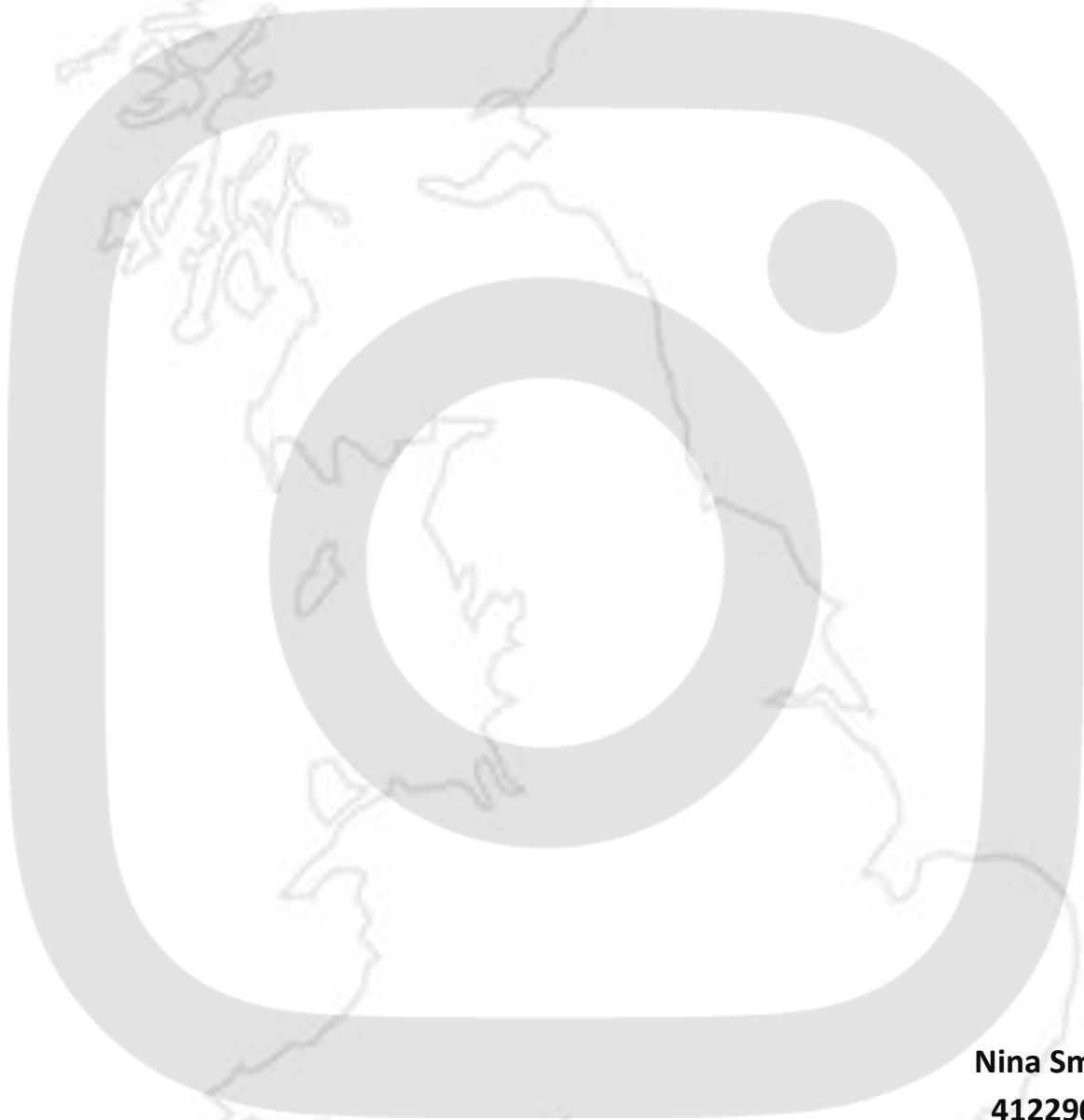


# **#LoveGreatBritain**

**A Case Study of VisitBritain's Narrative  
Construction on Instagram**



**Nina Smit**

**4122909**

**MA Thesis**

**Creative Industries**

**dr. T. Sintobin**

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# Abstract

Nowadays many tourism bureaus have turned to Instagram to promote their destinations and many of them use content that has originally been posted by visitors of the destination who are not connected to the tourism bureau. By using specific hashtags, Instagram users get the opportunity to have their post regrammed by the tourism bureau. One of the tourism bureaus that runs its Instagram account in this manner is VisitBritain, the bureau responsible for tourism in Great Britain. Especially taking into account that Great Britain consists of four countries as well as the recent Brexit referendum, Great Britain makes an interesting case study. This thesis examines what kind of narrative VisitBritain constructs of Great Britain on Instagram and how the tourism bureau constructs this narrative on the Instagram account @lovegreatbritain. The photos, hashtags, and captions included in the posts on the account are analyzed. This thesis draws from various theories on tourism, photography, and tourists; including John Urry's concept of the tourist gaze. Important notions are the romantic gaze, the tourist versus traveler, and nostalgia. Eventually it is concluded that VisitBritain constructs Great Britain as a destination that offers visitors an escape from present-day lives as well as an escape from mass tourism. By doing so, VisitBritain constructs an identity for the visitor as well.

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# Introduction

*"I'm fascinated with being able to travel the world via Instagram and just be somewhere different.*

*Teleport yourself somewhere else."*

- Mike Krieger

The above is a quote by Mike Krieger, Chief Technology Officer at Instagram, in a discussion on the possibility that Instagram may in the future start to use virtual reality to let Instagram users explore the world (Roettgers). Although this possibility is still in the future, fact is that Instagram is popular for travel and tourism purposes. There are Instagram users such as @muradosmann who travel the world and have close to 4.5 million followers and many others have hundreds of thousands followers on the platform (Pemberton). A study in France indicated that for 45% percent of French Instagram users, tourism was the most attractive activity on in Instagram (Khlat). It is no wonder then that official tourism boards have also created Instagram accounts in hopes of successfully marketing their destinations to Instagram users. One of the firsts to succeed in creating an extremely popular account was Tourism Australia. Their Instagram account @Australia currently has 2.4 million followers (Karnikowski).

It seems that currently most tourism boards have an Instagram presence, no matter on what continent they find themselves or whether they promote a city, region, or country. Not all are as popular as @Australia, but what they do seem to have in common is that most of the accounts use pictures taken by actual tourists instead of pictures taken by a hired professional photographer (Karnikowski). The tourism board accounts repost a picture that has been taken by a tourist and posted to their personal Instagram account. The act of reposting is called regramming and the reposted post is called a regram. Usually the tourism board's account gives credit to the original poster by mentioning their account name. The tourism board finds the original posts by searching Instagram for specific hashtags. Most accounts state which hashtags users can use to make sure the tourism board's account is able to find their posts, which gives them a chance of being regrammed.

## Focus

It can be assumed that a tourism board does not randomly pick posts to regram, and therefore it will be interesting to look at what kind of posts they pick and if there is a particular narrative that they construct on their Instagram accounts. Of course, this thesis will not be able to discuss all official tourism accounts, therefore its focus will be on the @lovegreatbritain account of VisitBritain, the tourism board that is concerned with attracting tourists to Great Britain. The recent development that Great Britain will leave the European Union in the near future - often referred to as Brexit - can have consequences for tourism on the island (Chapman; "Tourism"; Morris). This

makes @lovegreatbritain a currently relevant case study. Furthermore, Great Britain is an interesting case study because it consists of three separate countries - England, Scotland, and Wales - which could mean that there will be multiple narratives present on the @lovegreatbritain account.

The research question that this thesis will answer is: *what kind of narrative of Great Britain does VisitBritain create on its Instagram account @lovegreatbritain and how do they create it?* An Instagram post generally consists of a photo - or video, but usually a photo - a caption or a short paragraph, one or more hashtags, and sometimes a location related to the post. This thesis will focus on the photos, hashtags, and captions in the posts. The location will be discussed only in relation to one of these three elements and not separately because the location says more in its context than on its own. The previously mentioned research question will be divided in three subquestions: *what are the subjects of the photos and how are they represented; what kind of hashtags and captions are used; and what kind of posts does @lovegreatbritain regram and how do their regrams differ from the original posts?* The answer to the last question will give insight in how VisitBritain edits posts before posting them on the @lovegreatbritain account, which will be helpful in determining how they try to construct a particular narrative.

## **Great Britain**

As mentioned, Great Britain consists of England, Wales, and Scotland. This union is more political than cultural, and since the late nineteen-nineties Scotland and Wales have also been getting more leeway to self-govern (Childs 37). Interestingly, less than thirty percent of Scots, forty percent of the Welsh, and fifty percent of the English identifies themselves as British (Bradley 1). Although the Welsh also their own national identity, they tend to less strongly distinguish themselves from the English as the Scots (Childs 47). Many British citizens feel more connected to their country or even region or town than to Great Britain (Childs 59). There are differences in languages, (Smyth 217) culture, (Childs 50) and in religion (Cusick 241). Not only are these differences present between the Scottish, Welsh, and English, but Great Britain is also home to a multitude of religions, languages, and cultures that do not have British roots (Smyth 224).

Officially, religion in Great Britain is uniform, as the Church of England - an Anglican Church - is the established church, (Cusick 241) and also has a role in British law-making ("Church of England"). However, the different parts of Great Britain subscribe to different forms of Christianity. In Wales, Methodism and the Congregational church have traditionally been important (Cusick 245). Scotland even has its own national church, the Church of Scotland which is a Presbyterian Protestant church (Bradley 61). When it comes to church attendance however, Catholics have the higher numbers than the Anglicans in England and the Presbyterians in Scotland (Bradley 61). After the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, the Church of England and the Church of Scotland signed a pact

in hopes to bridge the differences between the English and Scottish people (Bingham).

Nevertheless, in the Brexit referendum, 62% of Scottish voters wanted to stay in the European Union and according to Scotland's first minister Nicola Sturgeon, a second referendum on Scottish independence after the one in 2014 is likely inevitable now that the United Kingdom's Prime Minister Theresa May wants to take the United Kingdom out of the European Union's single market ("May's Brexit Speech"). All in all, it seems fair to say that Great Britain is far from a homogeneous whole.

## **Britishness**

A 2014 report by the British Council, *As Others See Us* gives insight in what people generally associate with the United Kingdom, of which Great Britain is a large part. Of the respondents who were asked what characteristics contribute to making the United Kingdom attractive to them, 42% said its cultural and historic attractions, 39% said cities, 36% mentioned arts, cities were mentioned by 36% of respondents as well, and 33% mentioned history (Culligan 10). The most cited characteristic that makes the United Kingdom unattractive was the weather, which was often described as cold and rainy (Culligan 14). The report *How The World Views Britain*, published in December 2016, shows that the United Kingdom has been in the top five out of fifty countries when it comes to being "rich in historic buildings and monuments," having "a vibrant city life and urban attractions," and being "an interesting and exciting place for contemporary culture" ("How The World Views Britain" 12; 13). The United Kingdom ranked either 6th or 7th place each year concerning having "a rich cultural heritage" ("How The World Views Britain" 13). However, it has rarely cracked the top twenty concerning being "rich in natural beauty" ("How The World Views Britain" 12). The United Kingdom is mainly thought of as an educational tourist destination ("How The World Views Britain" 18) and the cultural products most associated with it are museums ("How The World Views Britain" 19).

The idea of Britishness that people outside of the United Kingdom have mostly matches the British citizens' thoughts on Britishness as these also include the country side and heritage (Storry and Childs 31). The country side is often idealized and seen as idyllic, which is a rural myth (Storry and Childs 21; Storry 91). The British country side and National Parks are "sometimes put forward as representative of an authentic Britishness that is at threat from the architecture, pollution, and city-oriented life of the present (Childs 54). In determining Britishness, the term is often confused and conflated with Englishness, (Childs 43) which often makes the Welsh and Scottish feel that their identity is being erased (Storry and Childs 19). Some of the "quintessences of Englishness" that are often also seen as Britishness are the Big Ben, the Union Jack, cottages, gardening, and tea (Storry and Childs 20).

Out of these five examples, maybe gardening needs an explanation. In the United Kingdom, 84 percent of households has access to a garden and 52 percent of its adult population practices gardening regularly (Bhatti and Church 38). Furthermore, "garden visiting and garden writing are significant cultural practices in the UK" as well (Bhatti et al. 50). Currently there are close to 550 gardens in the United Kingdom that can be visited, ("About Great British Gardens"). Additionally, the country garden is a globally known feature of the English landscape, although likely more iconic than ordinary (Bhatti et al. 40).

## **VisitBritain**

VisitBritain is the official tourism board for Great Britain and its "mission is to grow the volume and value of inbound tourism across the nations and regions of Britain and to develop world-class English tourism product to support [their] growth aspirations ("Business Plan" 3). The most recent long-term tourism plan argues that VisitBritain should focus its advertising and PR on playing to its strengths and addressing its "perceived weaknesses" (Great Britain 36). The former include heritage and both traditional and contemporary culture; the latter consists of natural beauty, food, value, and welcome ("Great Britain" 36). Interestingly, the organization of the VisitBritain board and the VisitEngland board are combined. The tourist boards for Scotland and Wales are separate organizations and seen as strategic partners of VisitBritain ("Business Plan" 1).

The business plan released by the British Tourist Authority in May 2016 mentions that VisitBritain wants to focus more on the markets in China, the Middle East, and other countries in Asia, as these markets are becoming more important ("Business Plan" 15). The report does not specifically mention Instagram, but it is noted that VisitBritain wants to develop their presence on social media and "develop relationships with key influencers and boost user-generated content" ("Business Plan" 13). The annual report 2015/2016 also mentions that VisitBritain worked with popular Instagram users in order to "get access to a different audience and grow its sphere of influence" ("Annual Report and Accounts" 25).

## **Hypothesis**

The starting point of this research is the hypothesis that VisitBritain uses the @lovegreatbritain account to show that Great Britain is a very diverse destination. It is expected that @lovegreatbritain posts on the more well-known - and maybe even stereotypical -tourist attractions such as the medievial castles and green hills, but that the account also makes an effort to show a more modern and contemporary side of Great Britain in order to attract a diverse audience. The captions will be used to describe the photo and directly address the readers to spark their interest and the used hashtags will be ones that make the posts easy to find on Instagram. The photo in the

regrammed post will likely not be changed from the original post but the captions and hashtags will be adapted by VisitBritain in order to better serve the narrative that they constructed to promote Great Britain. Furthermore, to reach an international audience, the @lovegreatbritain account will regram Instagram users of various ethnical and racial backgrounds. There will probably not be a large difference in the number of female Instagram users and male users that are regrammed, but as Instagram is a quite new platform, the regrammed users may tend to be relatively young.

## **Order**

The thesis will start with a status quaestionis that will place the topic in the context of already existing research on related topics. This will be followed by the theoretical framework that will serve as a background in order to answer the research question. The theoretical framework will touch upon the branding of a tourist destination, the spreading of tourism imagery, the concept of the tourist gaze, heritage tourism, nostalgia, and the hashtag. Then the methodology that will be used to answer the research question will be explained. As mentioned, the research question can be divided in three subquestions. Each of the questions will be answered in a chapter. The first chapter of this thesis will discuss what can be seen in the photo, the photo's composition, et cetera. The second chapter deals with the hashtags and captions of the posts. It will discuss what @lovegreatbritain writes about and the type of language that is used, whether or not they specifically address the audience, and what kind of hashtags they use. The third chapter will be about the original posts and the difference between those and the regrammed posts on the @lovegreatbritain account. It will take a look at what kind of people get regrammed by @lovegreatbritain, are they really ordinary tourists?; if @lovegreatbritain has made any changes to the photo, for example by adding a filter; does @lovegreatbritain use the same hashtags and captions of the original poster, or are they edited or completely replaced? Each chapter will end with a conclusion with the answer to the subquestion that was discussed in the chapter. Finally the thesis itself will end with a conclusion that answers the research question. In addition, the conclusion will deal with the possible limitations of the research as well as where the research provides leads for further research.



## Status Quaestionis

Quite a lot of academic research has been done on tourism and photography in general, whether it was focused on tourist photography or the imagery used in tourism brochures et cetera. One of the most important books in the field is the 2009 publication *The Framed World. Tourism, Tourists and Photography* edited by Mike Robinson and David Picard. The book deals with the relationship between photography, tourism, and tourists. It discusses the power relations between the photographing tourist and its subject, the visual rhetoric in tourism advertisements, and the role of photography in the making of touristic sites and sights. Tourist photography is also placed in the context of colonialism and postcolonialism. Another influential book in the field is *The Tourist Gaze*, published in 1990, of which the updated version *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* will be discussed in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Instagram can be seen as a current form of the tourism brochure, so research on tourism brochures could be useful. However, as Instagram is quite a recent phenomenon - the app was only released in October 2010 - not that much research has yet been done on the use of Instagram in tourism. Recently, researchers seem to have been paying more attention to the role of social media in general in the tourism sector, an example of which is Roberta Minazzi's 2015 publication *Social Media Marketing in Tourism and Hospitality* which discusses how those in the tourism and hospitality sector could use social media to market their destination to tourists and what the impacts of social media on tourists as well as suppliers can be. Although Instagram has not been fully neglected by tourism scholars, few have focused their research on analysis of both the visual and textual aspects of Instagram posts related to the tourism field nor have they often singled out Instagram accounts by tourism authorities.

Interestingly, scholars who have focused on Instagram and tourism in their research often seem to be attracted to the tourist's relation to space and Instagram's function of geo-tagging a post. Geo-tagging is adding a location to a photo or post which makes it possible for other users of a platform to see what pictures have been taken in which place on a map. Zhou, Xu, and Kimmons focused on geo-tagged digital photos in order to find "opportunities to study people's travel experiences and preferences" (Zhou et al. 144). Researchers from the Universidad Complutense in Madrid have used geolocated information from online photo-sharing services - of which Instagram was one - to "demonstrate the potential of photo-sharing services for identifying and analysing the main tourist attractions in eight major European cities" (García-Palomares 408). Others looked at how geographic origin and travel group composition influence tourist photographing and sharing (Konijn 1). Chung and Koo focus on how social media changes the way Korean tourists search for

travel information. However, they mention Instagram only once. A fellow Korean researcher focused on "travel selfies on social media as objectified self-presentation" which she also placed in a gender context (Lyu 185). Two scholars from the Brawijaya University in Indonesia, Fatanti and Suyadnya, published an article called "Beyond User Gaze: How Instagram Creates Tourism Destination Brand?" which, as one of the few, does focus on official tourism Instagram accounts and how they use their posts to attract tourists to the destination they promote. They see Instagram as entangling economic, business, and social functions (Fatanti and Suyadnya 1094). Fatanti and Suyadnya however do not really focus on the visual aspects of the posts, despite calling Instagram accounts online photo albums (Fatanti 1090). Their attention is directed to captions, hashtags, geo-tagging, and user generated content.

Three scholars from the United States have written about the relation between the posting of pictures on social media by tourists and their souvenir purchasing behavior. They found that people who do post pictures online "purchase souvenirs differently to those who do not" and that they are more likely to buy locally made souvenirs and that those who share photos could likely be more sustainable tourists (Boley 27). Most of the researchers mentioned above performed quantitative research instead of qualitative research, which is what this thesis will do.

# Theoretical Framework

## **Branding**

The use of Instagram by a tourism promotion agency, such as the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account of the VisitBritain tourism board is a form of producing and marketing a place, in this case Great Britain, as a tourist destination (Leite 46). According to Leite, "a locality must develop an identity that will attract visitors" to become a viable tourist destination, which is a process that is also called branding (Leite 47). Tourism organizations often try to achieve the branding of a place by choosing something that can be seen as a symbol of the location that is suitable to make into a product for tourist consumption. This can be an "ethnic or cultural trait," such as a specific dance or dish, or even "an entire ethnic group or historical event" (Leite 47). Long before Instagram was created, tourism organizations spent their time to convincingly sell a location as an attractive destination for travel. Often this was done through imagery of the location, for example in brochures made by the organization, but the imagery was also spread by photos taken by tourists who showed them to people back home (Leite 46). All these images combined create "myths" (Selwyn qtd. in Leite 46) or "narratives" (Bruner 20). These narratives, or myths, contribute to tourists' expectations of a particular location which start to get shape long before the tourist actually visits the destination (Leite 46). They provide the "conceptual frame within which tourism operates" (Bruner 21) by "resonat[ing] with cultural metanarratives about discovery, adventure, global intercultural relations, and so forth" (Leite 46). In general, tourism organizations repeat a couple of narratives instead of being innovative and inventing new narratives. Usually they just try to find a new location in which they can tell the same old stories, likely "because those stories are the ones that the tourist consumer is willing to buy" (Bruner 22). Often they promote images that signify the already "established representation of a destination to assure resonance with the audience" (Tussyadiah 156). Although the marketing of tourism destinations may often be standardized, this "does not [necessarily] have to standardize tourists" (Urry 192).

## **Spreading imagery**

The Instagram account by VisitBritain spreads the imagery via the organization as well as via the tourists themselves. On one hand, the tourism board uses it as a promotional tool, similar to a brochure, as they choose the images that they feel will attract the most people to the location and add a caption and hashtags that fit the message that they want to bring across. On the other hand, the imagery is also spread by tourists themselves because the board chooses photos to post on the official account by searching for the hashtags #LoveGreatBritain and #OMGB on Instagram. The photos with these hashtags are all taken by tourists who have already been to Great Britain and have

posted pictures to their personal accounts and added one or both of the aforementioned hashtags. Before Instagram and the internet in general people had to wait until they were home to show their friends and family the pictures of their travels, but now they can immediately create posts about their experiences online and broadcast them to a larger, global audience, (Urry 173) which is beneficial for the tourism organization as this functions as an easy, quick, and cheap tool for promoting a destination.

## **Media**

In relation to the spreading of imagery in tourism it is important to note the relationship between tourism, the media, and popular culture. The function of the media in tourism is twofold. On one hand it functions in "a communicative sense" and on the other hand "as a form of entertainment and enjoyment fuelling the development of tourism" (Long and Robinson 98). The media is not only a distributive mechanism that communicates messages and images to an audience but it is also "a form of entertainment in itself which feeds the production of popular cultural genres" (Long 99; 101). Long and Robinson mention that there now are mainstream television shows, books, and movies about the behavior and experiences of tourists. This not only means that tourism is part of these media narratives as just a setting or narrative device, it indicates that "tourism has become popular culture . . . and [is] being absorbed as part of everyday life" (Long 107). Although Long and Robinson focus on more traditional forms of media, their argument is also applicable to Instagram. The tourism board for Great Britain uses its Instagram account to communicate and distribute their message, that basically boils down to Great Britain is a great place to visit, to a global audience in order to attract tourists. At the same time, the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account has over 250,000 followers. These followers are not necessarily all people who have visited Great Britain or will visit it in the future, but they are the recipients of the tourism board's message as they are the ones who see @lovegreatbritain's posts and may even press the 'heart' button in order to like a post. They voluntarily followed the account so it can only be assumed that they get some form of enjoyment out of viewing the pictures of viewing the pictures and reading the accompanying captions. According to *Brandwatch*, sixty percent of Instagram users uses the app daily (Smith) and Instagram claims over 300 million daily users ("Stats"). In this case, use means that people open the app, but they do not necessarily post or like something. Therefore it seems fair to say that Instagram has become part of everyday life for the majority of its users. Social media, such as Instagram "are tied into the flow of the everyday and tend to reflect instantaneous time, a culture of instantaneity, where people expect rapid delivery, ubiquitous availability and the instant gratification of desires (Tomlinson qtd. in Urry 176). Important to note is also that the VisitBritain tourism board is able to see how many likes their posts receive so they get a sense of what type of destination or attraction is

popular among their followers. They could use this information to focus on the development of destinations that they feel will be popular among their followers which are also possible future tourists, although the relation between the number of likes and the number of actual visitors is unclear. Just as how Long and Robinson described the role of the media in tourism, Instagram functions as a distributive mechanism that communicates messages and images to an audience, but it is also a source of entertainment for the audience that may influence tourism development.

In this sense, the audience may influence the media or messenger, namely the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. This is contrary to the traditional way of looking at communication in media and tourism "as a one-way process from the media to receptive audiences" (Gillespie; Hall; Laswell qtd. in Long 101). Instagram makes this a two-way process and not only because Instagram users may influence the VisitBritain board's actions as mentioned above. The @lovegreatbritain account mentions on top of its page that users that post a picture taken in Great Britain on their own Instagram account have a chance to get their photo featured on the @lovegreatbritain account if they use the hashtag #LoveGreatBritain or #OMGB in the caption of their original post. Although the @lovegreatbritain account has the option to add a filter to the photo or change the accompanying caption and hashtags, this means that Instagram users who are also the VisitBritain board's audience can influence the content that is distributed by the board. This further enhances the two-way process. The fact that promoting a destination in this manner uses the tourist's real experience is not new though and neither exclusive to Instagram. As Long and Robinson write, since the rise of the Internet most tourism organizations have had a web presence although this often was just an edited version of the analog brochures. However, some also created virtual guidebooks that were more interactive and made use of the real experiences of tourist. In addition, many tourists started sharing their experiences and photos on their personal weblogs and review sites (Long 105-6). Other - potential - tourists may find their stories and photos more credible and sincere as they feel like the photos they see on a tourism organization's website are often heavily edited (Urry 57). However, with digital photography, even amateur photographers can improve their photos by editing them, so it is not necessarily true that an amateur's photo is more realistic than one taken by a professional photographer (Urry 175). Before VisitBritain had the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account, they already encouraged tourists to upload their experiences and photos online (Urry 57). Instagram then is an easy and accessible tool for both tourists and VisitBritain to do this.

### **Tourist gaze**

As has already been noted, the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account uses photos taken by tourists as content. Therefore this thesis should also take into account theories on tourist photography and how tourists look at the destination to which they traveled. Back in 1990, John Urry

already wrote about the tourist gaze and his book *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* written with Jonas Larsen provides a useful theoretical framework from which this thesis will draw. To understand the concept of the tourist gaze it is important to note that "the concept of the gaze highlights that looking is a learned ability and that the pure and innocent eye is a myth" (Urry 1). This means that the way people look at - gaze upon - things and places is framed by the society and culture that they are part of. It is as if they gaze through a "filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education" (Urry 1). In addition, gazing "is conditioned by personal experiences and memories and framed by rules and styles, as well as by circulating images and texts of this and other places" (Urry 1). This relates to the earlier mentioned notion by Leite that a tourist has an expectation of a destination that has begun taking shape long before the tourist actually visits that particular destination (Leite 46). The frames through which the tourists gaze are "critical resources, techniques, cultural lenses that potentially enable tourists to see the physical forms and material spaces before their eyes as "interesting, good or beautiful" (Urry 2). It is through these frames that the tourist interprets the destination and gives it meaning. The tourist gaze is a matter of "socially patterned and learnt ways of seeing" (Berger qtd. in Urry 2) and is "constructed through mobile images and representational technologies" (Urry 2).

These mobile images and representational technologies that shape a tourist's expectation of a destination, such as television, literature, magazines, and nowadays social media including Instagram, also construct and sustain anticipation as they make the tourist daydream and fantasize which ultimately contributes to them choosing a certain place to gaze upon (Urry 3). In this sense photography can be seen as a world making technology (Urry 164). The tourist in general directs its gaze to that which is different for their everyday experience and this can be features of landscapes and townscape. Urry and Larsen write, "the viewing of such tourist sites often involves different forms of social patterning, with a much greater sensitivity to visual elements of landscape or townscape than normally found in everyday life" (Urry 3). As a result, "people linger over such a gaze, which is then often visually objectified or captured," which can be in a photo, postcard, film, et cetera (Urry 3). Via these mediums the gaze gets "reproduced, recaptured and redistributed over time and across space" (Urry 3). Often, tourist photography has to do with "a ritual of quotation," (Urry 172) as tourists tend to take pictures of what they have already seen in, for example, brochures in order to show the people back home their own versions and 'prove' that they have really been there (Urry 172; Moir 168). Photography often shapes travel and gazing. Tourists may feel that if they do not take a photo they will not remember their experience and it becomes their reason for stopping, taking a picture and then continuing (Urry 172). They also take pictures to produce a "tangible memory" and make a fleeting moment last longer (Urry 156). In a sense, this makes their "experiences and memories . . . objects of nostalgia" (Urry 167). The images "serve a purpose for a

future-self as a mediator of nostalgia (P. Robinson 177). With social media, such as Instagram, "tourists communicate their memories of visiting different places and meeting different people through stories" (Tussyadiah 156).

Furthermore, Urry sees the tourist as a type of semiotician as "the gaze is constructed through signs," while "tourism involves the collection of signs" (Urry 3). This means that "timeless romantic Paris" is captured in the gaze when a tourist sees two people kissing in Paris, and when seeing a small village in England, it is the "real olde England" that is captured (Urry 3). The tourists read their environment for "signifiers of certain preestablished notions or signs derived from discourses of travel and tourism" (Culler qtd. in Urry 11). Tourists see objects, buildings, and landscapes as signs that stand for something else that is bigger than the thing itself. Photography helps tourists to read signs and become "competent gazers" (Urry 171). When tourists gaze, they see "various signs [which can function as either a metaphor or metonym] or tourist clichés" (Urry 11).

In response to the criticism in relation to the tourist gaze, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* argues that the tourist gaze should be seen as "performative, embodied practices" and "highlight[s] how each gaze depends upon practices and material relations as upon discourses and signs" (Urry 10). The gaze arranges and manages "the relationships between the various sensuous experiences" (Urry 9). Gazing should be seen as a set of practices that includes "interpreting, evaluating, drawing comparisons and making mental connections between signs and their referents, and capturing signs photographically," which implies that the organizing sense in tourism is visual (Urry 12). This is especially an interesting notion because Instagram is a mainly visual medium as well.

Even though the tourist gaze is present in the general sense, Urry and Larsen note that "there are different kinds of gaze authorized by various discourses," which include education; health; group solidarity; pleasure and play; heritage and memory; and nation (Urry 13). These discourses imply that there are multiple gazes and each has a different kind of relationship with the object of the gaze. In *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, eight gazes are distinguished, namely the romantic gaze, the collective tourist gaze, the spectatorial gaze, the reverential gaze, the anthropological gaze, the environmental gaze, the mediatized gaze, and the family gaze (Urry 13-14). For this thesis, especially the notion of the romantic gaze is relevant. This type of gaze stresses "solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze" (Urry 13). Tourists are expected to look at an object privately or with their significant other. The notion of the romantic gaze is used especially often in the western world. Common objects of this kind of gaze are "the deserted beach, the empty hilltop, the uninhabited forest, the uncontaminated mountain stream and so on" (Urry 13). Often the romantic gaze also frames a landscape as picturesque or having "sublime 'timeless' scenery" and ignores any signs of modernity (Urry 169). The romantic gaze has been important in spreading tourism globally as those who look through the romantic gaze are constantly searching for new

objects and destinations to gaze upon, as once something becomes too popular, the personal aspect of the romantic gaze is negated (Urry 225).

### **Tourist versus traveler**

In the 1980 book *Abroad*, Paul Fussell wrote on the difference between explorers, travelers, and tourists. According to Fussell, "all three make journeys, but the explorer seeks the undiscovered, the traveler that which has been discovered by the mind working in history, the tourist that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity" (Fussell 39). Travelers find themselves in the middle; the "risks of the formless and the unknown" of the explorer on one side, and the "security of pure cliché" of the tourist on the other (Fussell 39). The distinction between a traveler and a tourist is established even further by the argument that travel takes work. Those who travel are active; they study and inquire, and do not expect their travels run smoothly and be without any mishaps (Fussell 39-40). Tourists on the other hand are more passive; they do not extensively study the destination they visit, tend to expect their accommodation, transportation, and entertainment to be fully arranged, and there generally always are groups of tourists (Fussell 41-43). The tourist mainly wants "to pos[e] momentarily as a member of a social class superior to one's own, to play the role of a 'shopper' and spender whose life becomes significant and exciting only when one is exercising power by choosing what to buy," and raise their social status at home (Fussell 42).

There is a specific type of tourist that is called the anti-tourist (Fussell 47). Anti-tourists are convinced they themselves are travelers instead of tourists, although they still do not want to completely forgo all of the comfort that tourism has to offer (Fussell 49). It is the type of tourist that looks down on other tourists who shamelessly participate in mass tourism and therefore tries to hide their tourist identity. To achieve this, the anti-tourist for example tries to adapt their appearance to that of the locals in order not to stand out as a tourist and avoids the standard tourist sites (Fussell 47-49). The anti-tourist believes that "being a tourist is somehow offensive and scorned by an imagined upper class which it hopes to emulate and, if possible, be mistaken for" (Fussell 49).

### **Heritage tourism**

Concerning tourism, Great Britain has specialized in history and heritage, and "this affects both what overseas visitors expect to gaze upon and what attracts British residents" to spend their vacations within Britain (Urry 54). Not only museums, monuments and historic buildings, for example castles, are part of this so-called heritage tourism, the term also applies to "the intangibles of culture, such as oral traditions, rituals, folkways, and foodways," (Kelly 24) and natural sites, as some have even been included in UNESCO's World Heritage program (Kelly 27). According to Rickly-Boyd,



"heritage sites generally provide tourists with metanarratives of national significance, but they can also tell localizing narratives of place uniqueness by illustrating examples of local community provenance" (Rickly-Boyd 262). As mentioned above, such sights are often looked at by tourists through the romantic gaze (Urry 13). The romantic gaze has traditionally been concerned with the "appreciation of magnificent scenery" which "originated with the formation of picturesque tourism in late eighteenth-century England" (Urry 100). Tourists came to admire landscapes that they had already become aware of via written works and paintings, which also means that tourists who look through the romantic gaze have often been more elitist (Urry 100). Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City*, published in 1973, that especially in the eighteenth century, English landlords started to create their own sceneries, gardens, and landscape parks, after the examples of what they had seen in paintings (Williams 120). They "could produce their own nature" (Williams 122). The construction of place-myths that nowadays happens through online imagery and other forms of media happened back then in literary and art works.

The British countryside has become an increasingly popular tourist destination, especially for those who work in the service industries, (Urry 134) which according to Urry and Larsen has to do with "the disillusionment of the modern" (Urry 106). The dominant idea of what the countryside is supposed to have is "a lack of planning and regimentation, a vernacular quaint architecture, winding lanes and a generally labyrinthine road system, and the virtues of tradition and the lack of social intervention" (Urry 106). However, this is not all that the countryside has to have to be a good tourist destination, it should be what is considered a landscape, which "is what the viewer has selected from the land, edited and modified in accordance with certain conventional ideas about what constitutes a good view " (Andrews qtd . in Urry 106). People are very selective when gazing upon such a location and appropriate it. They are not supposed to gaze upon other people, or farm machinery, polluted water, telegraph wires, dead animals and so on (Urry 107). As Williams already wrote about the creation of landscapes in the eighteenth century: "a working country is hardly ever a landscape" (Williams 120). Rural labor and laborers were removed from the rural landscape and nature was taken control of and being ordered (Williams 124-125). The landscape gazed upon with the romantic gaze is an idealized version of the countryside. In a comparison with the city, the positive stereotypes of the country side were that it was more innocent, virtuous, and natural (Williams 234). It is however also important to note that in recent years, for some consumers nature is no longer just something to look at, but also something to be physically active in, for example by hiking, cycling, or climbing through the landscape (Urry 107-8).

Urry and Larsen note that heritage history is problematic because it is merely visual and does not take into account the social experiences related to the objects, buildings, and landscapes that they see which can have been negative, such as war, hunger, et cetera (Urry 138). Tourists use

heritage sites to reminisce and make contrasts between their own daily lives and what they see at the tourist site and often unfairly glorify earlier times (Urry 137). Furthermore, those in the tourism industry also design themed heritage spaces (Urry 145). Heritage tourism does not so much lead to an understanding of history but to the construction of heritage fantasies (Hewison qtd. in Urry 136). In addition, critics of the heritage industry also argue that "much contemporary nostalgia is for the industrial past" while those who are nostalgic for these times do not take into account what is currently happening in the industrial sector, which according to the critics means that "the protection of the past conceals the destruction of the present" (Hewison qtd. in Urry 136). It is argued that "heritage sites [function] as conduits between the past and the present" and "accentuate the positive and sift away what is problematic" (Rickly-Boyd 262; Kammen qtd. in Rickly-Boyd 262).

## **Nostalgia**

The notion of nostalgia has been mentioned several times in the preceding paragraphs. Therefore it seems important to examine what nostalgia is. Roberta Bartoletti describes nostalgia as "a symptom of the dissociation between the contingent, digital memory of modern society and the individual memory, which has retained its holistic and prescriptive nature. From this perspective nostalgia appears as a typically modern form of individual feeling" (Bartoletti 47). According to Bartoletti, there are no longer strong ties within modern society and everything is highly changeable, which makes society "open to other possibilities that could be actualized in the future" (Bartoletti 47). This implies that the ties to founding narratives are also becoming weaker, which, combined with its digital nature, results in "the relationships between what is remembered and what is forgotten as part of social memory becoming ever more based on a general sense of their equivalence" (Bartoletti 47). This means that the collective memory of a society is fractured and fragmented and no longer succeeds in melding multiple memories "to creat[ing] the identity and specificity of a group as a community which together remembers," (Assmann qtd. in Bartoletti 47) which results in a weak founding narrative that binds a community (Bartoletti 47). The sense of nostalgia that is hereby created is then commodified by the heritage tourism industry, according to Bartoletti (48).

A simpler understanding of nostalgia is seeing it as "a bittersweet longing for former times and spaces," (Niemeyer 16) which "recalls times and places that are no more, or are out of reach" (Niemeyer 20). This relates the concept of nostalgia to that of memory (Niemeyer 20). Niemeyer also notices a boom in nostalgia within media, which can be used to share memories, which is also present online (Niemeyer 17). This is especially interesting, as Instagram gives its users the option to make their photos look more vintage-y by adding preset filters over them, and as mentioned before, Instagram can be used to share memories by sharing photos. In addition to adding filters, online

images can be connected to nostalgia by the captions and tags that have been added to them (Bartholeyns 69).

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (Boym 10). It can also be seen as "rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress" (Boym 12). However, nostalgia is not only concerned with the past, it can also be prospective as "fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future" (Boym 12). Boym agrees with Bartoletti that nostalgia has to do with the relationship between individuals and collective memory (Boym 13). Boym distinguishes two main forms of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia (Boym 14; 26).

Restorative nostalgia considers itself to be truth and tradition instead of nostalgia and tries to reconstruct what it feels that has been lost while protecting the absolute truth (Boym 14). It wants to fill the memory gaps (Boym 52). Boym argues that "restorative nostalgia is at the core of recent nation and religious revivals [and] it knows two main plots [namely] the return to origins and the conspiracy" (Boym 14). Those who are restorative nostalgics do not see themselves as nostalgic as they feel that it is about truth. On the other hand, there is reflective nostalgia which doubts the absolute truth and "dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradiction of modernity (Boym 14). It thrives in "the longing itself, and delays the homecoming-wistfully, ironically, desperately," (Boym 14) and embraces "the imperfect process of remembrance" (Boym 52). Restorative nostalgia takes itself completely seriously and wants to "conquer and spatialize time" and "gravitates toward collective pictorial symbols and oral culture" (Boym 59). Reflective nostalgia can be humorous and ironic and does not see longing and critical thought as mutually exclusive (Boym 59). It "cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space" and is "oriented toward an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs" (Boym 59). In the instances in which this thesis will refer to nostalgia, it will mean a longing for an idealized version of the past in order to temporarily escape from the present.

## **Hashtags**

As mentioned before, the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account uses so-called hashtags. In "Searchable talk: the linguistic functions of hashtags," Michael Zappavigna discusses the function of hashtags on Twitter, which can also be applied to hashtags on Instagram as these seem to serve a similar purpose. His analysis "suggest[s] that hashtags are involved in a significant shift in the role that metadata occupy in social life, in other words, a shift toward coordinating activity and commentary rather than simply categorizing artifacts" (Zappavigna 278). Zappavigna's article

provides clear insight in what a hashtag is and how it can be used.

Hashtags are words, initialisms, concatenated phrases, or even entire clauses that are preceded by a # symbol on social media (Zappavigna 275). The # symbol indicates that the text that is preceded by the # symbol is part of the markup and not so much of the content. Hashtags are used as a "form of descriptive annotation produced by users" (Zappavigna 276). Interestingly enough, although the hashtags are part of the markup, they can still be integrated into the "linguistic structure of the texts" (Zappavigna 277) that they are annotating and thus perform functional roles in the discourse (Zappavigna 278). Multiple hashtags can be used in one post, and they can occur at the beginning, middle or end of a post - respectively prefix, infix, and suffix - although they are most likely to be found at either the end or beginning of the post (Zappavigna 287).

Usually hashtags are clickable - they are on Instagram - and when one clicks on the hashtag, one is directed to a page where all posts in which that particular hashtag has been used can be found. For example, if someone is interested in bearded dragons, searching on Instagram for #beardeddragon will find them all posts related to this topic. This type of hashtag use is mainly useful if one wants to reach a specific audience. Although VisitBritain does not know who exactly sees their posts as their followers can be very different types of people and the posts can also be seen by people who do not follow the @lovegreatbritain account, it is likely that they have an intended and imagined audience, which is "a person's mental conceptualization of the people with whom he or she is communicating [and] guide[s] our thoughts and actions during everyday writing and speaking," (Litt 330) thus also on social media. By using hashtags, Visit Britain can try to reach its imagined or intended audience and attempt to make the actual audience and imagined audience match.

Hashtags can also be "metacommentary unlikely to be used as a search query," (Zappavigna 275) such as writing #idontwanttogotowork which can be used to appeal to the posters audience of people who may feel the same way. The first instance indicates "the semantic domain of the post" while the latter makes a metacomment (Zappavigna 275). There is even a third possibility of what kind of meaning a hashtag can perform. It can even link "the post to an existing collective practice," (Zappavigna 275) such as the hashtag #fbf which stands for flashback Friday, which is a practice in which Instagram users post an old photo of themselves on Fridays accompanied with #fbf to indicate it's a picture of a different time in their lives. The same hashtag has also been appropriated by chicken owners who use #fbf as meaning fluffy butt Friday by which they have created the new collective practice of posting a picture of the fluffy backside of one of their chickens on Fridays. This is another example of hashtag use that is not likely to be used as a search query - aside from those who are part of the group in which this collective practice takes place - while it still adds meaning to the post. As hashtags often use "forms of abbreviation or concatenation," they're meanings can often be unclear to those who find themselves outside of the community that uses them (Zappavigna

276). In this sense, hashtags do not only operate "in the service of information management, they also operate in the service of interpersonal social relations" (Zappavigna 277) as they can play a role in the forming of communities or support visibility and participation (Zappavigna 277).

According to Zappavigna, hashtags can have three linguistic functions: experiential, interpersonal, and textual. Zappavigna bases these functions on a metafunctional approach developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics that "considers three key functions that language construes in any communicative performance: an experiential function of enacting experience, an interpersonal function of negotiating relationships, and a textual function of organizing information" (Zappavigna 278). These functions are not mutually exclusive (Zappavigna 280). In general, the primary function of a hashtag is considered to be that of a keyword or subject that indicates the topic of a post or what the post is about. Zappavigna gives the example of a post that says "From Season One'til now, I've never liked Skyler's character. #BreakingBad" (Zappavigna 282). Without the hashtag, it would not have been clear what the poster was talking about and "the hashtag provides this experiential context" (Zappavigna 282).

Other than indicating the topic or 'aboutness' of a post, hashtags can "construe attitudes toward those topics and enact relationships with the ambient audience" which then gives the hashtags interpersonal functions which are "concerned with adopting stances and negotiating affiliations" (Zappavigna 283-4). These hashtags can be realized as statements, questions, offers or commands (Zappavigna 284). In addition, hashtags can also be used to add evaluative meaning to a post. Hashtags that function in this manner can be categorized into three groups: affect, which expresses emotion; judgment, which assesses behavior; and appreciation, which estimates value (Zappavigna 285). According to Zappavigna, there are also hashtags that serve an interpersonal function by adding "playful meanings that have humorous undertones" to a post in order to create a specific identity for the poster while having little to do with the searchability of the post (Zappavigna 286).

The third function of the hashtag is textual, which can be thought of "coordinating these other two functions [the experiential and interpersonal functions] to form discourse that has the status of a communicative event" (Zappavigna 287). Hashtags have an organizing function within the post. It indicates what the Theme information is and what the New information is (Zappavigna 287). In general, when the hashtag has a "topic-marking function . . . [it] functions as the Theme about which some New information is given in the rest of the clause" (Zappavigna 288). However, it may also be that the Theme is within the tweet and that the hashtag contains the New (Zappavigna 288). The hashtag can orient the reader of the post to either the experiential metafunction of the post itself, for example the topic, or orienting the reader toward the interpersonal function of the post itself, which happens when it is an evaluative hashtag (Zappavigna 288).

# Methodology

As mentioned before, this thesis will discuss the Instagram account of VisitBritain, @lovegreatbritain, and will focus on the photo, caption, and hashtags of the post. This means that both visual imagery as well as language will be analyzed. The book *Official Tourism Websites. A Discourse Analysis Perspective* uses a method that is also useful for this thesis. In this book, Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger analyze the discourse on multiple tourism websites and they include both visual texts and linguistic texts, which is what this thesis will do as well. They argue that websites mediate the construction of narratives and communities by combining linguistic and visual texts, (Hallett 6) and therefore "make meaning in multiple articulations" (Kress qtd. in Hallett 7). This applies to the @lovegreatbritain account as well, as VisitBritain combines photos, captions, and hashtags to construct a narrative. The websites discussed by Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger, as well as the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account, "encourage tourism through multimodal texts," (Kress qtd. in Hallett 7) and it thus makes sense to use multimodal discourse analysis to study the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account.

Multimodal discourse analysis combines critical discourse analysis and visual semiotic analysis. Critical discourse analysis "considers language as a social phenomenon and thus analyses texts and places these texts in their context in order to determine the function of the discourse they represent in society [and is] an interdisciplinary approach with a linguistic basis" (Le qtd. in Hallett 7). Visual semiotic analysis is important because it goes deeper and acknowledges that not all meaning is right at the surface, but that "there are usually several layers of meaning within any textual or visual analysis" (Hannam qtd. in Hallett 11). According to Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger, a good starting point for the multimodal analysis of tourism websites - and the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account for the purpose of this thesis - is provided in traditional semiotic analysis, which focuses on the sign, the signifier, and the signified (Hallett 11). Barthes argued that "any sign must be seen to have both a denotative and a connotative signified," (Barthes qtd. in Hallett 11). The denotative is about what is immediately visible, "the scene itself, the literal reality" while the connotative interpretation places it in a larger context and reveals to an extent what society communicates what it thinks (Barthes qtd. in Hallett 11).

In order to properly discuss the photos in the @lovegreatbritain Instagram posts, their analysis will mainly be based on terminology in *The Handbook of Visual Analysis* that was published in 2004 and edited by van Leeuwen and Jewitt. The framing of the subject of the photo will be discussed, which has to do with the boundaries of the photo and how the subject has been positioned inside of these boundaries, (Lister 21) as well as the composition, which relates to how

the elements in the photo are arranged (Lister 38). By framing a photo in a certain manner, the resulting image is disconnected from the wider landscape and a sense of context is removed (M. Robinson 13). It should also be noted that generally a photo of a landscape is divided as a "one-third:two-third proportion", with the line of the horizon marking the divide between the upper one-third and the lower two-third (Lister 38). Furthermore, salience will be discussed, which is a term used "to indicate that some elements can be made more eye-catching than others" which can be done through color contrasts, tonal contrast, size, et cetera (Jewitt 25). In addition to this, the term saturation is relevant, which "refers to the purity of a colour in relation to its appearance in the colour spectrum," (Rose 39). High saturation means that the color is in a vivid form of its hue and low saturation means that is nearly neutral (Rose 39). Lastly, the point of view from which the photo has been taken will be taken into account. If the photo is taken from a low angle, this implies that the subject of the photo has power over the viewer, if it has been taken at eye-level equality between the two is implied, and if it has been taken from a high angle, this implies that the viewer has power over the subject. In addition, the frontality of the subject implies engagement, while a profile shot implies detachment (Jewitt 6).

Hallet and Kaplan-Weinger also draw from mediated discourse analysis as "linguistic and visual texts present meaning on both denotative and connotative levels; [they] do not just communicate; they represent and mediate" (Hallett 8) . In the case of websites - and Instagram accounts - technology functions as a mediator and users are able to choose their "relation to a text by using different links and networks of information to negotiate a path through the texts" (Hallett 10). According to Hallet and Kaplan-Weinger, hypertexts are an example of a way of doing this as the reader is able to construct a network of connected texts by individually navigating between them (Hallett 10). In the case of Instagram, hashtags - as they are clickable - function as hypertexts. They give Instagram users the possibility to look for texts, Instagram posts, which are related to the post that they initially were looking at. Zappavigna's previously discussed theory on hashtags will be useful for analyzing this. In addition to the hashtags, the usernames of the original posters of whom a post is regrammed by @lovegreatbritain are also clickable if provided, by which the web of related texts is made even wider. The same applies to the location that can be added to a post with Instagram's geotagging function. The location name is also clickable so people are able to find all posts related to that particular location. As mentioned, this thesis will focus on this particular function of Instagram.

Of course, the material that will be studied will be limited as this thesis is not broad enough in scope to discuss all posts of @lovegreatbritain as the account contains 1,340 posts at the time of writing. This thesis will thus focus on the posts within a particular period of time. As mentioned before, Brexit may have interesting consequences for tourism to and in Great Britain. Therefore the

focus of this thesis will be on the period surrounding the Brexit referendum. As voting took place on June 23, 2016, (Foster) this date has been chosen as the middle of the period, which means that the period that this thesis focus on starts on May 19, 2016 and ends on July 28, 2016. These dates are both exactly five weeks from June 23, 2016. The entire period thus encompasses ten weeks. As a result, the sample of posts by @lovegreatbritain is still too numerous, since the account posts one picture a day on average. Therefore it has been decided that the thesis will analyze the ten most popular posts and the ten least popular posts that have been posted between May 19 and July 27, 2016. It will also be interesting to see if there are significant differences between the most popular and least popular posts when it comes to their content. Not all twenty posts will be described in full detail, but they will be used to determine how VisitBritain tries to construct a particular kind of narrative on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account, and the posts that best exemplify this will be discussed in a more detailed manner.

Finally, it should be noted that a third party online tool for Instagram analytics called WEBSTA will be used. This tool states clearly on what date a particular post has been posted to Instagram, in contrast to the web browser version of Instagram which merely states how many weeks ago a post was posted. In addition, WEBSTA mentions if an Instagram filter has been used on a photo, and if so, which Instagram filter has been used. Instagram itself does not provide this information and it will be helpful when trying to determine how @lovegreatbritain changes the photos that they regram.



# Chapter 1 - Photos

The first chapter of this thesis will discuss the photos of the chosen posts of the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. The photo is arguably the most important part of an Instagram post because Instagram is a platform that is primarily meant to share photos and edit them in a quick and easy manner ("FAQ"). The chapter will answer the first subquestion *what are the subjects of the photos and how are they represented?*; and therefore focuses its analysis on the subject matter of the photos and in which way the subject matter is presented. This will give insight in the kind of narrative of Great Britain that VisitBritain constructs on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. First the most popular posts, those with the most likes, will be discussed, which are then followed by the least popular posts. Important to note is that the WEBSTA tool shows that there have not been any Instagram filters used on any of the photos but this does not mean that they have not been edited before being posted. Instagram users can choose one from forty preset Instagram filters to edit their photos and hereby for example change the colors, contrasts, or light in the photo. However, when one opts not to use a preset filter, Instagram also offers tools to manually edit the photo and one could also edit the picture by using third party software before posting it to Instagram.

## Most popular posts



Image 1

The most popular post on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account contains a photo of the Sherlock Holmes Museum situated in London.<sup>1</sup> The fact that it is a photo of a museum indicates that VisitBritain considers it important to represent tourist destinations that have to do with the heritage industry on their Instagram account, as museums are an intrinsic part of this industry (Urry 13). Something else that stands out concerning the subject of the photo is that it is a museum about Sherlock Holmes, a well-known fictional character that finds his origin in British detectives but has also been used in popular films, television shows, et cetera. Therefore, Sherlock Holmes can be considered part of British culture heritage as well.

Unless one really studies the reflections in the windows of the museum, there are no people immediately visible in the picture, which suggests that the museum is located in a quiet place that is

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<sup>1</sup> "Sherlock Holmes Museum." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGedbgDiiy-/>>

not very popular. The ivy makes it appear as if the museum can be found in a quite natural, although constructed garden-like environment, which means that the produced nature is in control of the human (Williams 122; 125). Furthermore, gardens are usually associated with privacy, (Bhatti and Church 38) which also causes the picture to give the impression that one could visit the museum without having to deal with many other visitors. However, when one takes a look at the location of the museum on Google Maps Street View, ("232 Baker St") it becomes clear that the museum is on an asphalted street with lots of traffic and people. Two doors down a yoga studio can be found, and across the museum is a sushi place. By framing the museum in a manner that does not including these signs of modern times, the @lovegreatbritain account constructs the location through the romantic gaze (Urry 107). Although the photo is framed in a manner that = does not show any visitors of the museum, the word 'souvenir' is visible on the sign above the door. This contrastingly indicates that the museum is meant as a tourist destination (Leite 50).

Furthermore, the picture does not appear to be a photo taken by a professional photographer. The subject of the photo is not centered, some parts such as the lamp on the right are cut off and the lines of the fence and those on the building are not entirely vertical or horizontal. This gives the impression that the photo was taken by an actual tourist, which is something that other tourists tend to appreciate (Urry 57). The photo also seems to be somewhat overexposed, but the subject is still clearly visible so it is likely this has been a choice of the photographer while taking the picture that it has been edited as such to place the focus more on the greens in the picture.



**Image 2**

The second picture shows one of the very few streets of the small village Castle Combe<sup>2</sup>. Looking at the picture, it seems to be a very quiet traditional British town surrounded by trees. The Union Jack on the right further emphasizes the 'British-ness' of the village, just as the cloudy gray sky. Just as in the first post, there are not any signs that hint at the fact that the picture was taken in 2016. Furthermore, there are only two people in the picture, who could very likely be residents as they do not necessarily show any signs of being a tourist (Urry 15).

This photo implies that Castle Combe is a village that has not yet been discovered by tourists. However, Google Maps Street View shows that right behind where the photographer of this Instagram picture stood is a parking lot which parked eight modern cars on a day in August 2016 ("The Street"). In addition, Castle Combe has multiple bed and breakfasts and two hotels, of which

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<sup>2</sup> "Castle Combe." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGULbTFii7p/>>

one has 48 rooms ("Where"). Compared to the less than 350 residents of Castle Combe, ("Castle") this likely means that there will be relatively many tourists in reality. The framing of the photo leaves out everything that would signify that Castle Combe is in fact quite a popular tourist destination.

The photo seems relatively professional compared to the first, as it takes into account the one-third:two-third rule and seems to guide the viewer into the picture and through the village, by centering the road that continues into the distance. It can be argued that the subject of the photo is gazed upon through a panoramic gaze that orders and controls the subject (de Cauter 4; 8).

Noteworthy is that almost the same picture, taken from only a meter or two away from where this particular photographer stood is used in promotional material for the area ("Lacock Castle Combe"). This could confirm that tourists tend to take pictures of what they have already seen of a destination before actually going there (Moir 168).



**Image 3**

The third image is of Cawdor Castle in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly enough the castle is in the background and the focus is on the blue flowers in the foreground which are the most salient element in the photo. By juxtaposing the flowers and the castle, it is emphasized that Great Britain has the best of two worlds. On one hand one can visit Great Britain to enjoy its history and the traditional buildings, and on the other hand one can go there to enjoy nature. However, once again, the nature visible in the photo is a garden, which means that it is idealized nature in a controlled environment (Williams 124).

The contrast between the vibrant color of the flowers and the muted tones of the castle indicate that while some parts of Great Britain are of the past, others are very much of the now and still alive.

Even though there has not been an Instagram filter added to the image, it has clearly been edited before being posted. The background of the photo appears muted, with yellowish tones, which adds a retro feel to the image. This is quite a popular effect on Instagram, (Bartholeyns 45) and increases the way in which "photography offers instant romanticism about the present," (Sontag qtd. in Bartholeyns 64) which plays into the trend of nostalgia (Urry 167). Similar to the other images discussed so far, the image does not show signs of the castle being a popular tourist destination. The garden gives a sense of privacy (Bhatti and Church 38). Interestingly, this photo was posted a week before the Brexit referendum. This suggests that VisitBritain wanted to show that Great Britain is still unified, despite the different attitudes of its countries regarding Brexit.

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<sup>3</sup> "Cawdor Castle." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGrOsNOCi7V/>>





Image 4

The fourth post presents a traditional looking cottage in the county of Wiltshire.<sup>4</sup> Just as the second and third post, this is a photo of a building in the British countryside. It is the front of a cottage and seems to be taken from right in front of the house. The colors in the picture seem somewhat muted and there does not seem to be focus on one particular element as there is not much depth in the photo, although the blue door stands out a little as it appears to be framed by the yellow roses.

Cottages are traditionally British, but the roses also are a representation of Great Britain, as the rose - although usually red - is one of England's national symbols (Childs 44). By framing the picture so that only a part of the house is visible and nothing can be seen from its surroundings, it is made sure that the viewer will think of the traditional Great Britain.



Image 4



Image 6

The fifth<sup>5</sup> and the eighth<sup>6</sup> post of the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account - seen in image 5 and image 6 - will be discussed together as they both include a photo of the same street in Edinburgh, namely Circus Lane. In addition, not only are they photos of the same street, the photos are almost identical. The places where the photographers stood when they took the picture are not far apart. Both photos show the same church at the end of the street. The fact that VisitBritain posted largely the same picture twice within a month seems to confirm that they want to use the Instagram account to construct a particular narrative of Great Britain. Therefore it seems true that tourism

<sup>4</sup> "Cottage." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGmAuuoii8W/>>

<sup>5</sup> "Circus Lane 1." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF3nX-bii3x/>>

<sup>6</sup> "Circus Lane 2." <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BG\\_WkJcCi4-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BG_WkJcCi4-/)>

organizations often tend to repeat the same narratives (Leite 46).

The framing of the two pictures differs somewhat. The second photo takes the one-third:two-third rule into account while the first does not. The first picture also seems to have been taken from a lower angle which makes the church appear more powerful as it seems to tower more over the other buildings in the street. Both pictures seem to have been edited, the first a little more subtle than the second. In the first image, the contrast between the clouds and the sky seems to have been made a more apparent and the greens seem to have been made more saturated than the other colors. This puts more emphasis on the idea that it seems to have rained just before the picture was taken, which would confirm the widespread stereotype that it is always rainy in Britain. The second picture on the other hand appears to be washed out, which is a common way to make a photo look more vintage and make it speak to those who feel nostalgic (Sapio 45). The focus in the second picture is also sharper and the grain more visible than in the first photo. Aside from the in comparison modern white garage door on the left in the second picture, both photos have in common that they only show what makes the street appear traditional and quiet. It is allowed to drive cars through the street and the pictures have likely purposefully been taken when there were no cars in sight. These photos are yet again taken through the romantic gaze and focus on the solitary and nostalgic. They suggest that one could come to Great Britain to escape from mass tourism and in doing so, they offer those who view the photo and may want to visit Great Britain the identity of a traveler who likes a sense of adventure instead of a tourist who depends on the arrangements made by others (Fussell 40-41).

Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that the second photo has been posted on June 23, the day of the Brexit referendum. Taking into consideration that Scotland did not vote in favor of leaving the European Union, it seems that VisitBritain wanted to create the idea that Great Britain is a unified whole.



**Image 7**

The Eilean Donan castle and part of its surroundings, as seen in image 7, are the subject of the sixth post<sup>7</sup>. The photo shows a bridge that leads to the castle and due to the way in which the elements in the photo are presented, the viewer follows the lines of the bridge to castle, which makes the castle the focal point of the photo. The photographer seems to have taken the one-third:two-third rule into account with the sky, the upper part of a hill, and the top of the castle in the background in the upper one-third; part of the bridge and castle in the middle one-third; and the grassy, muddy ground in the lower one-third. The framing of the photo does not show where the bridge or the area around the castle

ends so it seems that it can continue endlessly which makes the castle appear quite far removed and isolated from so-called modern civilization. Furthermore, there are no people visible in the image, which yet again implies that Great Britain offers quiet destinations for those who want to wander around solitarily without being disturbed by others. However, the website of Scotland's tourism board VisitScotland boasts that the castle is a popular tourist destination and among the most photographed places in the country ("Eilean"). The picture has been taken through the romantic gaze as it does not show any other people who were likely around, nor any signs of modern life.

It seems as if it was quite foggy when the picture was taken and that it was cloudy. This adds a certain sense of mystery to the picture and makes the photo reminiscent of the typical English gothic novel. The traditional gothic novel is often set among castles and ruins and has a mysterious atmosphere (Andrew Smith 4). The sense of mystery is increased by the fact that the viewer cannot see how the landscape continues behind the castle. In that sense, it seems to be located at the end of the world. The colors in the picture are fairly muted which adds a nostalgic sensibility to the picture. The ground in the foreground of the picture seems to have been wet at one point and the bridge indicates that there used to be water as well. Indeed, the picture was taken at low tide as there are plenty of images online that show the area around the castle covered by water. By using a picture of the castle at low tide at a moment when the weather seems dreary, this could easily make the viewer think the ground seems wet because it has just rained. This confirms the stereotype of the always rainy Great Britain.

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<sup>7</sup> "Eilean Donan Castle." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFx1H7eCiyp/>>

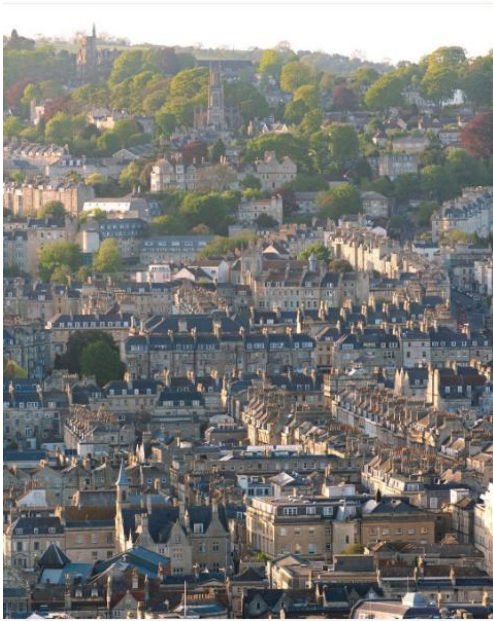


Image 8

The seventh of the most popular posts of the @lovegreatbritain account is remarkably different from the ones that have been discussed so far. The majority of those included a picture of a destination in the British country side. The seventh post on the other hand shows a more urban side of Great Britain and, although the architecture of the building cannot yet be considered contemporary, it is a significant change from the previous castles, cottages, and villages. The photo shows an overview of the Bath skyline and was taken from a higher angle.<sup>8</sup> The city is gazed upon through the panoramic

gaze, as it seems to be looked upon from the center and fills the frame as the city is not framed by anything else

(de Cauter 2). The rows of houses seem to continue outside of the frame - at least in the front and on the sides of photo - which implies that it is a city of greater size that has a fair amount of residents which contrasts the photos discussed above. On the right side of the picture, just within the frame, even cars are visible. In comparison to the other photos, this post clearly shows a more contemporary side of Great Britain and even though there are no people included in the photo, all the houses clearly indicate there will be quite many of them. By using this picture with houses built in Georgian style, the @lovegreatbritain account shows that Great Britain has more to offer than the countryside, although the area behind the city is quite green, so on the other hand the picture shows that the countryside is never far away in Great Britain. Furthermore, this post still puts the emphasis on the importance of heritage in Great Britain, as Bath is considered a World Heritage site by UNESCO ("World Heritage"). Another contrast between this picture and the others is that this is one that seems to have been taken on a fairly sunny day, which does not go along with the narrative of rainy Great Britain.

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<sup>8</sup> "Bath 1." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJDnuTCiOI/>>





Image 9

The ninth post of the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account that will be discussed has some similarities to the third post of the account. Each of the posts includes a photo that has a bunch of flowers in sharp focus and a historic building in the background that is more blurry. This creates depth in the photo. The third post had blue flowers in front of a castle, but this ninth post has orangish yellow daffodils in front of the Big Ben in London, which is one of Great Britain's most well-known and immediately recognizable landmarks.<sup>9</sup> The Big Ben and the other parts of the Palace of Westminster surrounding it emphasize that Great Britain is filled with history and heritage. The contrast between the spring

flowers and the historic building indicates that in London, Great Britain offers history and culture as well as nature, although in this case it is nature planted by humans. In most of the previously discussed posts and photos it was implied that the British weather is often on the colder, or at least on the more rainy side. Contrastingly this photo breaks with that theme and seems to be showing warmer weather as the warm orange tones of the sun are visible in the sky and are also present in the colors of the flowers. This effect is further emphasized as the flowers and sky seem to have the most saturated colors which makes them more eye-catching (Jewitt 25).

Interestingly enough, this is yet another picture that does not have any people in it, tourists nor residents of London or Great Britain. The lack of people is especially particular considering the fact that the Big Ben is one of London's most popular tourist destinations and London attracts almost nineteen million international visitors per year, and including British tourists this number is even higher and reaches 31.5 million visitors (Coldwell). The photo seems to have been taken from the backside of the tower instead of from the front which is located on a fairly busy London street. This may have been done to create a quiet atmosphere and to give the impression that the viewers of the picture can be by themselves when they gaze upon this popular landmark. The photo appears to have been taken at either sunrise or sunset. Especially taking the picture right after sunrise would be beneficial to creating the illusion that there will not be any other people around when one wants to gaze upon the Big Ben. This combined with the side from which the Big Ben is photographed in this post means that picture has been taken with the romantic gaze seemingly in mind. Furthermore, the tower literally towers over its surroundings and is the only object other than the background of the

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<sup>9</sup> "Big Ben" <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF9cEMEiixJ/>>



sky in the upper one-third of the photo. The fact that the Big Ben is shot from a low angle contributes to its majestic qualities (Jewitt 6).



Image 10

The tenth and last post of @lovegreatbritain's most popular posts that will be discussed in this thesis contains a photo of what some may consider quintessentially British: a tea room.<sup>10</sup> What immediately stands out about the photo are the white colors, which could be due to the photo being somewhat overexposed. Especially the sign with the name of the tea room stands out as its frontality makes it easy to engage with (Jewitt 6). The name is 'The Cobbles Tea Room' which appears to refer to the cobblestone streets that are quite popular and widespread in Great Britain and have been

mentioned in relation to some of the other posts by @lovegreatbritain discussed in this thesis. The tearoom's name further emphasizes the traditional Britishness of the photo. The sign also mentions that the cakes sold in the tea room are home made, implying that the pastries have been made artisanally. This could be seen as going back in time as nowadays there also are places that sell baked goods that have been made in factories. The mention of 'home made' also makes the tearoom seem more homely, a sensibility enhanced by the weeds that are visible in between the paving stones and the - what appears to be mildew - on the wooden fence and flower pots. The row of paving stones directs the eye of the viewer further into the photo and thereby seems to invite the viewer to the tearoom. Some may interpret the picture as harking back to a time in which life was simpler and less stressful because they might feel like everything did not have to appear as perfect as they feel it does nowadays (Boym 10; 12). In this sense feelings of nostalgia are present in the photo.

The row of houses connected to the tea room and the small path seem to make it clear that the location is likely not situated in an extremely small remote countryside village. Like the others, the photo in this post also does not show any people and because the tea room does not provide much outdoor seating considering there are only two tables shown in the picture, one would be likely to assume that it is a destination which is relatively free of other tourists. However, a quick look at Google Street View shows that just around the corner of the tea room is a larger street on which at least one bed and breakfast, multiple restaurants and souvenir shops can be found ("33 The Mint"). In addition, the photos on Google Street View show quite a large number of people dressed as tourists (Urry 13;15). In contrast to the photo posted by VisitBritain on the @lovegreatbritain

<sup>10</sup> "Tearoom." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGhF5YiCi7m/>>

account, the Google Street View images show that at least during the summer, in which the Google pictures were taken, the tearoom is actually located in a quite touristic area.

### Least popular posts

This section starts with the image of the post by @lovegreatbritain that received the lowest amount of likes and will gradually move to the posts that are among the most popular posts within the subsection of the least popular posts.



Image 11

The least liked post by the @lovegreatbritain Instagram that will be discussed in this thesis is quite different from the most liked posts that have been discussed above. In contrast to the previously discussed pictures, it is not clear at first sight what one is looking at, but it is a spa in Bath.<sup>11</sup> What immediately stands out in the photo are the glass walls of the building. The use of glass is a sign of more modern architecture than the architecture in the previous images, as this kind of use of glass did not start to become common in architecture until after the Crystal Palace of 1851 which signaled the start of modernity (Cutler 67; 69). The other parts of the building, as well as its surroundings and the reflections in the glass walls

seem to have been built in Georgian style, which indicates that there is also more historic architecture to be found. This particular destination in Great Britain thus combines the modern and the historic and therefore VisitBritain argues by using this pictures that tourists will be able to find something of their liking in Great Britain, whether they prefer a contemporary or more traditionally British aesthetic.

The clearest lines in the picture seem to direct the viewer's eye upward. Furthermore, one could draw a diagonal line between the upper corners of the building that directs the viewer's eye to the man on top of the building who seems to gaze at the sky, which, in addition to the upward lines, makes the people who are looking at the picture direct their gaze at the sky too. Combined with the sky's saturated and bright blue colors and the vivid whites of the clouds, (Jewitt 25) this appears to make the sky the focal point of the picture. Looking at the sky, the picture seems to have been taken on a sunny day which is remarkably different from the other pictures discussed so far. It is also not

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<sup>11</sup> "Bath 2." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJZh3oCiyo/>>

the type of weather that is generally associated with Great Britain. Additionally, there are two birds visible, which appear to be seagulls. The presence of the seagulls indicates that there is a body of water such as a sea nearby the location in which the picture was taken. Although this is not that surprising as Great Britain is an island, it is a remarkable difference from the other pictures as they highlighted the British countryside, traditional city streets, and green nature.



Image 12

The twelfth post of @lovegreatbritain on Instagram that will be discussed by this thesis includes a photo of two owl chicks on a branch and is the first of the discussed posts that focuses on animals.<sup>12</sup> The post seems to imply that Great Britain does not only have towns and flora that are worth visiting but that its fauna would make a visit worthwhile as well, by which it highlights another aspect of Great Britain. The owl chicks in the photo appear to be inside, which could suggest that Great Britain also works on wildlife conservation - which is confirmed by the photo's caption - and this indicates that

Great Britain deems its flora and fauna important and worthy of protection.

The owl chicks are definitely the focus of the picture as they are surrounded by nothing but negative space. The owl chick closest to the camera is in sharp focus and gazes at the camera. As a result, the viewer feels more engaged with the subject of the photo as the viewer becomes aware that they are not only gazing upon something or someone but that they are also being gazed upon (Lister 22). The yellowish tones of the photo are reminiscent of sepia-toned photographs which gives the image a slightly vintage quality (Sapio 45). The close range in which the owl chicks have been shot makes it seem unlikely that they have been shot by an actual tourist as they are probably not allowed to be this close near the animals without a cage in between.

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<sup>12</sup> "Owl Chicks." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BHSQI09h2dP/>>



Image 13

appears to be quiet and peaceful. The city is presented as something that should be gazed upon instead of taking part in it, which is done by shooting the picture from a higher angle (Lister 22). This effect is further enhanced by the fence between the person who gazes and the city, which physically separates the two.

A part of the London skyline as well as the London Olympic stadium can be seen in the picture that is part of the thirteenth post from the sample of posts from the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account.<sup>13</sup> The city seems to continue far into the distance and by framing it as such; VisitBritain emphasizes the fact that Great Britain does not only have countryside destinations to offer its visitors but also more urban areas. However, the picture still does not show the crowds of people, traffic, and buzzy city life that often tend to be part of a city. By putting the city in soft focus and the glares from the sun, the city



Image 14

(Jewitt 6).

Similar to the other pictures of Bath that have been discussed in this thesis, the building that is featured is built in a Georgian style of architecture. By repeating photos of this type of architecture, VisitBritain seems to want to establish it as a key feature of Great Britain. It adds to the

The fourteenth post that this thesis discusses includes another picture that seems to have been taken when the weather was nice.<sup>14</sup> In addition, it differs from the other pictures as this one clearly includes a person. A man, who appears to be a window washer, is shown cleaning windows of buildings in a street of Bath. This means that the photo is not taken through the romantic gaze as this gaze usually focuses on an idealized image that does not include any type of workers. The romantic gaze is very selective and a site worthy of being gazed upon rarely includes workers of any kind (Urry 107). Furthermore, the focus seems to be more on the man as he is featured more frontally and the building a bit more en profile

<sup>13</sup> "Arcelormittal Orbit." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BIFn8PYBxzN/>>

<sup>14</sup> "Bath 3." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGKX4npj0E/>>



narrative that Great Britain has a large and interesting history. The uniqueness of the building is emphasized by the shot having been taken from a lower angle, which makes the building seem even higher. The image adds to the historic sensibility even more by not showing any modern signs when it comes to traffic or technology, other than the device used by the window cleaner, and only showing the pavement which implies that motorized vehicles are not usually present on this particular street. However, Google Street View shows once more that the street on which the building is located actually receives quite a fair amount of traffic ("73 Great").



**Image 15**

The subject of the photo that is part of the fifteenth post is a roe deer that is chewing on some leaves<sup>15</sup>. This photo is quite similar to the one of the owl chicks. Both pictures highlight the British fauna. In addition, each photo focuses on a specific type of animal which is photographed while it is facing the camera. Just as the owl chick, the roe deer is gazing back at the viewer. Furthermore, the background is blurred and although it seems the roe deer is in a forest setting; its surroundings are not quite clear so the animal is mainly surrounded by negative space, which makes the roe deer stand out even

more (Lister 22). Nevertheless, the main color of the surroundings seems to be green, which implies that Great Britain has nice natural sites that can be visited by tourists. It seems unlikely that this picture has been taken by a tourist without a specific interest in photography. It would be quite difficult to photograph a wild animal in this manner if one just runs into it by coincidence. Unless one has the right equipment, setup, and help; it seems nearly impossible to achieve such a picture.

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<sup>15</sup> "Roe Deer." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BHSnToZB2ku/>>



**Image 16**

The discussion of the sixteenth post will be quite brief as there are not that many elements to the photo. In the front of the picture one sees yellow flowers, behind them seems to be a grassy field, and even further to the back there appear to be trees.<sup>16</sup> This gives the impression that a tourist can find large areas without buildings or people in Great Britain. By having the whole picture in soft focus and no bright colors, the location seems quite peaceful and as if it could provide an escape for people who would like to use their vacation to recharge. The sky seems quite gray in the picture which hints at the aforementioned stereotype

of the British weather not being too great. Furthermore, the softness of the picture also gives it a quite dreamy and nostalgic quality (Sapio 45).



**Image 17**

Another image that seems to have been edited to have a vintage look can be found in the seventeenth post of the @lovegreatbritain Instagram that this thesis discusses.<sup>17</sup> The colors in the picture are also washed out to appear less vibrant. In contrast to the previous picture, the weather seems to have been a bit nicer when this picture was taken as the light on the grass seems to indicate that it was relatively sunny.

The photo's subjects are a sheep and two lambs that appear to be grazing in a hilly field that seems to continue endlessly. Yet again, this implies that Great

Britain has lots of natural areas that tourists can wander around in. However, the fact that the backsides of the sheep are shown makes the photo seem less inviting to tourists than it would have been when the sheep were facing the camera or had been photographed from the side. Although the heads of the sheep are not visible, their legs and the horns of the adult sheep are, and based on those it appears feasible to assume that the sheep are of the Blackface breed. This is the most common sheep breed in Great Britain ("Blackface"). The use of this breed gives a more British sensibility to the picture. Many other countries and regions have sheep, but a tourist would only find

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<sup>16</sup> "Yellow Flowers." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGMdEaaCi3N/>>

<sup>17</sup> "Sheep." <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BHAI3\\_JCi2r/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BHAI3_JCi2r/)>

this particular type of sheep everywhere in Great Britain (Rickly-Boyd 262). This post about Scotland was yet again posted on the day of the Brexit referendum.



Image 18

Although many of the previously discussed images have been edited, mainly to make a particular element stand out more or enhance the nostalgic sensibility of the overall picture, the image included in the eighteenth post has been added to the extent of it more resembling a painting or a computer-generated image than an actual photograph.<sup>18</sup> Nothing in the picture seems to be particularly put in focus and there is not as much depth in the picture as in some of the others.

The photo contains different types of trees and plants, such as ferns, and the photograph seems to show only a small area in a large forest as the ends of it are nowhere to be seen in the picture. The sunlight seems to shine through the trees, which means that there are many of them as their leaves almost seem to create a roof over the woods. The use of light in the picture also adds a more magical or even spiritual sensibility to it. There are no visible signs of human interference in the picture, for example a path, and the nature seems unruly and pristine, in contrast to the previous images which tended to include more garden-like sites. It is quite an idealized picture that fits with the concept of the romantic gaze (Urry 13).



Image 19

The penultimate post of the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account that will be discussed by this thesis includes an aerial shot of Bath<sup>19</sup>. The image shows rows and rows of Georgian style buildings that appear to continue outside of the frame, which means that it is a pretty big city. Some of the roads and quite an amount of cars are also visible in the picture, as well as what appear to be allotments. Of all the photos that have been discussed so far, this one gives the best idea of a larger town and city life. However, even in this image, the British country side is highlighted as well, as it is visible behind the city and

<sup>18</sup> "Forest." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BISqpzYh94z/>>

<sup>19</sup> "Bath 4." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJ1TECii5-/>>

confirms the commonly known image of the green British hills. A road is visible in the upper one-third of the picture, which continues through the country side and directs the viewer's eye away from the city. Therefore, this post seems to emphasize the British country side yet again. The tones in the picture seem to be on the bluish side which makes the picture look colder than when they had been more orange or reddish. This implies that the weather when the picture was taken also was cloudy instead of sunny.



**Image 20**

The final image from the @lovegreatbritain Instagram post that this thesis will discuss is another picture in which Great Britain's nature is featured. Similar to the image of the eighteenth post discussed by this thesis, the twentieth photo does not show any signs of civilization. The entire frame of the photo is filled with trees, ferns, heather, other foliage, and the sky.<sup>20</sup> However, in contrast to the eighteenth picture, the final photo shows that there is a field between the trees in the upper one-third of the picture before the actual woods are reached which likely means that human beings have been

involved in some way. The pictures do have in common that there is a sense of the spiritual or at least mystery created, which in this final picture is done by the fog among the trees. The fog is quite white and very visible what makes it stand out (Jewitt 25).

## **Conclusion**

After taking a look at twenty images included in the posts that VisitBritain posted to the @lovegreatbritain account, the ten most popular ones and the ten least popular ones, it can be said that the subjects of the photos differ but there are a couple of themes that recur in multiple photos. By repeating particular themes in the photography that they use, VisitBritain constructs a narrative of Great Britain for their audience, as they will remember the kind of images that they have often seen and will associate these images with Great Britain. In some cases this might mean that the @lovegreatbritain posts almost the same photo within a month, as happened with the photo of Circus Lane in Edinburg. Usually however, the elements in the photos' compositions are similar and not exactly the same.

One recurring theme consists of buildings that are either historical, such as the castles, or seen as typical British architecture, for example the Georgian style buildings in Bath. Noteworthy is

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<sup>20</sup> "Heather." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BIVGFcKBfzY/>>



that even in the pictures of more urban locations, there still are clear signs of the British countryside and British nature. Furthermore, many of the pictures include objects, signs with text, or animals that can be seen as typically British, such as the Cobbles tearoom and the Black Face Breed Sheep. The @lovegreatbritain account seems to post pictures of what is already familiar to its audience as being British. There are hardly any posts with photos that come as a surprise and include something that one might not expect in Great Britain. Furthermore, many of the pictures even seem to have been taken on days with typically British dreary weather. VisitBritain seems to run its Instagram account with the already existing place-myths in mind. The only perceived weakness, according to the long-term tourism strategy, (Great Britain 36) that is addressed in the photos is Britain's natural beauty, while contemporary culture, one of its strengths, is almost entirely neglected.

Interestingly, the audience of the @lovegreatbritain account seems to appreciate that the photos posted by the account confirm the expectations of Great Britain that one generally already has. The majority of the pictures that seem to have been taken when it was sunny weather have ended up among the least popular posts. In addition, the photos that include elements that less obviously signify something British are mainly included in the least popular posts as well. The most popular posts on the other hand include pictures of the Sherlock Holmes museum, English cottages, the Big Ben, and a tearoom that are unmistakably connected to Great Britain and not to other parts of the world.

As mentioned, the @lovegreatbritain account often reposts photos taken by supposedly actual tourists instead of using material especially taken for marketing purposes by professional photographers. Urry and Larsen have argued that tourists consider reviews and photos of other tourists to be more sincere and believable as they would be less likely to heavily edit their photos in order to make the destination look more attractive (Urry 57). However, it is quite hard to believe that all photos that have been discussed have been taken by tourists who just wanted to post a snapshot to their Instagram accounts. The majority of photos seem to follow photographic conventions of how to take a good picture and its photographers appear to have paid attention to the point of view from which they took the picture, what the focus of the image should be, and so on. Furthermore, although there have not been any preset Instagram filters used on the photos, nearly all of them appear to have been edited. In some cases only some details have been tweaked to make particular elements in the composition more eye-catching, but quite a lot of others seem to have been fully edited to make the pictures seem older and more vintage than they actually are, which is connected to nostalgia.

The photographs also are connected to feelings of nostalgia because most of them do not show any signs that would be typical of present-day Great Britain. Apparently something is lacking in present day life which one might feel could be found in the past, and in that case it seems beneficial

to let the photos used by @lovegreatbritain on Instagram cater to these feelings of nostalgia (Boym 12). Even a city as London which definitely has contemporary aspects is only shown from a great distance or just one particular building in the city is highlighted. Furthermore, almost none of the pictures include people, whether they would be residents or tourists. This implies that one would be able to wander around Great Britain solitarily without continuously running in to other tourists. The majority of the pictures seem to focus on British heritage and the romantic gaze. All this combined presents Great Britain as a region in which tourists could admire British history and culture without being surrounded by other tourists and they could visit the British countryside and woods if they wanted to find a destination that is even more peaceful and worthy of being gazed upon. Interestingly, quite a few of the photos seem to be of locations with nature that has been ordered and controlled by humans, such as gardens and parks, instead of untouched natural sites.

Taking all of the above into consideration, Great Britain is constructed as an escape from contemporary everyday life as well as an escape from mass tourism. Those who are able to visit Great Britain are privileged because the lack of tourist in the pictures implies that there are just a few lucky enough to gaze upon these sites. The photos suggest that Great Britain is a destination for those who are not mere tourists but are travelers who want to go off the beaten path. However, as the images tend to put the viewer in control of what is being gazed upon as well as the nature in the photos being constructed and ordered, the photos seem to be geared more towards the anti-tourist than to the true traveler, according to Fussell's definitions.

It is also important to note that out of the twenty discusses posts, fifteen posts contain a photo of a location in England, and five of the posts have a photo of a Scottish location. There are no photos of Wales. This might be because Wales and England are more similar than Scotland and England (Childs 47). However, the tensions between the British countries are ignored on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. Additionally, the VisitBritain tourism board and the VisitEngland tourism board are run by the same organization, which might mean that they are somewhat biased and favor more English posts. Even more interesting, three of the photos of Scotland have been posted in the week of the Brexit referendum, two of those were even posted on the exact same day as the referendum took place. England and Wales voted to leave the European Union, while Scotland did not ("EU Referendum"). Furthermore, the Scottish people generally do not identify themselves as British (Bradley 1). By including more posts of Scotland in the week of the referendum, VisitBritain seems to want to emphasize that Scotland is still a part of Great Britain.

## Chapter 2 - Hashtags and Captions

This chapter will focus on the captions and hashtags used by @lovegreatbritain on Instagram in order to determine how @lovegreatbritain utilizes these to construct a particular narrative. It should be noted that although the word caption is generally refers to only one phrase or sentence that accompanies a photo, for this thesis it will be used to refer to all the text in a post by @lovegreatbritain on Instagram. If captions on the @lovegreatbritain account are quoted in this chapter, their source will be referenced in the footnotes. The discussion of the hashtags will draw from the theory on hashtags by Zappavigna that has been discussed in the theoretical framework. Some hashtags used by @lovegreatbritain will be discussed individually, while others will be discussed as a group as they are very similar.

### **Hashtags**

The @lovegreatbritain Instagram account uses hashtags for all ten of the most popular posts. This is not that surprising as hashtags are used to make posts easy to find so that people who are interested in a particular topic can find them as well, (Zappavigna 275) even though they may not be following the account that posted it. As VisitBritain started the @lovegreatbritain account to promote Great Britain as a tourist destination, it is likely that they want to attract as large an audience as possible and not just their followers. In two of the least popular posts, there are no hashtags included. This is quite striking because as just mentioned, the hashtags help spread VisitBritain's message to a larger audience. It could however clarify why these two posts have not received many likes as only people who follow @lovegreatbritain or who were specifically looking at that account received the post. People who were looking for the topic of these posts would have searched by using related hashtags which means that they would not find a post that has no hashtags.

The most used hashtag in both the most popular and least popular posts is #lovegreatbritain. This is also one of the hashtags that VisitBritain wants other Instagram users to use to be able to regram their posts. In contrast, the hashtag #OMGB which stands for "Oh My Great Britain" is only used once in the sample of twenty posts, even though it is a hashtag that enables regramming as well and part of a VisitBritain campaign that was first launched late 2015 and continued in 2016 ("#OMGB"). The hashtag #lovegreatbritain functions as a topic marker, as it indicates that the post is about Great Britain. It labels the content, which is the most common use of a hashtag (Zappavigna 288). In addition, by using the hashtag that is also used by others who would like to be regrammed by @lovegreatbritain, VisitBritain links the post to an "existing collective practice," (Zappavigna 275) which strengthens the formation of a community of tourists and potential tourists who are

interested in visiting Great Britain (Zappavigna 277). Furthermore, as the hashtag #lovegreatbritain is used in almost all posts, its repetition increases the visibility of the hashtag which means that more people will see it which eventually could lead to more users of the hashtag and an even larger audience (Zappavigna 277). These are not the only intrapersonal functions of the #lovegreatbritain hashtag. It can also be read as expressing metacommentary, (Zappavigna 283; 285) as the poster @lovegreatbritain expresses their love for Great Britain with the hashtag. Similarly the hashtag encourages the readers to also love Great Britain as the hashtag can be read as an imperative: Love Great Britain. In addition, the account often uses #lovegreatbritain as marking the end of the caption, which happened in thirteen of the sixteen posts that used hashtags. In these cases the hashtag can be read as 'love, Great Britain' which constructs Great Britain as a region that is appreciative of the tourists and citizens who share pictures of the destination.

Other hashtags that are used often by @lovegreatbritain are those that clarify in which location the picture was taken, which can be the names of countries, regions, cities, or even of specific castles, such as #england, #exmoor, #edinburgh, and #eileandonancastle. This type of hashtag has an experiential function (Zappavigna 275). They make sure that everyone on Instagram who is interested in one of these locations will be able to find the posts, even if they do not follow the @lovegreatbritain account, which broadens the audience reached by VisitBritain. A special form of the location indicating hashtag that functions as a topic-marker used on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account are those in which the name of the location is preceded by the word 'visit', for example #visitscotland and #visitnессie. Both these hashtags have an experiential function as they link the posts to the topic that they are about, but they also have intrapersonal functions. The use of 'visit' in the hashtag indicates that the hashtag is related to the tourism industry as the official tourism boards of the countries within Great Britain are known as VisitEngland, VisitScotland, and VisitWales and their online posts are often also tagged with the 'visit' hashtag. Therefore, by using these hashtags, @lovegreatbritain links their posts to the tourism industry as a whole, which meets Zappavigna's idea of using hashtags to connect the post to a collective practice (Zappavigna 275). Furthermore, hashtags such as #visitlondon and #visitbath can also be read as imperatives that implore the readers to indeed visit London and visit Bath. The use of #visitNessie is especially interesting as this does not use the name of the location but the nickname of the mythical creature that presumably can be found in the lake of Loch Ness in the Scottish Highlands. By using this hashtag, @lovegreatbritain reinforces the idea that Loch Ness is quite a mythical and mysterious location, which is quite a common narrative in tourism. The use of 'Nessie' instead of the 'Monster of Loch Ness' also indicates that it is a myth that is thought of quite lovingly.

Many of the other hashtags that are used by @lovegreatbritain are descriptive of what can be seen in the photo. In many cases these are quite factual, such as #balloons with a picture of a hot

air balloon and #spa when a spa is shown in the picture. These hashtags thus are topic-markers. However, what stands out is that these descriptive hashtags are mainly used in the least popular posts, while there is only one of the most popular posts that uses similar hashtags, namely #village and to a lesser extent #chocolatebox. According to the Cambridge dictionary, chocolate-box is "used to refer to something that looks very attractive, but is traditional and boring" ("Chocolate-box"). In the case of @lovegreatbritain, the posts calls the village Castle Combe a chocolate-box village, which reinforces the idea that time has been standing still in the British countryside, so this post contributes to the construction of Great Britain as a region that can be visited in order to escape the present and caters to feelings of nostalgia. The hashtag however also insinuates that the past was not all that great either, as the village is considered boring according to the definition of chocolate-box, so nostalgia is not taken that seriously (Niemeyer 334). Many of the other descriptive hashtags that are used are related to nature, such as #heather, #mists, #forest, and #nature itself, which seem to imply that Great Britain is a region where one could go to find some peace and quiet, as a refuge from modern life.

Two other hashtags that stand out are #sherlockholmes and #janeausten. These are used to indicate that the place seen in the photo is connected to these famous figures in British history. Both Jane Austen and Sherlock Holmes have become popular through different forms of media. Jane Austen's popular books have been made into movies and while Sherlock Holmes started out as a fictional detective in book form, there are still films and television series being made based on his original stories. The hashtag #sherlockholmes is used for a post about the Sherlock Holmes museum, which means that the post is somewhat about Sherlock Holmes and the hashtags thus function as a topic-marker. In the case of #janeausten, the function of the hashtag is not as clear, as the post is not really about Jane Austen. The post shows an area of Bath which, according to the post, was Jane Austen's favorite view. Therefore the hashtag does not seem to be a topic-marker but more a way of finding a larger audience for the post, namely people who are interested in Jane Austen, her work, and her life. They might look on Instagram for posts related to Jane Austen and could find their next travel destination there. The #sherlockholmes hashtag works this way as well. It brings a destination to the attention of people who are interested in all things Sherlock Holmes, even though they would not look at the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account for information initially.

Five of the hashtags used by @lovegreatbritain are verbs: #walk is used once and #explore and #discover twice each. All three of these words are used as hashtags in posts that are related to nature. Aside from #walk, these hashtags appear to imply that Great Britain has many interesting hidden areas and landscapes that have yet to be discovered and explored, which in turn implies that there are not many people in these areas. This again seems to confirm the idea that people visit the British countryside and natural sites in order to escape from their modern lives. It also implies that

those who get to visit Great Britain are not ordinary tourists but are more akin to travelers (Fussell 37). Furthermore, these hashtags may not seem to be very useful topic-markers as they seem quite broad, they are more useful than one might think. An Instagram search shows over 3 million posts with #discover, over 14 million posts with #walk, and even over 21 million posts with #explore. A great amount of posts within these results showcase landscapes and natural sites that look very quiet and as if there are no people around. They seem to have been posted by people who like to travel. Therefore, the use of these hashtags by @lovegreatbritain connects their posts to the travel and tourism community on Instagram. The amount of posts with these hashtags makes it also less unlikely that people use these hashtags to search on Instagram.

In three of the posts, @lovegreatbritain uses hashtags that can be considered forms of appreciation, which estimates value and is an interpersonal function of hashtags, (Zappavigna 285) namely #cottagegoals, #hottestdayoftheyear, and #inspiring. The latter one, #inspiring is used with a post of a landscape in Great Britain with lots of trees and heather. This again emphasizes that Great Britain has destinations where one could go in order to admire nature, think, and recharge. It still runs with the concept of escaping modern life for a bit. The second hashtag, #hottestdayoftheyear is metacommentary within the post that indicates that the picture in the post was taken on the hottest day of the year (Zappavigna 275). A certain value has thus been applied by the poster to the temperature of that day. It could also be an attempt to connect the post to a collective practice of posting about the hottest day of the year, but the particular hashtag has only 30,000 search results on Instagram, which means that it is not a very widespread collective practice at least. The first hashtag, #cottagegoals is maybe less obvious a form of appreciation. However, in online language, 'goals' is often used to describe something that one aspires to be or aspires to have. A popular example of this is the hashtag #relationshipgoals. Instagram has over 4 million posts with this particular hashtag and it is often used next to a picture of a couple that seems perfect in the eyes of the poster or a picture of an item, situation, or quote that is otherwise connected to a seemingly perfect couple. The hashtag #cottagegoals thus indicates that the cottage in the picture is one that is at least near perfect and desirable. The hashtag has only 360 hits on Instagram but it is metacommentary on the picture which will, (Zappavigna 275) especially by younger readers, be read as very positive. This also connects the post to the collective practice of calling something that is desired 'goals'.

A few of the other hashtags used by @lovegreatbritain are mainly used with the function of a topic-marker, as well as connecting them to an existing collective practice. These hashtags are #ridetheslide, and #NationalParksWeek. Both of these hashtags indicate what the post is about, which probably the clearest to see in the second hashtag. However, the first hashtag is the slogan of the ArcelorMittal Orbit in London. This is a sculpture and observation tower created by Anish Kapoor

from which visitors can also slide down, ("About") hence the slogan. This means that at least those in the know will get what the post is about once they see the #ridetheslide hashtag. Therefore #ridetheslide functions as an experiential hashtag. It also connects the post to the collective practice of visiting the ArcelorMittal Orbit and then posting about it on social media with the hashtag #ridetheslide. For the #NationalParksWeek hashtag it is clearer why it functions as an experiential hashtag and marks a topic. It indicates that the post is related to the annual National Parks Week that celebrates the national parks in the United Kingdom. In addition, the hashtag #NationalParksWeek also connects the post to a collective practice, as visitors of national parks during National Parks Week are encouraged to use the #NationalParksWeek hashtag on social media ("National Parks Week").

According to Zappavigna hashtags can have a prefix, infix, or suffix position in the text. The majority of the hashtags used by @lovegreatbritain has a suffix position, (Zappavigna 287) which means that they are placed at the end of the text and are not part of the text itself. This is not that surprising as Zappavigna already argued that hashtags are most likely to be found at the beginning or end of a post (Zappavigna 287). The @lovegreatbritain account mainly uses the hashtags at the end of the post as keywords to make the posts easier to find on Instagram or to summarize the important details also mentioned in the caption, such as the location that the photo was taken. In fewer instances the hashtags add something to the caption by providing metacommentary.

## Captions

What is instantly noticeable about the captions on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account is that the captions of the most popular posts are shorter than those of the least popular posts. The captions of the most popular posts are around two sentences long while those of the least popular posts do go over five sentences at times. Considering that Instagram is mainly a platform for the sharing of photos, it is not that surprising that the ones with less focus on the caption became more popular. Just as was done with the hashtags, not all captions will be discussed individually, but they will be grouped together according to similarities.

In the majority of the posts, @lovegreatbritain talks in the first person, so they talk about 'we', or in some instances about 'I'. 'We' is used when VisitBritain is 'talking', while 'I' is used when they have a guest-Instagrammer who takes over the account for an entire day or multiple days. In the latter instances, the guest-Instagrammer also introduced, for example by "this is @thebathphotographer taking over the feed today"<sup>21</sup> or "good morning, @ryansheppeck here on today's takeover with @lovegreatbritain."<sup>22</sup> When the post is made by a guest instead of by

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<sup>21</sup> "Bath 1." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJDnuTCiOI/>>

<sup>22</sup> "Eilean Donan Castle." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFx1H7eCiyp/>>

VisitBritain, the caption usually is on the longer side. An example of the use of first person by VisitBritain is "when we visited Cawdor Castle"<sup>23</sup> when the uploaded post was an original by VisitBritain instead of a regrammed post. The use of the first person makes it seem like an actual person is running the Instagram account, instead of just a marketing company.

The result of a seemingly real person being behind the @lovegreatbritain account instead of a tourism board is not only achieved by the first person use, but also by using words that express judgment of the photo in the post or the objects in the post. By using phrases such as "loving this dramatic sky over a sweet cobblestone street"<sup>24</sup> and "probably one of Britain's prettiest villages"<sup>25</sup> the @lovegreatbritain account makes it seem like it is a person giving their personal opinion on what is seen in the photo. This also happens when the account calls a photo that they regrammed "a wonderful snapshot."<sup>26</sup> All of these instances combined make the account feel more personal than when VisitBritain would merely say something in the vein of 'Great Britain has great traditional villages', which would make the account seem more distant and less approachable.

In addition, the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account also tries to create a close relationship between itself and the followers by directly speaking to them. They often directly address the readers of a post's caption, for example by opening with "good morning;"<sup>27</sup> asking questions such as "recognize this place?;"<sup>28</sup> using imperatives and the word 'you' such as in the phrase "just hold on tightly to your camera"<sup>29</sup> in order to encourage the reader to do something; and making suggestions to the reader by saying "if you go down to the woods today, you might meet a roe deer!"<sup>30</sup> This manner of addressing the readers of the post, and thus also the account's followers, clears the way to have more interaction between the account and the followers, as the latter are likely to feel acknowledged by the former. As Instagram is a platform in which popularity seems to be measured by the amount of followers of an account, its amount of likes, and the amount of comments it gets, it seems natural that the VisitBritain wants to open up the account to interaction.

Furthermore, the majority of the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account's content is provided by other Instagram users whose posts get regrammed. Therefore it also seems beneficial that the @lovegreatbritain account seems personable, approachable, and open to interaction. Who is not more likely to share something with someone if they know that the other will appreciate it? VisitBritain seems aware of this, as the @lovegreatbritain account always gives credit for the

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<sup>23</sup> "Cawdor Castle." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGrOsNOCi7V/>>

<sup>24</sup> "Circus Lane 1." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF3nX-bii3x/>>

<sup>25</sup> "Castle Come." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGULbTFii7p/>>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "Eilean Donan Castle." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFx1H7eCiyp/>>

<sup>28</sup> "Circus Lane 2." <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BG\\_WkJcCi4-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BG_WkJcCi4-/)>

<sup>29</sup> "Bath 4." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJ1TECi5-/>>

<sup>30</sup> "Roe Deer." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BHSnToZB2ku/>>



regrammed photo to the original poster and often also elaborately thanks the original posters by giving them a compliment. Examples of this are "thanks to @blackbirdchronicles for sharing this lovely photo with #lovegreatbritain"<sup>31</sup> and "thanks to @gelena\_b for sharing this great photo with #lovegreatbritain!"<sup>32</sup> By clearly thanking the original posters for providing content, the @lovegreatbritain Instagram will likely seem more likeable for many of its followers. This might be part of the strategy to make tourists feel more welcome in Great Britain (Great Britain 36). The fact that @lovegreatbritain thanks the Instagram users whose posts are used, that the readers are addressed directly, the use of the first person, and the opinions within the caption combined all contribute to the construction of @lovegreatbritain as a seemingly 'real' tourist. It makes sense if this is what VisitBritain wants to achieve with the @lovegreatbritain account, because other - potential - tourists often consider images and texts by other tourists to be more believable and sincere than those of tourism marketing professionals as they feel that the latter are less trustworthy because they want to sell a specific destination to them and may heavily edit the pictures and texts (Urry 57).

As mentioned, the @lovegreatbritain account includes subjective descriptions of what is seen in the photos in their captions. This is often done by using many adjectives in the captions. The elaborate use of adjectives does not only lead to a judgment of value in the captions, but it also paints a more vivid picture of what is seen in the photo. When the caption includes sentences such as "street-side cottages and flower boxes line the pavement, the odd car rumbles past on the cobbles and that iconic church peeps over the rooftops,"<sup>33</sup> it seems hardly necessary to even look at the picture as the caption makes it quite clear what can be seen. Two other examples of this are "loving this dramatic sky over a sweet cobblestone street in Edinburgh"<sup>34</sup> and the description of a castle as "raw and rustic, it has such a natural appeal."<sup>35</sup> These lively descriptions can not only make the reader see the picture without actually seeing the picture, they also contribute to the construction of Great Britain as a tourism destination where it is quiet and where time has stood still. By mentioning "the odd car,"<sup>36</sup> the @lovegreatbritain account appears to want to contrast the destination to people's everyday lives. Those who live in cities may be bothered at times by all the cars and may be nostalgic for times in which traffic was not as chaotic. The @lovegreatbritain account emphasizes in the caption that there will be very few cars when visiting this particular destination. Combined with the mention of the cobblestone streets, cottages, and natural appeal, it seems that VisitBritain wants to create the illusion that there are very few signs of modern times in Great Britain, which is also

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<sup>31</sup> "Yellow Flowers." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGMdEaaCi3N/>>

<sup>32</sup> "Sherlock Holmes Museum." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGedbgDiiy-/>>

<sup>33</sup> "Circus Lane 2." <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BG\\_WkJcCi4-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BG_WkJcCi4-/)>

<sup>34</sup> "Circus Lane 1." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF3nX-bii3x/>>

<sup>35</sup> "Eilean Donan Castle." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFx1H7eCiyp/>>

<sup>36</sup> "Circus Lane 2." <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BG\\_WkJcCi4-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BG_WkJcCi4-/)>

what happens when looking at landscapes through the romantic gaze (Urry 106-7). Phrases such as "countryside home,"<sup>37</sup> "historic city,"<sup>38</sup> "village escape,"<sup>39</sup> and "rolling hills"<sup>40</sup> all contribute to this as well. Most of the pictures with similar language use are among the most popular posts of the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account, which seems to imply that this is what the followers want to hear about Great Britain. This might be because the image created by this language confirms the expectations that the followers have of Great Britain based on previous text and images that they have read (Leite 46; Urry 1). The captions by @lovegreatbritain seem to be at least partially used by VisitBritain to connect the images to feelings of nostalgia (Bartholeyns 69).

Not all captions on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account are fully filled with adjectives and phrases that speak to their followers' imaginations. The captions are also used to simply state what kind of attraction or destination in Great Britain is presented in the photo. Noticeable about this is that in almost all of the posts, @lovegreatbritain puts the name of the location in the caption of the photo as well as geotags the image to that particular location. The name of the location added to the picture - not the name used in the caption - is clickable for those who visit the @lovegreatbritain page. This link leads to a page with all Instagram posts that were tagged to this particular location, with an outtake of a map at the top of the page which indicates in which area of Great Britain said location can be found. The geotag connects the post to a web of related posts that have been made at or about the same location. Instagram users may use this function to find all posts about a location that they are particularly interested in. The geotagging of the post functions in a manner similar to hypertext as discussed by Hallet and Kaplan-Weinger (Hallet 10). Therefore, it seems rather superfluous to also mention the exact location in the caption as the name in the caption is not clickable and thus seemingly less useful. In many cases the location is a street, city, or area, but in some instances the location is more specific. An example of this is the Big Ben,<sup>41</sup> which is a world-famous British landmark, but less well-known locations that could benefit from being named by the @lovegreatbritain account are mentioned as well, such as The Cobbles Tea Room in Rye,<sup>42</sup> the previously mentioned ArcelorMittal Orbit in London,<sup>43</sup> and the Thermae Bath Spa in Bath.<sup>44</sup> Only one of these three names relates to the construction of Great Britain as a traditional, quiet place for those who feel nostalgic, namely The Cobbles Tea Room as the name refers to cobblestone streets, which are mentioned quite often in the captions on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. In

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<sup>37</sup> "Cottage." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGmAuuoi8W/>>

<sup>38</sup> "Circus Lane 1." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF3nX-bii3x/>>

<sup>39</sup> "Circus Lane 2." <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BG\\_WkJcCi4-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BG_WkJcCi4-/)>

<sup>40</sup> "Sheep." <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BHAI3\\_JCi2r/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BHAI3_JCi2r/)>

<sup>41</sup> "Big Ben." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF9cEMEiixJ/>>

<sup>42</sup> "Tearoom." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGhF5YiCi7m/>>

<sup>43</sup> "Arcelormittol Orbit" <https://www.instagram.com/p/BIFn8PYBxzN/>

<sup>44</sup> "Bath 2." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJZh3oCiyo/>>

addition, tea consumption is something for which Great Britain, and especially England, is known, maybe even stereotypically so. In this case, even something as seemingly straightforward as just a name of a tea room contributes to the narrative of Great Britain that VisitBritain constructs on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. What is particularly noticeable is that the post on the tea room is one of the most popular posts, while the other two, one of a modern public art work and the other of a spa that is in the caption described as having modern architecture, are among the least popular posts.

Lastly, the part on the hashtags used on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account stated that hashtags such as #discover and #escape are used to give the idea that Great Britain has many quiet areas to which one could retreat in order to escape modern everyday life. These words are also used in the captions. Followers are encouraged to "discover the Serpent Trail in the South Downs"<sup>45</sup> and told that "there are so many gorgeous places to discover in [Edinburgh]."<sup>46</sup> Sentences such as these imply that Great Britain has not yet been fully discovered by other tourists, which is appreciated by those who look at destinations through the romantic gaze, as this gaze values solitude and privacy (Urry 13). Therefore, the tourists who look through the romantic gaze look for destinations that are new and not yet too popular and crowded with other tourists, because that would negate the aspects of solitude and privacy (Urry 225). By using the word 'discover', VisitBritain uses the captions to try to convince their followers that they can still roam Great Britain freely without being bothered by other tourists doing the same. However, VisitBritain contradicts themselves at times on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram accounts, as "discover the Serpent Train in the South Downs" is followed by "a series of guided walks"<sup>47</sup> which actually seems to negate the idea that one is able to discover the location on their own.

## Conclusion

Taking all the hashtags and captions into consideration, it can be concluded that VisitBritain focuses the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account mainly on the idea of Great Britain that is already quite widespread. Although some attention is paid to more modern tourist destinations such as the ArcelorMittal Orbit in London and some posts highlight modern architecture, generally the emphasis is put on the more traditional qualities of the British tourist destinations. This is both done in the captions as well as in the hashtags. The primary function of the hashtags seems making the post easy to find for those who are already interested in Great Britain as a tourist destination, which is done by turning the names of locations into hashtags and using the hashtags that start with #Visit[name of location] as well as the #lovegreatbritain hashtag invented by VisitBritain which use by tourists is

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<sup>45</sup> "Heather." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BIVGFcKBfzY/>>

<sup>46</sup> "Circus Lane 1." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF3nX-bii3x/>>

<sup>47</sup> "Heather." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BIVGFcKBfzY/>>

encouraged. In addition, the hashtags provide metacommentary on the posts which connects the posts to feelings of nostalgia and they contribute to the construction of a narrative of Great Britain through the romantic gaze as they emphasize the British towns and landscapes as being quiet, traditional, and pristine. Furthermore, seems to direct the hashtags to tourists who would rather consider themselves travelers than tourists as VisitBritain highlights that Great Britain is a destination that can be discovered and explored. The @lovegreatbritain account uses hashtags that are tangentially related to the post as well, in order to attract Instagram users who do not follow the account but who may consider Great Britain a viable future travel destination after seeing the post. By using hashtags such as #VisitNessie, the @lovegreatbritain account builds on already existing place-myths.

The captions of the post generally do the same as the hashtags. The @lovegreatbritain account uses quite a lot of adjectives to describe the photos and the locations which often emphasize the more traditional aspects of Great Britain and do not mention its modern, current side. By directly addressing their followers and clearly crediting the original sources of the posts and showing their appreciation, VisitBritain makes the @lovegreatbritain account seem like an approachable, friendly platform which in turn might encourage tourists to share their photos with the account, which will be beneficial to VisitBritain as it will create a larger pool of content to choose from. Interestingly, the posts with hashtags and captions that seem to see Great Britain through the romantic gaze are generally more popular than the ones that focus on less nostalgic and more unfamiliar aspects of the island.

## Chapter 3 - Original Posts

As this thesis has already mentioned, VisitBritain gives tourists the opportunity to get regrammed by the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account if they use the hashtags #lovegreatbritain or #OMGB in their own posts. This means that it is likely that at least part of the content posted by @lovegreatbritain was not - or at least not entirely - created by VisitBritain. Therefore it seems important to also look at the kind of content that gets regrammed by @lovegreatbritain as this shows what type of content VisitBritain is looking for which gives insight into what kind of narrative of Great Britain VisitBritain wants to present and how they create this particular narrative. This chapter will answer the third subquestion of this thesis, namely *what kind of posts does @lovegreatbritain regram and how do their regrams differ from the original posts?* First, this chapter will look at the type of Instagram user that is regrammed by the @lovegreatbritain account, then it will discuss the possible differences between the regram and the original post, starting with the photo, then the hashtags, and eventually the captions.

### Original posters

The @lovegreatbritain Instagram uses the #lovegreatbritain hashtag to find posts to regram for their own account. However, they do not say that all content on the Instagram account will consist of regrams, and indeed, there are some original posts found in the sample that this thesis discusses. Out of the twenty posts included in the sample, fourteen are actual regrams that previously have been posted to someone else's account. However, five of these are by guests who were allowed to take over the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account for a specific amount of time. This means that only nine of the fourteen posts were actually regrammed by VisitBritain finding these posts when searching for the #lovegreatbritain and #OMGB hashtags. Furthermore, guests of the @lovegreatbritain account included in the sample posted four original photos that had not yet been posted to their personal account. This leaves two of the twenty posts that were posted as original content by VisitBritain itself.

First, the original posters of the actual regrams will be discussed. The first is @gelena\_b whose Instagram biography mentions that she lives in Great Britain, London to be exact, uses an iPhone to take all the pictures that she posts, and she likes to travel. She originally posted the picture of the Sherlock Holmes museum, which is located in London. The fact that all of her pictures are taken with an iPhone indicates that she is not likely to be a professional photographer. However, she has over 25,000 followers on Instagram, which means that she does have a sense of what kind of pictures people like to see. The second poster is @colinianross. According to his biography he is a professional photographer who lives in Great Britain, which does not make him a typical random

tourist. He has a little over 2,300 followers. Then there is the @abbeybrooke81 Instagram account which no longer exists, but a little digging shows that her Instagram handle was changed to @\_abbeybrooke\_. According to the Instagram profile she has 232 followers, lives in London, and considers herself a mother, wife, and scientist. The fourth regrammed poster is @olgabuhagiar who lives in Scotland and has nearly 2,400 Instagram followers. She mentions that she uses a Nikon D5000 or D7100 to shoot the pictures on her account and links to her portfolio. Although it is not clear if she also works as a photographer, some of her pictures can be licensed for use for over €500, (Buhagiar) so it seems she at least takes her photography quite seriously. Fifth is @rezie\_mart who seems to have deleted the original photo from the account. It is unclear if she actually works as a photographer but she travels a lot in order to take photographs and has a website with her portfolio. Her Instagram account has a little over 1,600 followers. The sixth Instagram user that has been regrammed is @snowflakesfairy, who has close to 138,000 followers. She also lives in Great Britain and mentions her account is about travel and lifestyle. The Instagram account is connected to a Facebook profile that focuses on her photography. She has posted advertisements including her photos for business on the Facebook page, which means that she likely also works, at least sometimes, as a photographer. The seventh regram comes from @blackbirdchronicles who has around 61,000 followers. Details about the person behind the account are unclear, but considering the high number of followers it is someone who knows what kind of pictures people generally like to see. The eight post regrams @bestofexmoor, an Instagram account that no longer exists. However, the regram also mentions the person who had taken the photo for @bestofexmoor, namely Stuart Warstat, and he is an amateur photographer who has also done commissioned work, although it is unsure if this was paid work ("Stuart"). The final of the actual regrams was first posted by @southdownsnp which is the official Instagram account of the South Downs National Park and has 1,061 followers. They mention that the picture was taken by J. Dominick, who happens to be a professional photographer from Sussex (Dominick).

Secondly there are the people who have been invited as a guest poster on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account who have regrammed a post that they had first posted to their personal account. The Instagram user @ryansheppeck is the first guest poster. He has over 18,000 followers, works as a freelance professional photographer, and is from England. The second guest poster is @laretour, who was featured twice in the sample. Interestingly, she is Scottish was a guest poster on the day of the Brexit referendum. She lives in Edinburgh and has around 6,100 followers. Her Instagram account links to her website, which mentions that she works in social media and is an avid blogger. She uses quite professional equipment to take her photos and edits her Instagram pictures with another app named VSCO. She also works as a freelance photographer (Laura). The third account part of this category is @nfwildlifepark. This is the account of the New Forest Wildlife

Park in Hampshire and is followed by 839 people. It is not mentioned, but it would not be surprising if they used a professional photographer for their promotional material, especially when taking the quality of their Instagram images into account. The last guest poster is named as @thebathphotographer, but the name of the Instagram account has been changed to @bathphototour, which has 2,237 followers. This is the official account of professional photographer who provides photographic tours of Bath for people who are interested in photography.

Finally there are the guest posters who have posted an original post to the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. Therefore, the post, or any additional details about the post cannot be found on their own Instagram accounts. These guest posters are two accounts that have already been discussed, namely @nfwildlifepark and @bathphototour. The @bathphototour is featured three times in this category.

The first thing that is noteworthy about the sample of people whose Instagram posts have been regrammed by @lovegreatbritain is that the majority of them are people who live in Great Britain. While this does not necessarily mean that they are familiar with the subject that they have photographed for the post, it is likely that they have a different perspective on Great Britain and the locations than a tourist from outside of Great Britain would have. These people who live in Great Britain are part of the same society and culture as the people who run the @lovegreatbritain account. Therefore their perspective of Great Britain may be quite similar. Furthermore, it should also be mentioned that many of the people whose photos have been regrammed are quite skilled photographers. Some of them work as professional photographers and others are at the very least highly skilled amateur photographers and know how to take and edit pictures in such a manner that they are appreciated by a large audience, as can be seen in their numbers of followers. The number of followers the people who have been regrammed is also an interesting issue. The lowest number of followers in the sample is 232, the second lowest is 835, and then the numbers quickly move into the thousands, tens of thousands, with the highest number of followers being around 137,000. For comparison, statics showed that in 2015, an American teen had 150 Instagram followers on average (Ratcliff). Although the available statics on the average number of Instagram followers are limited, it seems fair to conclude that most of the accounts regrammed by @lovegreatbritain have a - far - higher number of followers than the average Instagram user. In addition, some of the accounts regrammed by @lovegreatbritain, or those who have been invited by them as a guest poster, are connected to a specific location that could be considered a tourist destination. The location that they are connected to could possibly benefit from being shown to @lovegreatbritain's Instagram audience. These people could have presented the destination that they are trying to promote on Instagram in a different manner than an ordinary tourist would as they have more to gain from the

destination's Instagram exposure.

It seems that VisitBritain wants to give the idea that the @lovegreatbritain account presents the experiences of tourists and residents in Great Britain by giving people a chance to get regrammed if they use the #lovegreatbritain or #OMGB hashtag. Considering that tourists are more likely to believe the experiences of actual tourists over the promotional materials by tourism organizations, (Urry 57) it makes sense that VisitBritain tries to present the posts as the experience of ordinary people who would not benefit from it. However, VisitBritain seems to still keep control of the narrative of Great Britain that is created on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account and the way it is represented. VisitBritain tries to achieve this by mainly regramming people with a large number of followers which means that they can be sure that these posts are generally appreciated by a large audience. In addition, many of the regrammed and invited Instagram users are from Great Britain, which could mean that their representation and idea of Great Britain matches the ones that VisitBritain has. Furthermore, they pick people who have greater experience with photography than the average tourist likely has, which means that the picture in the post is more likely to be of decent quality. Additionally, the guest posters tend to have a connection to a tourist destination so when they are invited to post on the @lovegreatbritain account, they share a common goal with VisitBritain: to attract as many tourists to Great Britain as possible.

### **Photo differences**

As this thesis has made clear, some of the posts on the @lovegreatbritain account are regrams, which means that someone other than VisitBritain took the picture that is included in the post. It will be interesting to see if VisitBritain has made any changes in the image before posting it to the @lovegreatbritain account as this will hopefully give insight into the kind of narrative they want to construct and how they construct said narrative. Many of the images regrammed by @lovegreatbritain have stayed the same, but there are six that have been edited. These photos will be discussed below. Each time, the original picture is on the left, and the regrammed picture that can be found on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account will be on the right.

In image 21, the photo of the Sherlock Holmes museum can be seen. It appears that the only edit that has been made before posting it to the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account is that the image has been cropped and more resembles a square. When Instagram started out, only square images could be uploaded. This has now been changed however, and not all images on the account have a 1:1 ratio. As will be seen with some other pictures, this is not the only one that has been cropped in order to become a square. The VisitBritain team could have decided to crop the image to put more focus on the Sherlock Holmes museum itself, as well as its name sign. In the original picture, especially the ivy on the balcony may pull the focus away from the museum.





Image 21<sup>48</sup>

The second instance in which the original image has been cropped can be seen in image 22, which shows the photo of the English cottage. Similar to the picture of the Sherlock Holmes museum, the regrammed version is in the shape of a square. Although it is quite difficult to see in these smaller versions, the posts on the Instagram show the difference is clearer. In the lower right corner of the original photo, a pinkish purple flower is visible, which is quite eye-catching. By removing this from the photo, the emphasis remains on the more traditional British roses. Furthermore, in the uncropped original, there is a reflection visible in the window which shows a row of parked cars. These cars put the photo in to the present day. VisitBritain makes the image seem more traditional and nostalgic by deleting these signs of modern technology.



Image 22<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> "Sherlock Holmes Museum." Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFo8Be-jzR4/>> Regram: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGedbgDiiy-/>>

The photos shown in images 23 and 24 will be discussed quite briefly. Both pictures have been cropped by VisitBritain before posting them to the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. As a result, these regrammed images, like the previous ones, are now in the shape of a square. No specific details have been left out by this. In image 23, only a part of the sky has been removed, which makes the tower and houses more frame-filling and directs the focus to them. The sky has been also made smaller in image 24, which removes a large white part of the picture, which makes it easier to focus on the white sign which, as has been discussed in the first chapter, highlights traditional British tea and cobblestone streets.



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Image 23<sup>50</sup>



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Image 24<sup>51</sup>

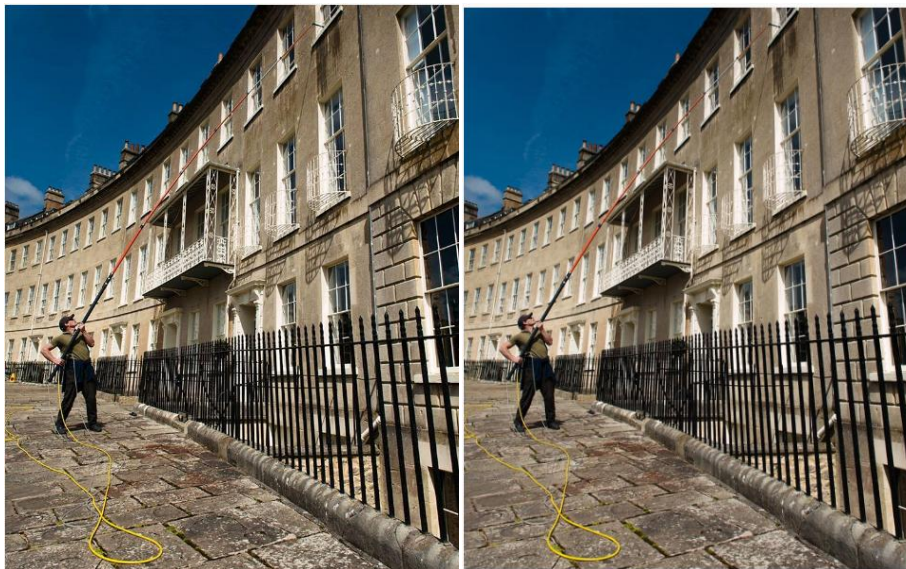
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<sup>49</sup> "Cottage." Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGhdqNxzXVU/>> Regram: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGmAuuoii8W/>>

<sup>50</sup> "Circus Lane 1." Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFnuVpYjmKi/>> Regram: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF3nX-bii3x/>>



The photo of the post shown in image 25 does not appear to be cropped. In these small versions of the pictures it is hard to see whether there is any difference between them at all. However, the online versions of the post show that in the original picture, there is a yellow cone on the left, near the fence which appears to be one of those cones with warnings that the floor maybe slippery. This cone cannot be found in the regrammed picture, and upon closer inspection, the part of the fence where the cone originally was appears blurry. It seems that the cone was photoshopped out of the picture before posting it to the @lovegreatbritain account. This could be because the yellow would distract the viewer from the building, which is supposed to be the focus of the picture. Furthermore, the cone would make the photo seem less ideal and link it to everyday modern life. Looking at the regrammed post, it is also visible that the lines and details of person in the photo and the yellow hose are not as clear as in the original post. They appear to have been somewhat blurred, which causes the focus to be more on the building, which links the post to historic British architecture, while the worker and the hose would link it to everyday work. It seems that the @lovegreatbritain account wanted to create a more idealized image of Great Britain.



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Image 25<sup>52</sup>

The situation with the photos shown in image 26 is somewhat different as it does not concern an actual regram. However, the photos have been taken on the same day, from the same hot air balloon, at almost the same time. The original picture has warmer tones to it than the second picture, which makes one think that they have been taken under different weather circumstances. It seems unlikely that the weather suddenly changed within maybe even less than minutes. Therefore,

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<sup>51</sup> "Tearoom." Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BEnoyUzmQqZ/>> Regram: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGhF5YiCi7m/>>

<sup>52</sup> "Bath 3." Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFt3-HtQ9gJ/>> Regram: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGKX4npII0E/>>

it appears that at least one of the two images has been edited. It is unclear which one has been edited, but this does not really matter. There has been made a choice to post the image with the cooler, more bluish tones to the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. The warmer tones seem to indicate that the original images was taken when it was relatively sunny, while the bluish tones of the image on the @lovegreatbritain account imply that it was colder and cloudier. The image posted to the @lovegreatbritain account confirms the stereotype of the British weather being dreary.



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Image 26<sup>53</sup>

### Hashtag differences

The scope of this thesis does not allow for discussion of all hashtags used in all of the original posts that have been regrammed. Therefore, the focus will be on what type of hashtags all of the original posts have in common and the differences between the hashtags used in the original posts and those in the regrammed posts that stand out the most. It is immediately noticeable that the original posts include many more hashtags than the regrammed versions on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account do. Although there is one original post that has no hashtags at all, the lowest one after that has nine hashtags and there are multiple posts with thirty hashtags and numbers in the high twenties. To compare, the posts in the sample taken from the @lovegreatbritain account have between zero and nine hashtags each, which are much lower numbers.

As has been argued in the second chapter of this thesis, most of the hashtags used on the @lovegreatbritain account have to do with the location in which the photo was taken. Similar hashtags are also popular with the original posters. However, @lovegreatbritain usually emphasized the connection of the post to tourism bureaus by using hashtags such as #VisitScotland and

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<sup>53</sup> "Bath 4." Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BHfCCoeB5W6/>> Regram: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJ1TECii5-/>>

#VisitLondon, which connects these posts to the tourism bureaus of these destinations. In the case of the original posters, they also do not simply state the location by adding just the name of the location preceded by a # symbol as a hashtag. Two examples of hashtags they use are #happeninghighlands and #scotland\_greatshots. These and similar hashtags function as a topic marker but they also provide metacommentary on what is seen in the photo and on the photo itself (Zappavigna 278). The hashtag #happeninghighlands indicates that the subject of the photo can be found in the Scottish highlands and, according to the poster, these highlands are the place to be as 'happening' indicates that there is something that is "particularly interesting, entertaining, or important" in the highlands and that they are "very fashionable" ("Happening"). The hashtag #scotland\_greatshots links the photo to the practice of photography and comments on the photo that its poster considers it a great shot. It also connects the post to a collective practice as there are over 20,000 posts on Instagram with the same hashtag. The connection to other photographers on Instagram is also established by hashtags unrelated to Great Britain such as #nikon and #letsgoshoot.

These are not the only ways in which the original posters link their Instagram posts to existing collective practices. Two hashtags that are used in multiple posts are #passionpassport and #mytinyatlas. The first hashtag #passionpassport was originated by the people behind the website passionpassport.com. They want to connect travelers and give them a platform to share stories, experiences, and photos ("About Us"). Using the #passionpassport hashtag is one way of participating in this. The second hashtag, #mytinyatlas, is similar. It was coined by the travel and lifestyle magazine *Tiny Atlas Quarterly*. The magazine's team wanted to enable people to share their own travel experiences and photography and make it easy to find these experiences and photos for others, (Kamin) which is facilitated by the hashtag. The original posters seem to focus their post on an audience that consists of travelers, more so than of people who are interested in Great Britain.

The focus on travel is also emphasized by the use of hashtags related to exploring. Hashtags such as #explore, #exploreeverything, #travelingourplanet, and #explore are quite popular among the posters. This indicates that the original posters like to present the subjects in their photos as something that is not yet very popular and that they have discovered, even though it actually might be a quite well-known destination. Furthermore, the posters seem to consider themselves travelers instead of tourists (Fussell 38). As has been argued in the second chapter, this is similar to the way in which VisitBritain presents Great Britain on Instagram. The @lovegreatbritain account also focuses on exploring and discovering, but they use less specific hashtags that are more general and not as connected to a specific subgroup of Instagram users. The @lovegreatbritain account's imagined audience seems consist of people who are already highly interested in Great Britain and its countries (Litt 330).

## Caption differences

Although VisitBritain generally uses less hashtags on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account than the original posters did, they use more words per caption than most of the original Instagram posters. This seems to indicate that VisitBritain wants to construct the narrative of Great Britain to its own likings, despite partially using photos that have been taken by people unconnected to VisitBritain. By adding their own captions, VisitBritain can emphasize certain elements of the photo and delete text that mentions circumstances or characteristics that they do not want potential tourists to focus on.

As has been argued in previous chapters, VisitBritain appears to want to present Great Britain as a place where visitors will be able to wander around without being bothered by fellow tourists. Therefore it makes sense that they do not want to post original captions that include sentences such as "queues of people blocking my way"<sup>54</sup> that are used to describe someone's experience at the Sherlock Holmes Museum. This kind of commentary next to the picture would negate what the photo itself appears to represent. The caption "Well, the trains may not run on time, our National Health Service is feeling the pressure, The British schools don't always get top marks, but at least we still make the best cup of tea in the world and serve it the English style"<sup>55</sup> seems to emphasize the aspects of Great Britain that the original poster thinks of as typically British, which is something that VisitBritain does on the @lovegreatbritain account as well. However, the original caption mainly mentions the negative British qualities, so it may come as no surprise that VisitBritain changes the caption in order to let their audience only focus on the British tea.<sup>56</sup> Removing the aspects that are problematic is typical of heritage tourism sites (Rickly-Boyd 262).

Something else that is noteworthy about the captions is that the original posters focus the caption less on the location in which the picture was taken than the @lovegreatbritain account does. This is especially clear in one of the posts by an invited guest poster that was first posted to his original account. The original caption is as follows: "Ever wondered how the windows of Bath's tall Georgian houses get cleaned? So much fun meeting and photographing people like this on our private photo tours!"<sup>57</sup> This caption only mentions the location once. On the other hand, the caption in the regrammed post is quite long and a part is focused on the location:

"This burly chap is one of a small army of people keeping Bath spick and span. This shot was taken on Lansdown Crescent. Some of the tallest Georgian Houses in Bath are on Great Pulteney Street, where the window cleaners stand in the basement and

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<sup>54</sup> "Sherlock Holmes Museum." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFo8Be-jzR4/>>

<sup>55</sup> "Tearoom." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BEnoyUzmQqZ/>>

<sup>56</sup> "Tearoom." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGhF5YiCi7m/>>

<sup>57</sup> "Bath 3." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFt3-HtQ9gJ/>>

use a pole that reaches five storeys up to the attic windows!"<sup>58</sup>

This particular quote mentions three separate locations related to the photo and Bath is even named twice. There is also another post in which the original poster does not even mention the location in the caption<sup>59</sup> but VisitBritain has added it to the regrammed version.<sup>60</sup> The quote from the caption that describes how the window cleaners clean the tall Georgian town houses is also a good example of how the captions of the regrams by VisitBritain are generally more elaborate and descriptive of the photo in the post. It seems that VisitBritain wants to include as much information as possible including value judgments, as has been argued in the second chapter, as well as descriptions of the locations, and more details that could convince their audience why the subject in the photo is unique to Great Britain.

## Conclusion

In summary, VisitBritain generally makes changes to the posts before regramming them to the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. There is a tendency to crop photos to a 1:1 ratio. This likely happens to make sure that the photos fit the narrative that VisitBritain wants to present on Instagram, namely that tourists will be able to seek refuge from everyday life in Great Britain as it is filled with typically British history and nature without being surrounded by masses of other tourists. Many photos make it seem as if time has somewhat stood still in Great Britain and by cropping the pictures they can remove the elements of the photo that would draw Great Britain back into the current period in time. The edited regrams focus on what is considered to be quintessentially British and by doing so confirm stereotypical ideas about Great Britain. Most of the time, VisitBritain has picked posts to regram that were originally posted by people who currently live in Great Britain and likely share the same cultural and societal values and therefore may take pictures that would fit in VisitBritain's narrative. Furthermore, the ages, sex, and racial and ethnical backgrounds were not clear for all of the original posters. However, what can be said is that the people of whom these characteristics were identifiable, the majority seemed to be white Europeans. This is quite noteworthy as VisitBritain states that it wants to reach international markets ("Business Plan" 15).

Additionally, many of the featured Instagram users have a lot of experience in photography and some are even employed as photographers. This means that they would know how to take a good photo. Furthermore, the majority of the original posters has quite a large Instagram following, which means that they take pictures that are widely appreciated. This reflects the statement that VisitBritain wants to work with key influencers on social media ("Business Plan" 13). By choosing their pictures to regram, VisitBritain seems to have a higher chance that their photos will be liked.

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<sup>58</sup> "Bath 3." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGKX4npj0E/>>

<sup>59</sup> "Yellow Flowers." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFUosDVGbtb/>>

<sup>60</sup> "Yellow Flowers." <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGMdEaaCi3N/>>

Moreover, the hashtags and captions are changed in a similar manner to achieve the same goal as with the photos. However, it is interesting that the original posters link the posts to a more diverse set of existing collective practices than the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account does. By linking the post to multiple collective practices it is likely that one reaches a broader audience. The hashtags used by VisitBritain are mainly focusing on what is related to Great Britain, which likely means that the majority of the people who see the post were already interested in Great Britain to begin with and that the posts do not reach as many potential tourists as VisitBritain would want. A possible explanation for this could be that VisitBritain does not want to distract the viewers of the post from the narrative of Great Britain that they present.



## Conclusion

The chapters in this thesis have analyzed the photos, hashtags and captions used in the posts of VisitBritain's Instagram account @lovegreatbritain. The original posters and the differences between the original posts and the regrammed versions on the @lovegreatbritain account have been taken into account as well. The analysis shows that VisitBritain constructs Great Britain on Instagram as a destination filled with history, heritage, and nature that is suited for a visit by those who want to temporarily escape from their present-day lives as well as from mass tourism. Even in the photos of popular tourist sites in Great Britain, no people are shown which gives the impression that one could visit these places in solitude. In some cases, VisitBritain has edited the photos in order to remove elements that would undoubtedly connect the photo to the present. The photos have a nostalgic sensibility to them, which is increased by many of the photos giving the impression that they are more vintage than they are, for example by the use of muted colors.

The subjects of the posts build on existing place-myths and stereotypes of Britishness, such as heritage sites, tea, gardens, and even the presumed dreary weather. The hashtags and captions of the posts tend to emphasize the Britishness of what can be seen in the photos. Furthermore, the hashtags and captions of the original posts are changed by VisitBritain before regramming them to the @lovegreatbritain account in order to remove characteristics that they do not want their followers to associate with Britishness. Noteworthy is that overall, the posts that match the existing stereotypes and place-myths the most tend to be the ones with the highest number of likes. In addition, despite being taken by various people, some of the photos are very similar to existing tourism promotional photography of the destinations. One location is even featured in two different photos shot by two different Instagram users without there being many differences between the two pictures. This seems to confirm the ideas that tourists tend to photograph what they already know (Urry 172) and that tourism organizations tend to repeat the same narratives because they sell (Bruner 22).

Interestingly, in Great Britain's *Delivering a Golden Legacy. A Growth Strategy for Inbound Tourism to Britain from 2012 to 2020*, VisitBritain stated that it wanted to focus on Great Britain's perceived strengths traditional and contemporary culture. However, hardly any form of contemporary culture is presented in the photos. The focus clearly is on Great Britain as one large heritage site. Additionally, the same strategy plan stated that Great Britain was not perceived globally as being rich in nature and that VisitBritain wants to change this perception. Many of the photos discussed in this thesis indeed were of sites with nature or elements of nature, but generally these are idealized landscapes seen through the romantic gaze and man-made nature such as

gardens and parks. As a result, nature in Great Britain is portrayed as being ordered and controlled by humans.

VisitBritain states in its *Business Plan 2016/2017* that it wants to focus on reaching a global, international audience ("Business Plan" 36). One would therefore expect that they regram posts of a diverse group of Instagram users in order to have a broad appeal. On the contrary, the majority of the Instagram users who are regrammed by VisitBritain or invited as guest posters on the @lovegreatbritain account live in Great Britain and seems to consist of white Europeans. Therefore their perspective on Great Britain is likely similar to the one that VisitBritain has and the regrammed posts will then not deviate much from original content created by VisitBritain. Additionally, many of the regrammed posters appear to be highly skilled in photography and some even work as professional or semi-professional photographers. Furthermore, most of the regrammed Instagram users have a number of followers that is significantly higher than the average number of Instagram followers. This can be explained by VisitBritain's statement that they want to work with people who are influential on social media ("Business Plan" 13). Instagram users are given the opportunity to be regrammed by @lovegreatbritain if they use #lovegreatbritain or #OMGB as hashtags, which implies that the content on the account is created by regular Instagram users and tourist. Those who view the posts on the account could feel that they are more sincere and trustworthy than other tourism advertising, (Urry 57) although this seems to be negated by the type of posts and Instagram users that VisitBritain chooses to regram.

Lack of diversity is not only present in the group of regrammed users and guest posters; it is also present in the posts on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. Of the twenty posts that have been discussed in this thesis, fifteen show a location in England, only five showcase Scotland, and none of the photos' subjects is located in Wales. In addition, most of the photos show traditional Britishness - or in some cases even Englishness - without taking the current multicultural society into account. The posts on VisitBritain's account pay no attention to the different identities and tensions between these identities within Great Britain. It is also worth noting that three out of the five posts on Scotland have been posted in the week of the Brexit referendum, two of them even were posted on the day that voting took place and were posted by a Scottish guest poster. The general Scottish attitude towards leaving the European Union differed from those of England and Wales. It appears that VisitBritain wants to emphasize that Scotland is still a part of Great Britain by highlighting Scotland in the week of the Brexit referendum and inviting a Scottish Instagram user as a guest poster on the day of voting.

Great Britain is not only constructed as an escape from mass tourism by the lack of people in the photos, but also by the use of language in the hashtags and captions. VisitBritain adapts the captions and hashtags of the original post before regramming it to make sure that they do not

construct Great Britain as a destination for mass tourism, as some of the original posts mentioned that the location in the posts was quite popular among tourists. Moreover, quite a lot of the words used in the captions and hashtags have to do with exploring and discovering a place. These are words that are mainly associated with travelers instead of tourists (Fussell 38). Combined with the lack of people, seemingly quiet atmosphere in the photos, and the photos mainly being taken through the romantic gaze, these hashtags and captions contribute to the construction of Great Britain as an escape from mass tourism but they construct an identity for the viewer and visitor as well. They are part of the lucky few who get to gaze upon the British cities and landscapes and are different from ordinary tourists who participate in mass tourism. Nevertheless, it should be noted that much of the supposed nature in the photos is actually man-made and this, combined with the panoramic gaze used in some of the photos, indicates that what is gazed upon is still ordered and controlled. Therefore, VisitBritain seems to rather address the anti-tourist than the true traveler with the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account.

### **Research limitations**

The scope of this thesis did not allow for analysis of more posts than the twenty that have been discussed. As mentioned, there do not seem to be many differences in the posts before and after the Brexit referendum, which could be because the sample of posts was too small and taken from a period too close to the day of the referendum. An analysis of a broader period of time and a larger sample of posts may yield more interesting results. Furthermore, the cultural background of the writer of this thesis is not that different from the ones of the people responsible for the posts on the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account. Researchers with an entirely different background may have interpreted the posts in a different manner.

### **Further research**

For further research it would be interesting to study the @lovegreatbritain Instagram account over a longer period of time to see how it develops in the period after Brexit and when Great Britain is no longer part of the European Union. The separate Instagram accounts for VisitEngland, VisitScotland, and VisitWales could then also be taken into account to see if the narrative that VisitBritain constructs differs from the narratives that each country constructs for itself. This may especially be interesting to do with VisitEngland as it is run by the same organization as VisitBritain and England appears to be the most represented on the @lovegreatbritain account. Furthermore, additional research could also analyze VisitBritain's narrative construction on multiple social media platforms as the tourism board also has a presence on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Google Plus, Pinterest, Weibo, and WeChat. The latter two are popular social media platforms in China and it could be interesting to see if VisitBritain constructs a different narrative there than when they try

to reach a global audience. Additionally, the narratives that are constructed on social media could be compared with the narratives in different forms of media that VisitBritain uses to advertise, such as the website and brochures. Finally, the number of likes a post gets does not necessarily correspond with the number of visitors to that particular destination. The most popular post on Instagram does not have to be the most popular destination. Therefore it would be interesting to find out how the number of likes and followers on the Instagram account translates to actual visitors.

## Primary Sources

### **"Arcelormittal Orbit"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BIFn8PYBxzN/>>

### **"Bath 1"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJDnuTCi0I/>>

### **"Bath 2"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJZh3oCiyo/>>

### **"Bath 3"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGKX4np0E/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFt3-HtQ9gJ/>>

### **"Bath 4"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGJ1TECii5-/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BHfCCoeB5W6/>>

### **"Big Ben"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF9cEMEiixJ/>>

### **"Castle Combe"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGULbTFii7p/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGC6OGvqV6v/>>

### **"Cawdor Castle"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGrOsNOCi7V/>>

### **"Circus Lane 1"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF3nX-bii3x/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFnuVpYjmKj/>>

### **"Circus Lane 2"**

@lovegreatbritain: <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BG\\_WkJcCi4-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BG_WkJcCi4-/)>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BE5NkLfY4U1/>>

### **"Cottage"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGmAuu0ii8W/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGhdqNxzXVu/>>

### **"Eilean Donan Castle"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFx1H7eCiyp/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BDyeBTGMOsf/>>

### **"Forest"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BISqpzYh94z/>>

### **"Heather"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BIVGFcKBfzY/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF2DbqfiQA0/>>

### **"Owl Chicks"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BHSQI09h2dP/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGhm-W4OUjj/>>

### **"Roe Deer"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BHSnToZB2ku/>>

### **"Sheep"**

@lovegreatbritain: <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BHAI3\\_JCi2r/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BHAI3_JCi2r/)>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BF3CG5sy4Xz/>>

### **"Sherlock Holmes Museum"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGedbgDiiy-/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFo8Be-jzR4/>>

### **"Tearoom"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGhF5YiCi7m/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BEnoyUzmQqZ/>>

### **"Yellow Flowers"**

@lovegreatbritain: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BGMdEaaCi3N/>>

Original: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BFUosDVGbttb/>>

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