

Chanel's Invitation to Backstage:
The Effects of Visual Storytelling and Content Ephemerality on VIP emotions

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Purpose/Rationale. The ever-growing social media realm has reshaped the way brands connect with their customers, and digital storytelling has become a new norm for brand communication (Ehlers, 2017). Furthermore, recent development of an advanced presentation mode such as Snapchat and Stories on Instagram and Facebook added a new wave of social media trends in which users indulge into the ephemerality of sharing, contributing to their in-the-moment spirits (Bayer et al., 2016). The ephemeral content in these presentation modes disappear after 24 hours in general. While backstage (i.e., behind-the-scenes) storytelling and content ephemerality have gained popularity in social media platforms, many luxury fashion brands hesitate to follow the trend because they fear losing control of their brand image and are concerned about lack of exclusivity (Abrams Research, n.d.). Thus, this study attempts to investigate the effect of visual storytelling on VIP emotions in luxury fashion brands' social media communication and how the effect interacts with different presentation modes such as high- and low-levels of ephemerality (i.e., Instagram Stories mode vs Instagram regular posts, respectively).

Conceptual Framework/Hypotheses Development. The behind-the-scene images in social media have the power of storytelling (Baetens & Bleyen, 2010) and create viewers' feeling of being privileged, important and part of extraordinary experiences (Barksy & Nash, 2002). Lim and Childs (2016) found that informal pictures (i.e., behind-the-scenes) that capture a moment evoke higher levels of emotional responses than staged images of a model or a product on Instagram because of narrative elements presented in the informal images such as a character, a plot and chronology (Escalas, 2004). This psychological mechanism can be explained by the role of mental simulation evoked by a visual stimulus (Chang, 2013). Additionally, different presentation modes on Instagram (i.e., high [Stories mode] vs low [regular posts] ephemerality conditions) are expected to influence the processing of visual storytelling. For instance, while a presentation mode that highlights ephemerality of social media content increases viewers' perception of having distinctive experiences by enabling them to be exposed to the glimpse of others' lives more intimately (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014), the weakness of the ephemeral content is poor quality (Grasmayer, 2016). Thus, the effectiveness of visual storytelling in such an ephemeral condition becomes questionable, particularly for luxury brands. In turn, in the low-ephemerality presentation mode, a series of behind-the-scenes images are likely to increase a sense of telepresence, enabling viewers to immerse into the visual narrative. Therefore,

H1: Viewers in the low-ephemerality presentation mode will perceive a series of behind-the-scenes images (vs front stage) as a story more than in those in the high-ephemerality presentation mode.

H2: Visual narrative of behind-the-scenes images will have less of an impact on telepresence in the high-ephemerality (vs. low-ephemerality) presentation mode.

H3: Visual narrative of behind-the-scenes images will have less of an impact on VIP emotions in the high-ephemerality presentation (vs. low-ephemerality) mode.

H4: The effect of content ephemerality on VIP emotions will be mediated by a sense of telepresence.

Research Design/Procedure. Employing Instagram as a study context, the experiment utilized a 2x2 between subject factorial design in which college students (n=119) from a Midwestern University were recruited and randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions: staged images in a low-ephemerality condition (i.e., Instagram regular posts) (n= 33), staged images in a high-ephemerality condition (i.e., Instagram Stories mode) (n=32), behind-the-scenes images in a low-ephemerality condition (n= 25) and behind-the-scenes images in a high-ephemerality condition (n= 29). A pre-test of 63 undergraduate students confirmed the images of different content types as proper stimuli for main study (i.e., staged, behind-the-scenes). Researchers developed stimuli using the same set of content-type images for each presentation-mode condition. In the main study, a description of each presentation mode that highlights different levels of content ephemerality was provided prior to exposure to stimuli. Four images were presented in a row in each condition. In high-ephemerality conditions, each image was set to be exposed for five seconds; in low-ephemerality conditions, each image was exposed at least five seconds, and participants had control to view longer and move to the next image. After exposure, participants were asked to assess perception of storytelling, telepresence and VIP emotions.

Results. To test H1-H3, ANOVA and post-hoc analysis was used. Results revealed a significant difference in perception of storytelling ($F=3.496$, $p=.018$): viewers in the low-ephemerality condition, perceived behind-the-scenes images as more of a story ($M=4.848$) than staged images ($M=4.188$, $F=9.247$, $p=.004$). However, this was not true for the high-ephemerality conditions (Behind-the-scenes Mean= 4.138, Staged Mean= 4.419, $F=1.287$, $p=.261$), thus supporting H1. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that behind-the-scenes images produce lower levels of telepresence in the high-ephemerality condition ($M=2.855$) than the low-ephemerality condition ($M=3.864$, $F=7.516$, $p=.008$), thus supporting H2. Similarly, behind-the-scenes images generated lower levels of VIP emotions in the high-ephemerality condition ($M=2.855$) compared to the low-ephemerality condition ($M=3.865$, $F=7.516$, $p=.008$), thus supporting H3. Lastly, the results of Hayes' PROCESS analysis (Model 4) (2013) verified that a sense of telepresence mediates the effect of content ephemerality on VIP emotions (Effect= .442, SE=.154, 95% CI= .159, .770). With a significant direct effect of ephemerality on telepresence (Effect= 1.178, SE=.367, $t=3.21$, $p=.002$, 95% CI= .4410, 1.914) and a significant direct effect of telepresence on VIP emotions (Effect= .375, SE=.088, $t=4.277$, $p=.001$, 05% CI= .199, .552), partial mediation was established, thus partially supporting H4.

Discussion. Findings from this study contribute to researchers and marketers by validating the contradicting effects of visual storytelling in different presentation modes. Although ephemeral content has emerged as an innovative way for brands to communicate with consumers, our findings suggest that luxury brand managers should carefully develop a differentiated content strategy when adopting different presentation modes even in the same social media platform.

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