

Mapping Consumer Engagement and Brand Impression Management in Instagram: A Decision Tree Approach

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Introduction As a popular visual advertising and marketing platform, Instagram has the highest rate of consumer engagement with brands in comparison to Facebook and Twitter (Elliott, 2014). This platform optimizes a feature of customizing colors and resolutions of pictures to create unique visual experiences, which further enhances consumer interactions on brand posts. For instance, one picture posted on Michael Kors' Instagram generated 218 thousand likes within 18 hours (Taube, 2013). Consumer engagement on brand Instagram pages has increased by 108% during the first quarter of 2015 (vs. 32% of Twitter, 27% of Facebook) (eMarketer, 2015) in such forms as clicking "likes", making comments and sharing pictures with others. Vilnai-Yavetz and Tifferet (2015) indicate that pictures on social media play a significant role in brand impression management, suggesting that a brand post (e.g., visual message) could have a direct impact on developing impression about the brand to consumers. Despite the growing interest in this visual-based SNS, little is known about brand impression management (IM) from a brand management perspective; research so far has been limited to IM from a consumer's perspective (e.g., consumers' use of Facebook for IM) (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Accordingly, this study aims to answer two research questions: *How does a brand utilize Instagram for online impression management? And how do consumers respond to it?*

Theoretical background Drawn from the theories of social presence and media richness, the current research explores the relationship between brand impression management and consumer engagement in Instagram. Social presence refers to feelings and awareness of others and community that users experience in an online environment (Tu & McIssac, 2002). Research suggests that communication media vary in the level of social presence enabled (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Media richness theory further argues that richer media with more immediate feedback and a greater diversity of cues could result in better performance (Dennis & Kenny, 1998). In classifying consumer engagement in connection with pictures on fashion brands' Instagram, this study claims that pictures on Instagram can predict consumer online engagement in Instagram. The ability to predict is due to Instagram's capabilities of social presence and media richness. Pictures posted by a fashion brand on its Instagram account work as tools for brand impression management (Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2015). Brand impression management refers to a brand's conscious or unconscious attempts in consumer-brand interactions to construct a desired image (real or ideal) in the minds of consumers (Harris & Spiro, 1981). Consumer engagement behavior, the creation of an enduring and meaningful relationship between the brand and the consumer (Van Doorn et al. 2010), embraces consumer's sharing, liking and making comments on brands and products on social media.

Methods and Results Data was collected from one fashion brand’s Instagram (i.e., Lululemon). Based on a scoring tool, 100 pictures posted within a certain time period were coded by two coders (Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2015). Brand impression management was identified by the frequency of seven elements of the pictures (i.e., style, object, smile, eye contact, situation, human/product in picture, theme). Likewise, consumer engagement was analyzed with the frequency of four elements (i.e., comments, emojis, likes, and word-of-mouth). The inter-coder reliability reached 0.92. Next, a decision-tree analysis using Weka Data Miner was performed. A decision tree represents “a tree in which each branch node represents a choice between a number of alternatives, and each leaf node represents a classification or decision” (Wan & Lei 2009, p. 583). Thus, a decision tree approach could classify consumer engagement (decision) in response to each element of pictures (choice). Results indicated that consumer engagement varied by elements of pictures on the brand Instagram. First, comments were mainly made based on the following elements: original picture, no eye contact, no smile and product focused/scenery only/people in scenery (Figure 1). Second, four elements that determined the use of emojis were eye contact, situation, object and theme. Interestingly, when people in a picture do not look at the camera, consumers are more likely to respond with emojis. Third, theme, human/product in picture and smile determined the number of “likes”. Lastly, eye contact, theme, human/product in picture and situation were associated with word-of-mouth.

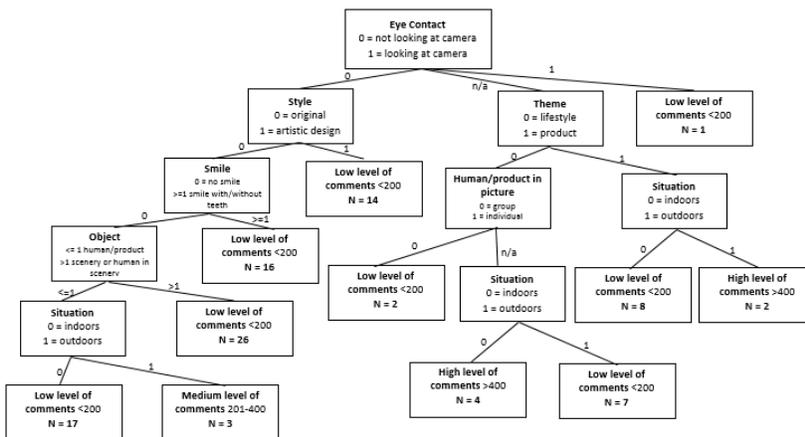


Figure 1. A Decision Tree of Comments

Discussion and Implications This study systemizes consumer online engagement along with brand impression management on Instagram. Visual elements of pictures posted on fashion brands’ Instagram influence various types and levels of consumer engagement. The findings contribute to the literature by validating the association between brand impression management and consumer engagement on social media sites (SNS) from a brand management perspective. This study also provides fashion SNS marketers with realistic insights into planning and executing brand impression management strategies within SNS.

References available upon request