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A Qualitative Research on the Effect of Visuals Triggering Different Sensations on Consumers' Attention Towards and Preference for Instagram Posts

Social media have become an important communication channel for marketers. However, there is still lack of knowledge about the different approaches in social media marketing strategies and their effect on psychological engagement (Ashley & Tutton, 2015). Furthermore, due to the fact that many brands and companies are posting on social media, timelines of followers and social media users are crowded with branded posts or advertising. Meaning that it is difficult to make content stand out and build relationships with customers. What may be great content or a very nice picture, seems to disappear in the bulk of social media content. According to Krishna *et al.* (2016) sensory marketing can influence advertisement design and effectiveness. Sensory marketing is marketing that engages the consumers' senses and affects their perception, judgement and behaviour (Krishna, 2012). Moreover, ad visuals do not only trigger the sense of sight, but they can also activate mental stimulation and imagery (Krishna *et al.*, 2016). Mental imagery is the perception of being present in an imagined situation by using sensory cues by which ideas, feelings and memories are activated from the working memory (Argyriou, 2012; MacInnis & Price, 1987). The aim of this research is to examine the effect of visual stimuli (i.e., colour) and visual stimuli triggering mental imagery in other senses (i.e., orientation, perceived movement, perceived taste, perceived smell, perceived touch or a combination of cues) on consumers' attention and preference levels for Instagram posts. To test this effect, a qualitative research approach was followed. Twelve products of an existing Dutch retail brand were selected. For each product, two or three Instagram posts with visuals that trigger different sensations were chosen. In total, 23 visuals were studied through 16 in-depth customer interviews (44% male; age between 16 and 61, Mage = 31,88; 44% daily, 38% weekly, 18% monthly Instagram use). The main findings of this research are that the level of attention depends on which and how many sensations are triggered, whereas the level of preference depends on the type of sensation triggered by the visual, how it is used and for which product. Regarding attention, posts that trigger more than one sensation lead to more attention. Concerning preference, it is important that a visual contains a story and a context that fits with the elements the message is about (i.e., the product and the triggered sensations). 14 out of 16 people mentioned several times that products which were not shown in their daily user-friendly habitat (orientation), were perceived more negatively than products shown in a recognizable situation. Nonetheless, a post with a fitted context and clear story might not be the post that receives the highest level of attention, but thus receives higher levels in preference.