

## “I” or “She”? The impact of visual perspectives on creation of consumption imagery on Instagram

Keywords: Social media, visual strategy, visual perspective

**Purpose/Rational:** Over the past few years there has been a noticeable shift towards using visual content on social media. This phenomenon is most apparent on Instagram - a visual platform, which has the highest consumer engagement rate (Elliott, 2014). This astronomical power of Instagram has pushed brands to answer one important question: how to visually better communicate, and stick with their target audience? (Kim & Ko, 2012). While current insights have witnessed the power of images used in social media for brands, academic evidences on which types of images and how they influence consumer behavior are rather limited. As a stepping point, this study examines how visual perspective in the image (visual perspective: first-person vs. third-person) of a brand post creates consumption imagery (imagery fluency) and consumption imagery acts as the underlying mechanism that drives attitudinal and relational outcomes on Instagram.

**Theoretical Framework:** *Visual perspective* is a visual ability to construct mental imagery formed from a particular perspective or point of view (Kosslyn, 1988). Visual perspective can be formed by picture, such as shifting the camera angle (up vs. down), location (e.g. inside vs. outside), direction (e.g. front vs. back), or distance (far vs. near) (e.g. Jiang et al., 2014). Prior studies in neural imageries identified the two most distinct types of visual perspectives: first-person and third-person. Existing literature suggests that first-person has been found to encourage consumers to picture themselves experiencing the events (Libby & Eibach, 2011; Valenti, Libby, & Eibach, 2011), whereas the third-person perspective helps users to become the object of a scene observed by other people, which means they visualize themselves in the consumption experience as bystanders (Libby & Eibach, 2002). *Imagery fluency* refers to the ease of generating mental imagery. Researchers contend that imagery-evoking advertising materials facilitate imagery fluency that enable consumers to evaluate a product prior to actual experience and shape buying behavior (Chang, 2013; Petrova & Cialdini, 2005). Following this rationale, this study proposes that a first-person visual perspective on brand post increases viewer's imagery fluency more than a third-person visual perspective because consumers are likely to feel that the brand is more relevant to them (H1). Previous studies supported that this imagery fluency enhances consumers' self-brand connection (H2a), attitude toward a brand's Instagram (H2b), and intention to extended information search (H2c). Additionally, the effect of visual perspective on self-brand connection (H3a), attitude toward a brand's Instagram (H3b), and intention to extended information search (H3c) are mediate by imagery fluency.

**Stimuli development:** A professional designer developed two different types of visual perspective Instagram brand post (first-person versus third-person) using a fictitious brand, Alania. One image of a shoe product from a global brand was obtained from brand Instagram page. All cues that could signal a brand's name such as a brand label was removed. Then visual perspective was manipulated following the previous literature (e.g., Libby et al., 2009). In the first-person condition, the women's shoe picture is faced from the bottom as viewers can feel

that they are wearing shoes. In the third-person condition, the brand post is faced from the top so viewers feel that others are wearing the shoes. These images were displayed on a mock Alania's Instagram brand page, in a pictorial format.

**Procedure:** To test the proposed hypotheses, an online experiment was employed using a one-factor (visual perspective: first-person versus third-person) between subject design. To collect relevant responses to the context of this study, only respondents who were female and an Instagram user were able to participate, resulting in 91 usable responses. The respondents received one of the two visual perspective brand posts randomly. Following the exposure to the stimulus, the participant completed the questionnaire, measuring imagery fluency (3 items), self-brand connection (6 items), attitude toward a brand's Instagram (3 items) and extended search behavior (5 items) on a 7 Likert-scale. Additionally, manipulation checks (2 items) and simple demographic questions were asked. All measurements were developed based on previous literature (Burnkrant et al., 1995; Chang, 2013; Lee & Mason, 1999; Wang et al., 2011; Zhang & Yang, 2015).

**Analysis & Results:** Manipulation checks were confirmed. A one-way ANOVA results demonstrated that an image of first-person perspective is more effective at generating first-person perspective ( $M= 5.73$ ,  $p=.001^{***}$ ) than third-person perspective ( $M= 3.19$ ); An image of third-person perspective is more effective at generating third-person perspective ( $M= 5.17$ ) than the first-person ( $M= 2.66$ ). In support of our H1, the results revealed that respondents who were exposed to first-person perspective had greater levels of imagery fluency ( $M=5.74$ ,  $F(1,89)=7.07$ ,  $p=.009^{***}$ ) than that of third-person perspective ( $M=5.13$ ). Moreover, the results confirmed that imagery fluency increased self-brand connection ( $F(13,77)=2.26$ ,  $p=.014^*$ ), attitude toward a brand's Instagram ( $F(13,77)=2.00$ ,  $p=.032^*$ ) and intention to extend information search ( $F(13,77)=2.99$ ,  $p=.001^{***}$ ), supporting H2a-c. Lastly, the mediating role of imagery fluency was confirmed. The results of PROCSS analysis with bootstrap method (5000 resamples, 95% CI; Hayes, 2013) revealed that imagery fluency significantly mediated visual perspective and self-brand connection (effect= .246;  $-.501 < CI < -.062$ ), attitude toward a brand's Instagram (effect=.134;  $-.301 < CI < -.039$ ) and intention to extend information search (effect=.177;  $-.397 < CI < -.053$ ). Thus, H3a-c were supported.

**Discussion:** Findings from this study highlight the importance of visual perspective in creating consumption imagery, which in turn amplifies attitudinal and relational outcomes on Instagram. In particular, the first perspective image was more effective in yielding imagery fluency. Moreover, findings illuminate that imagery fluency is a key psychological mechanism in processing visual perspective stimulus and a driving force in shaping consumer behavior on a social media platform. Consequently, this study contributes to the existing literature in the area of brand marketing and social media and offers practical insights by showing the importance of visual perspective in leading the success of a visual strategy. Implications and limitations are discussed. *References available upon request\*\*\**