



## Consumers' Narrative Transportation on Social Media: A Study of Instagram of Fashion Brands

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**Introduction** As the world of fashion becomes more and more digital, fashion marketers consider digital content strategies in social media as a way to enhance brand experience and communication, creating a competitive advantage (Cowan, 2012). For example, Tory Burch posts personal stories and photos of family besides photos of brand lines on the Tory Burch brand Instagram; it has 733,000 followers as of 2015, while the brand brought \$1 billion in revenue in 2014. Instagram has created annual revenue of \$250-\$400 million in 2014, with a population of 300 million users (Goel, 2014). Despite its promising potential for competitive positioning, consumer behavior in this type of visual/image-focused social media-- has been understudied: *How do visual/image messages work in consumer information processing?* To address this question, this study proposes and tests a model of visual information processing within the context of a social media – Instagram. Specifically, focusing on the concept of narrative transportation as a psychological process involving consumer visual information processing, our model proposed that consumers' perceptions of visual messages would help develop narrative transportation, which in turn creates affective responses and brand attitudes.

**Theoretical Background and Hypotheses** Narrative transportation refers to a distinct mental state that continuously generates persuasive effects with a mix of “attentions, imagery, and feelings” (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701). Visual/image contents can function as narratives that people likely get transported from creating meanings and experiencing events depicted in the visual/image contents (Phillip & Mcquarrie, 2010). This study employs the transportation-imagery theory that not only reveals consumers' creating mental imagery but portrays their experiencing the events depicted in the information they process (Laer et al., 2014). According to the framework, identifiable characteristics of storyteller have impact on narrative transportation: Comprehension fluency and imagery fluency are specified as two characteristics of visual messages by a fashion brand (a storyteller's) on its Instagram page. Comprehension fluency refers to the degree of which consumers experience ease when they comprehend visual information, (Chang 2013) and fluency of imagery refers to the extent to which consumers generate related imagery when processing visual information (Petro & Cialdini, 2005). Further, two outcome variables, affective response and attitude toward fashion brand, are examined to study how narrative transportation would influence consumer responses. This study proposes a model postulating the following research hypotheses:

**H1.** Comprehension fluency (H1a) and imagery fluency (H1b) positively influence narrative transportation.

**H2.** Narrative transportation positively influences affective response (H2a) and brand attitude (H2b).

**H3.** Comprehension fluency positively influences affective response (H3a) and brand attitude (H3b).

**H4.** Affective response positively influences brand attitude.

**Method and Results** An online survey was used for data collection. Measurement items of research variables were adapted from prior studies. A total of 137 responses recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk were usable for data analysis. First, a well-fitting measurement model was established using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the maximum likelihood estimation (AMOS 22.0). Reliabilities, convergent and discriminant validity were also confirmed. Second, SEM with ML estimation (AMOS 22.0) tested proposed hypotheses. The proposed model yielded an acceptable fit to the data. Results indicated that all hypotheses except for H2b were supported (Figure 1).

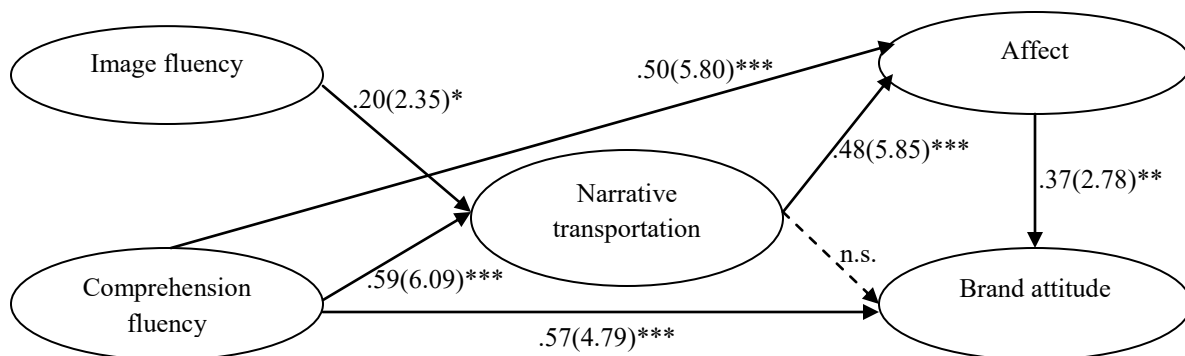


Figure 1. Resulted Model

Note. Numbers are standardized factor loadings and Critical Ratios (CRs) in parentheses. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Discussion and Implications** Findings from this study indicate the important role of comprehension fluency of fashion brand Instagram on consumers' narrative transportation, affective response, and brand attitude. If a fashion retailer provides informative visual content in its social media platform, it would greatly encourage consumers to get transported to the pictures and to have positive emotional responses to the brand. Similarly, the effectiveness of visual presentation lies in imagery fluency of the pictures in Instagram that motivate consumers to create the stories of experiencing the products. At the academic level, this study develops a comprehensive research model to describe consumers' visual information processing in a virtual community context. At the market level, it sheds light on digital content marketing that benefits brand experience and communication by proving digital messages in social media as a new approach of brand storytelling for effective branding strategy.

References available upon request