male couple. While the posting of the same-sex female couple was not followed by a net loss of followers, it was followed by two days of slow growth compared to the daily growth average, reaching only 21.8\% and 20.5\% of the average daily growth respectively. While the observational nature of this part of the analysis makes conclusions regarding cause and effect impossible, a small conclusion sketching out some observations regarding the third KPI is still in place. While the posting of the straight couple was followed by a week of high level percentage growth, the postings of the photos portraying same-sex couples were followed by comparatively slow short-term growth. In the case of the post featuring the gay couple, it was even followed by a rare net loss of followers. Before proceeding to the interviews, an analysis of the data from the Instagram posts will be compared to the themes identified in existing literature on the subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI 3: Foll. growth</th>
<th>Straight</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Female-female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% follower growth</td>
<td>1.96%</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As discussed above, the sample size of this study is too small to make a full comparison between these findings and those identified in the existing literature on reactions to gay and lesbian themed advertising. However, it would seem as if certain findings from the reactions by Daniel Wellington’s followers are in line with the findings of existing scholarship. The chosen method does not allow to test some of the existing findings, such as the gendered gap between men’s and women’s reactions to homosexual imagery in advertising (Um 2014; Oakenfull & Greenlee 2004). However, certain themes in previous studies will be able to be contrasted to the results of this thesis using the three KPIs. The central themes that have emerged from the social media data

\(^3\) For exact figures measuring the account’s follower changes, see appendix d.
include the high-levels of engagement associated with the posting of pictures featuring same-sex couples, the higher levels of negative and polarized reactions and the role of gender in the same-sex couple subjects. These themes were largely in line with the findings of existing studies on the subject. The high level of engagement identified with the posting of photos featuring same-sex couples were largely in line with Angelini & Bradley (2010). In Angelini & Bradley (2010, p. 495), participants who were exposed to advertisements containing homosexual imagery reported higher levels of engagement with the content of the advertisements, the individuals spending more time processing the advertisements. In this thesis, the high level of engagement generated by the photos of same-sex couples would in a similar way indicate that the followers have spent more time processing the photos. This can be seen through the measured engagement rates; the brand’s followers definitely engaged with these posts to high degree compared to the average engagement.

The reactions to the photos of same-sex couples on Daniel Wellington’s Instagram account indicate the seemingly polarizing effect of homosexual imagery in advertising. Many seem to appreciate the posts’ content, as indicated by the above-average numbers of likes garnered, while some loudly disapprove of this type of content, as further evidenced by the fairly high number of disapproving comments. The high level of disapproving comments to the photos in the comments section would then seem to be in line with Angelini & Bradley (2010) and Um’s (2014) results underscoring the negative reactions associated with advertisements containing homosexual imagery. The significantly lower levels of follower growth and short-term loss of followers after the posting of the same-sex couple photos might indicate a type of negative reactions to these photos. While it is not possible to draw any conclusions on why the account saw a higher than average loss of followers, it is possible that some of these Instagram users chose to unfollow the account due to the brand’s choice to include representations of same-sex couples. On the other hand, however, the high numbers of likes would seem to be, at least partially, in contrast with the above discussed findings of previous studies.

Arguably the most notable yet expected outcome of the reactions to the Instagram posts is the nature of reactions to the gay male couple versus reactions to the same-sex female couple. As indicated by Holz Ivory (2017) and Oakenfull & Greenlee (2004), advertisements featuring same-sex female couples have been found to be evaluated significantly more positively than
advertisements featuring same-sex male couples. The data from Daniel Wellington’s depiction of a gay male couple and same-sex female couple would seem to be in line with the findings of these studies. The difference in the reactions to these two photos were significant. In the comments section under the female same-sex couple, there were almost four approving comments for every disapproving comment. In the comments section for the gay couple, the ratio was inversed, with comments expressing disapproval outnumbering comments expressing approval by 22.6%. It is also worth noting that the posting of the gay male couple was followed by a temporary net loss of followers, whereas this was not the case following the posting of the same-sex female couple. It is once again important to underscore that while no conclusions can be made based on these figures, it is still valuable to point out that the brand’s Instagram account saw a rare loss of followers during the day following the posting of the picture of the gay couple. Given that the most common representational tropes differ significantly between gay men (the well-dressed Neil Patrick Harris type, see Nölke 2017, p. 236) and lesbians (the partnered femme and the lipstick lesbian, see Nölke 2017, p. 239; Gill 2009; Oakenfull & Greenlee 2004), it is interesting to note the stark differences in reactions; even when the depictions of these two same-sex couples are near-identical. Having identified three main themes from the analyzed photos, this thesis will now proceed to the analysis of the interviews.

4.2 Results and Analysis of Interviews

I will now shift focus to the ethnographic part of this analysis by presenting the results of the interviews with Daniel Wellington’s social media staff. The aim of the interviews was to learn about the social media team’s motivation for including content featuring same-sex couples, and if the reactions to these photos affected their brand building mission on Instagram. Finally, I wanted to understand whether or not the reactions to these photos affected the team’s commitment to increasing and improving representations of diversity on social media. I should note that the list of interview questions was fairly long, with some questions providing me with a working knowledge of how the brand’s staff work with social media. While the responses to these questions were helpful in guiding me in the process of writing this thesis, I will omit some responses that do not directly or indirectly contribute to the answering of the main research questions listed above. The two interviews were held with Daniel Wellington’s social media staff
in June and July 2018, just over a month after the last of the three photos analyzed in this thesis was posted to the brand’s Instagram account. The two employees interviewed, that I will refer to as Caroline and Jenny, work with strategizing, scouting and posting content to the brand’s social media channels. I will now outline the interviewees’ responses on their motivations behind their decision to post same-sex couple inclusive content.

When asked about the reasons to include photos featuring same-sex couples, both interviewees highlighted the same key motivators. Firstly, a perceived sense of responsibility to include more diverse representations in the brand’s social media accounts, and secondly; the potential to accomplish social change by doing so. As a representative for a brand with a large social media following, Jenny said that “since we are so global and so big, I think that we almost have a responsibility to represent our diverse community”. Deliberating on this line of thought, Jenny highlighted her view that the social media staff has “an obligation to show the world as it is” in the brands’ social media feeds. Similarly, Caroline hints at her commitment to portray more diversity in the brand’s social media feeds:

“because we are a global brand and we have followers from so many parts of the world, and as our mission is to engage, and of course not only one type of follower or one type of demographic target group, but [to engage] as widely as possible”

Caroline emphasized that this sense of responsibility also stems from the awareness of the power big brands hold today. Caroline said that “there are so many that have trust in what brands have to say and what they communicate” and claimed that many “have trust in brands, even more than in politicians, newspapers or news media”. In regard to this sense of responsibility in steering the brand’s way of communicating, Caroline added that “we have a lot of power, but also a lot of responsibility”. Upon deliberating more on this sense of responsibility to the large and diverse community, both staff members highlight the potential to act as agents of social change with their communication through the brand’s social media feeds. Talking about the specific decision to upload content featuring same-sex couples, Caroline saw that as “a way to take responsibility, to normalize” and that “many may look up to us, and there I think that we could lead by example”. When asked to deliberate in what ways they would normalize by posting pictures portraying same-sex couples, Caroline said:
“Consider all pictures that exist in people’s feeds and on the internet or wherever, really. By posting a picture of a same-sex couple, we contribute by making that type of picture visible in people’s feeds… and that consumers are exposed to it. And I guess that is what constitutes a normalization”.

Jenny, in a similar vein, emphasized the potential to contribute to a normalization of this type of discourse depicting same-sex couples:

“So, I am thinking that the more times we do it, and if we also influence other brands… the more brands that do it, then hopefully it will become more accepted worldwide”.

Here, Caroline and Jenny echoed many social constructionist theories highlighting the power of discourses and the potential for change vested in new types of discourses. One might say that Caroline and Jenny’s words are in line with Jørgensen & Phillips (2002, p. 9), highlighting that our social realities change through new forms of discourses. Lykke (2010, p. 91) asserted that repetitions of discourses play a role in normalizing ideas and values. This is a view that goes in line with Caroline’s idea of normalizing non-heterosexual relationships, by contributing to the existence of visual representations of these in people’s everyday lives.

In order to better understand the ways these social media professionals had been affected by the followers’ reactions to the pictures of same-sex couples, I wanted to hear them describe the reactions themselves. Contrasting the reactions to the photos to her own expectations beforehand, Jenny said:

“Of course I thought that there would not only be love. But I know that you always get very moved, expecting that we would also receive a lot of love. But I think it was actually better than I had expected with a lot of ‘I love you even more now,’ and the types of comments saying that ‘Now I’ll wear my Daniel Wellington watch every day’ and ‘Cred to you’ and a bit of that. I would say that there was more love and kind words than I had dared to hope for”.

Whereas Jenny clearly highlighted the positive reactions over the negative reactions, Caroline expressed more ambivalence in her overall description of the followers’ response to the same-sex couple photos:
“Well, this is interesting, instinctually I would say negative, but that is not necessarily true. [...] evidently, looking objectively at the numbers, then there were more neutral or positive comments than negative”.

I then asked if there was any difference between the reactions to the gay male couple and the reactions to the same-sex female couple. Jenny summarized this in few words saying that “there was a big, big difference”, adding that there was “more fuss around the one depicting two men.” Caroline shared Jenny’s description of a big difference in the reactions to the two photos, adding her own thoughts as to where this difference is rooted:

“Well, lesbian porn: it is for men, and it is more ok. It is nice even, there is nothing threatening or disgusting about it. So that is the reason I believe the comments sections looked so different”.

Here, Caroline expressed an interpretation that is shared by multiple scholars researching LGBTQ+ media representations. Caroline’s words are in line with those of Gill (2009, p. 152) and Oakenfull & Grenlee (2004), stating that representations of lesbians can be described as having an erotic value for the heterosexual male gaze and therefore more positively received.

Considering the mix of positive and negative reactions that these posts featuring same-sex couples sparked, the interviewees were asked to deliberate on whether or not the uploading of the pictures had an effect on their brand-building mission through their social media channels. While both staff members acknowledged the negative reactions to these pictures and the temporary loss of followers, Jenny replied that these “overall have no effect at all” on the business’ larger mission to grow the account to increase brand visibility and recognition. Deliberating further, Jenny and Caroline both identified potentially positive consequences by including these photos featuring same-sex couples. Finding a silver lining after the temporary loss of followers, Caroline said:

“So even if there was a drop just then, maybe there are many that thought ‘Wow, this is a really good account, they take a stance for a good cause, I want to follow and support [it]’”

Similarly, Jenny considered the potentially positive consequences of taking a stance for a social issue:
“So, if we consider the net outcome of the whole thing, then maybe we also had a lot of people who, before this, did not really think anything in particular about us and now ‘Wow, I really think they made a nice statement here’ and that they remember that”.

These statements seem to suggest that while the social media team acknowledge the disapproving reactions to the photos, they also consider the potentially less tangible positive effect the statement made in including same-sex couples among the brand’s followers.

Finally, I wanted to know how the reactions to these Instagram posts affected the social media team members and whether this impacts their way of including diversity in Daniel Wellington’s social media feeds in the future. Jenny, who was positively surprised about the reactions to these photos, stressed that the reactions to these photos have not impacted her commitment to portraying more diversity:

“but no, I would not say that this has had an effect on me, and that I think that ‘woah, there was a lot of, like, cleaning up to do, there were a lot of comments and that we lost some followers and that we should be careful’… absolutely not. I would say that I am rather thinking about what else we would like to show. […] I am thinking that we are just a little bit further towards becoming… to show more diversity and that we just need to keep doing it”.

Caroline, who initially highlighted the negative reactions to these photos, said that being part of the team and posting these photos of same-sex couples acted as an eye-opener for her raising her awareness on the issue of homophobia:

“I think that everyone has become aware and especially myself I feel. Because I know that… if you do not have a personal connection to a subject or whatever, then I do not think that much about it. So for me it has been… and maybe I am being naïve… but before we posted this picture of the same-sex couple in February, for me it has been something that does not really concern me. And of course it makes you… not upset and not worried either, but when you see these comments of course you react like ‘my god, like what is happening?’ and you think it is crazy. But at the same time it is so easy to, at least it has been, for me to just keep going in my little bubble and not think more of it. But really, I would say that after we have done this and I started to reflect on this, it is something I am thinking of and something that I have become aware of, which I am happy about”. 
When asking her to reflect on whether her sense of responsibility in including more diversity in social media is intact after posting these representations of same-sex couples, she said:

“Yes, and it might have grown even stronger. Actually”.

These statements seem to suggest a consolidation, among the staff members interviewed, of the perceived responsibility “to show the world as it is” as Jenny so neatly expressed. With a contrasting mix of love, encouragement and homophobia, it would seem that the reaction of the brand’s followers solidified the staff members’ sense of responsibility to portray a diverse and representative social media feed.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

5.1 Conclusions

This thesis has documented the experience of implementing LGBTQ+ social media content and the effects that this has had within the watch brand Daniel Wellington. In this thesis, the aim has been to examine the effects of the uploading of three Instagram posts featuring different romantic couple constellations, both among the brand’s social media followers and within the brand’s social media staff. The analysis centered around three photos depicting a straight couple, a gay male couple and a same-sex female couple. Through the form of a case study, this thesis has examined the reactions to these representations by statistically analyzing the social media posts. It has also presented the effects of these representations on the social media team through interviews with the staff members. Specifically, I have analyzed the reactions to the two photos portraying same-sex couples in light of existing literature on the subject. With this data as a backdrop, I have interviewed the brand’s social media team in order to explore whether the reactions to the same-sex couple inclusive content has affected the team’s commitment to portraying a diverse feed representative of the brand’s diverse community of followers.

An examination of the reactions to the three Instagram posts suggests that the photos depicting same-sex couples embracing each other sparked great quantities of polarized engagement among the brand’s followers. These great quantities of engagement were indicated by the high numbers of likes and a well above average number of comments. The reactions could be described as
polarizing, as they attracted both a high number of likes, indicating that the photos of the same-sex couples were appreciated among the brand’s followers, as well as comparatively large quantities of disapproving and homophobic comments. While certain interpretative limitations exist, the data gathered from the social media posts seem to lend support to certain key themes as identified in the existing body of literature. In line with Angelini & Bradley (2010) and Um (2014), the same-sex couple content sparked much engagement, including a considerable number of disapproving and negative responses. It should be noted, however, that the amount of positive and approving engagement found among the reactions to these posts, would seem to be contradictory to Angelini & Bradley (2010) and Um (2014). As similar to Holz Ivory’s (2017) and Oakenfull & Greenlee’s (2004) findings, the content including a same-sex female couple was evaluated much more approvingly and positively than the content portraying a gay male couple. Due to the sample size’s restrictions, however, more research is necessary in order to better understand the reactions to same-sex couples as featured in social media marketing.

Interviews conducted with the Daniel Wellington social media team have explored both the team’s decision to include same-sex couple themed content as well as the effects that the follower reactions have had. The interviewees indicated that the main motivation behind their decision to post such photos was a sense of obligation to better portray a social media feed representative of their diverse, global community of followers. As an equally important motivation, the social media staff members have indicated that they were driven by a view that the inclusion of same-sex couples, as well as other types of diversity representations, could potentially enact social and cultural change. The interviews have indicated that the followers’ reactions to the posts did not have a deterring effect on, or change, the team’s commitment to including more diversity on the brand’s social media channels. On the contrary, the experience of consciously including same-sex couples on their Instagram account would seem to have sparked further awareness and motivation within the team, encouraging further diversification within their range of visual content.

5.2 Discussion

Through a statistical analysis of Daniel Wellington’s LGBTQ+ social media marketing together with an ethnography on the company’s social media team, this thesis, as the first of its kind, has brought certain new insights to attention. I would like to conclude this thesis by highlighting
some of these. Firstly, I would like to underscore some of the positive effects of including same-sex couples in social media marketing. My statistical analysis of the same-sex couple representations hints at a significantly more positive outcome, as represented through a high number of likes, than compared to the overall negative sentiment in the findings of previous literature.

Beyond the statistical analysis, the ethnographic section of this thesis reveals new insights into the corporate response to LGBTQ+ inclusive marketing. The interviews have revealed that Daniel Wellington’s social media staff are driven by transformative ideas in their work, an ethic that may disrupt and destabilize traditionally heteronormative discourses. Through the inclusion of diversity in the brand’s social media channels this thesis highlights one way in which that may be achieved. Additionally, the interviewees reported that they felt positively about the experience of posting representations of same-sex couples, an experience that has further strengthened their commitment to the brand’s inclusion of diversity in its social media feeds. The ethnographic research proves that this thesis has achieved one of its main aims: to capture a more nuanced understanding of the effects of LGBTQ+ themed marketing. By looking beyond the audience’s reactions, the main focus of existing studies, this thesis has added an extra layer of insight to the existing body of literature.

It should be noted that due to the narrow scope of this thesis, the focus is limited. While I refer to, and paraphrase, a number of studies referring to the larger LGBTQ+ community, I have chosen to exclusively focus on representations of same-sex couples. This means that numerous intersections of the rainbow community have not been included. As identified in my summary of LGBTQ+ media representational tropes, partnered gays and lesbians enjoy the most visibility. Accordingly I would suggest that the intersections of the LGBTQ+ community that have not been included in this thesis be the focus of future research. Future research could, as an example, analyze the effects of representations of transgender, non-binary and queer people.

Navigating and researching the corporate social media landscape, a number of additional issues worthy of academic research have come to mind. Future research could focus on the opportunities and challenges of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in brands’ advertising through social media. Do reactions to gay and lesbian themed advertising in social media differ from those identified in traditional media? Additionally, brands have the ability to reach millions of social media users for
free by posting social media content daily. Could the nature and dynamics of social media facilitate the increased representation of LGBTQ+ individuals? As indicated by Daniel Wellington’s social media staff, no long-term effects on the brand’s Instagram account were seen by including content featuring same-sex couples. These results present a stark contrast to the adverse outcomes of LGBTQ+ themed advertising in traditional media as outlined in previous studies. Could the ongoing shift to social media advertising decrease the risks associated with featuring queer themed advertising?

Throughout the research process, specifically in analyzing the content featuring same-sex couples, I encountered a large number of homophobic comments. Seeing these comments has made me consider the potential issues surrounding the corporate response to hate speech as witnessed on social media. Instagram, as well as the other major social media platforms, has been criticized for its seeming reluctance to actively curb discriminatory content and hate speech (Eddy & Scott 2017; Murphy 2018). This could present some challenges for brands with large followings looking to include content that could be seen as politicized and thus spark debate, or just pure hate speech, in the comments section. Are brands and companies equipped with the will and the knowledge to successfully handle this issue? How do large companies and brands deal with the issue of hate speech in their own comments sections? These questions will be increasingly important as freedom of expression, hate speech and slander on the internet are hotly debated.

At the same time, while screening the comments section, the nature of ethics surrounding online ethnography in social media was frequently highlighted. While general guidelines exist for researchers to follow, many gray areas have emerged while mining the comments sections of each social media post studied. Lines become easily blurred on social media regarding what could be seen as personally identifiable data. Social media handles, aliases, informal and hybridized discourses that may or may not reveal sensitive information, are all problematic ethical territory for the researcher. As social media continues to be a part of our daily lives, and an unavoidable location for social interactions, more research will be needed to help guide researchers in making correct ethical decisions.
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Um, N-H 2012, ‘Seeking the holy grail through gay and lesbian consumers: An exploratory content analysis of ads with gay/lesbian-specific content’, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 133-149.


Wallenberg, B 2016, ‘Från noll till en miljard på fem år – så här gick det till’ [From zero to a billion in five years – this is how it happened], *Veckans Affärer*, 1 July 2016, viewed 20 July 2018, <https://www.va.se/nyheter/2016/06/27/tysander/>.


Appendix

Appendix a: Consent Form

Appendix b: Interview Questions

Appendix c: Social Media Data

Appendix d: Screenshots from InfluencerDB showing Follower Changes @danielwellington
Consent Form for Participation in Research Study
Linköping University
Title of Study: Queer Love in Social Media Marketing

Description of the research and your participation
You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Martin Kallur. The purpose of this study is to explore the reactions to gay and lesbian themed imagery in social media marketing.

You were selected as a possible participant as you have participated in this project of posting photos of non-heterosexual couples as part of Daniel Wellington’s social media staff. If you consent, your participation in this study will involve an interview about the social media staff’s experience throughout this project. With your consent, the data from this interview will be included in the final publication.

Risks and discomforts
There are no known risks of participating in this research.

Potential benefits
There are no known or expected benefits to you that would result from your participation in this research study. However, your participation in this research study will contribute to a body of literature exploring the effects of LGBTQ+ inclusive marketing and advertising.

Protection of confidentiality, identity and integrity
With your consent, the information you provide in this interview will be used in this research. However, your identity (including your name and exact professional title) will not be revealed in the published study. The researcher will, to the greatest extent possible, protect your integrity.

Voluntary participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary and your consent may be withdrawn at any time throughout the study. You will not be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or withdraw your consent.
Contact information
If you have any questions about the study or if any problems regarding your participation in this study arise, please contact Martin Kallur at 070-2876230 or marka246@student.liu.se.

Consent
I have read this consent form and have been given both the opportunity and the time to ask questions regarding my participation in this study. I give my full consent to participate in this study.

Participant signature:

Participant name:

Date and location:
Interview Questions

- What are the goals and purposes with Daniel Wellington’s presence in social media?
- Why are social media important for big brands today?
- What methods/indicators do you use in order to measure your performances and whether you are achieving your goals?
- What are your thoughts about portraying diversity in Daniel Wellington’s social media channels? Is it important for you? If yes, why?
- How do you feel when you see same-sex couples represented in the media in general, and in advertising in particular? How do you usually react when you see same-sex couples in advertising/social media marketing? How did you react when you saw Daniel Wellington’s first picture of a same-sex couple?
- Why have you chosen to post pictures of same-sex couples to Daniel Wellington’s Instagram account? Were you worried about the reactions? What types of reactions did you expect?
- How would you describe the reactions to the pictures of same-sex couples? What types of engagement did these pictures evoke when they were posted to the account?
- Numbers wise, did the posting of these pictures have an effect on Daniel Wellington’s Instagram account in any way?
- How did the reactions make you feel? How were you affected by the positive vs. The negative reactions?
- Have the reactions to these photos made you change your way of thinking about representing LGBTQ+ couples on Daniel Wellington’s Instagram in the future?
Social Media Data (as of 11 July)

11/21 Post - [https://www.instagram.com/p/BbxakSJgj6h/?taken-by=danielwellington](https://www.instagram.com/p/BbxakSJgj6h/?taken-by=danielwellington)

Likes: 36,355
Average number of likes*: 56,2k
Average number of comments*: 195
Number of comments: 156
Comments expressing approval: 68 (43.6%)
Comments expressing disapproval: - (0%)
Excluded comments: 88 (56.4%)
Approval/disapproval ratio: -
Percentage follower growth week following post: 1.96%

2/14 Post - [https://www.instagram.com/p/BfMSkECAMyI/?taken-by=danielwellington](https://www.instagram.com/p/BfMSkECAMyI/?taken-by=danielwellington)

Likes: 85,911
Average number of likes*: 61.1k
Average number of comments*: 343
Total no. of comments: 1164 (out of which 300 are deleted)
Comments expressing approval: 274 (23.5%)
Comments expressing disapproval incl. deleted comments: 336 (28.9%)
Excluded comments: 554 (47.6%)
Approval/disapproval ratio: 0.82
Percentage follower growth week following post: 0.26%

5/17 Post - [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bi5AWT-gQ12/?taken-by=danielwellington](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bi5AWT-gQ12/?taken-by=danielwellington)

Likes: 47,016
Average number of likes*: 49.9
Average number of comments*: 206
Total no. of comments: 252 (out of which 21 are deleted)
Comments expressing approval: 133 (52.8%)
Comments expressing disapproval incl. deleted comments: 36 (14.3%)
Excluded comments: 83 (32.9%)
Approval/disapproval ratio: 3.7
Percentage growth week following: 0.25%
Average Follower Growth during Period of Posting 11/21/2017-5/17/2018

Beginning of period 11/21: 3,616,173
End of period 5/17: 4,183,418
Total growth: 567,245

Duration: 178 days
Avg daily growth: 3187
Percentage weekly growth: 0,61%

First post 11/21 percentage growth week following: 1,96%
Second post 2/14 percentage growth week following: 0,26%
Third post 5/17 percentage growth week following: 0,25%

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<td>1164</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. no. of comments</td>
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<td>206</td>
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<td>% of avg.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>339%</td>
<td>122%</td>
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<td>43.6%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% disapproval</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Appro./disappro. ratio</td>
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<th>Gay</th>
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<td>% follower growth</td>
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<td>0.26%</td>
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Screenshots from InfluencerDB showing Follower Changes @danielwellington

Source URL: https://www.influencerdb.net/insights/e149ae8e-eb89-47db-bd57-89a9f6bab9f4/follower-changes/
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<th>Posts</th>
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