Put faces to your Instagram posts. Elements for a fashion brand's social media images to help overcome the "algorithm"

Nigel AR Joseph, Jihyeong Son, Vicki McCracken, Washington State University, USA

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Background and Research questions. Instagram is an immediate avenue for apparel brand to connect to its consumers (Muntinga, Moorman & Smit, 2011). When consumers follow a brand on Instagram, they get the brand's post updates on their profile feed, which tracks likes, comments, views, and other interactions. However, this avenue has become congested from the everchanging algorithm of Instagram limiting business to only reach 7% of their followers (@Instagram, 2019a). Further, the algorithm determines a brand's organic reach by what post and profiles users engage with more frequently, Instagram usage, and the number of followers (@Instagram, 2019b). The difficulties of the everchanging algorithm have marketers and researchers questioning what makes an image impressionable for brands? Brand impression management is a brand's attempts to influence the formation of a desired perception in the minds of consumers (Harris & Spiro, 1981; Hur, Lim & Lyu, 2017). While academic evidence on which elements influence image impression is somewhat limited, this research spurred by Hur et al., (2017) on visual perspectives, sought to examine other factors that make an image likable on social media. More specifically, what elements within an image may increase its likability?

Stimulus design and method. To explore the research questions, we first developed the semantic likability scale by selected eight highly popular Instagram images in the past two years from the three most popular athleisure/outdoor brands profiles on a U.S. university campus (for a total of 24 images). The scale uses a 5-point semantic differential derived from the visual-sentiment ontology database (Columbia University, 2017), similar to Borth et al. (2013) methods using adjective-noun pairs. The participants were asked to rate the 24 images for attractive, remarkable, beautiful, fashionable, cool, inoffensive, inappropriate, not-frustrating, and favorable using Qualtrics software. Factor analysis proved the Cronbach's alpha value was .902 explaining 56.54% of the variance (Table 1). The combined score was used to represent the likability of the image. Participants also were asked to provide information on demographics. Next we used content analysis to determine the following elements of the 24 images including if the image had a person/people face(s), if the imaged had at least one person of color/ethnicity and if the person was an influencer/celebrity.

Results. The research surveyed 90 participants mean age: 22.04 +/- 1.28 years, 31.1% people of color/ethnicity, 66.7% female, (all individuals identified their gender with no person identified themselves as transgendered, agender, or polygender). To explore what elements within an image may increases its likability, we first determine if images with people or products scored differently. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was significant, p <.001 with images with people are more likable than images with products. Our next step was to analyze images with people, we conducted a ANOVA: 2 (face/no face) x 2 (person of color/ethnicity/white person) x 2 (influencer/non-influencer). The results indicate that the three predictors with interactions accounted for 15.4% of the variance. The main effect of images with faces/without a face was statistically significant, $p < .001$, which suggests that images with a face have a higher evaluation than images without a face. The main effect of people of color/ethnicity was not statistically significant $p = .228$. The main effect of influencers was statistically significant, $p = .001$, which suggests that images with an influencer have a higher evaluation than images with non-influencers. The only interaction that was significant was between influencers and people of color/ethnicity, $p = .008$, which suggest that images that do not have either an influencer or a person of color/ethnicity is ranked lower than having both influencer only, and person of color/ethnicity.

Table 1. Likability Semantic Scale Factor Analysis

Semantic Word Pairs	Factor Loading
Attractive/Inattentive	.768
Non-Frustrating/Frustrating	.663
Beautiful/Ugly	.647
Remarkable/Unremarkable	.823
Fashionable/Not Fashionable	.686
Cool/Not Cool	.807
Inoffensive/Offensive	.650
Appropriate/Inappropriate	.650
Favorable/Unfavorable	.720

Cronbach alpha =.902 | 56.538% of the Initial Eigenvalue variance

Implications. Collectively the research finding suggests people are the content that may navigate the congestion of image likability on Instagram. Therefore, brands should post images of influencers ensuring their faces are not obscured or hidden. Also, this research showcases that race and ethnicity do not decrease the evaluation of an image's likability; on the contrary, brands Instagram feeds should showcase the array of people is significant for brand impressions on Instagram. Future research should seek to determine other factors that increase likability, as well as determine if perceptions of an image likability predict liking behavior.

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