

Social Media & Relationship Marketing

Jealousy and Persuasion via Instagram

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Mr. Barbera

Consumers in North America are exposed to approximately 30,000 brand impressions daily. During an average day consumers are exposed to television commercials, radio advertisements, billboards and sometimes, direct sales, but more significantly are the thousands of readily identifiable brand impressions that we observe, but don't overtly consider. The car logo on our steering wheel, the MTA logo on the bottom corner of the New York City Subway map; the Apple, Google, or Samsung logo on your phone, and the interlocking "NY" of the person wearing a Yankees' jersey at a ball game are all brand impressions. Each of these items are cognitively processed and stored for a later date when marketers hope that you use your heuristic decision-making process to make a purchase without much apparent rhyme, reason or thought.

The aforementioned brand impressions are not expelled from digital marketing on social media platforms. Social media is an organic catalyst of social proof, which harnesses a powerfully persuasive tool: images.

After completing research for a well-known pizza company, we identified the phenomena of individuals using words associated with jealousy. The phenomena triggered future Internet engagement and human-to-human conversation regarding the topic of each phenomenon. These observations inspired our research team to look further into the persuasive attributes of jealousy on social media with more breadth and depth.

Prior research suggests consumers will drive passed a new restaurant approximately 22 times before visiting the establishment. Humans fear the unknown, and we tend to frequent the establishments we trust, know and have had prior positive, memorable experiences. Additionally, consumers are likely to visit establishments that share an emotional connection. Humans have two methods processing information, (1) quick and without thought or cognitive processing, and (2) systematically with an extensive decision task. Business operators and marketers continuously attempt to design campaigns that persuade the consumer to make a purchase with little to no cognitive reasoning. The heuristic decision function is important to the bottom line of businesses and their brand equity. For example, we do not conduct Internet searches, we "Google it." Humans do not Bing the nearest restaurant. Google's brand has become synonymous with Internet search.

Persuasive messaging through branding and semiotics is a simple method of nudging the consumer to execute the desired call-to-action. Purple represents loyalty. Blue represents neutrality and low cost, and red and yellow trigger hunger. Hence, why many fast food organizations choose to use red, yellow or a combination of both colors in their marketing. Additionally, humans react well to images. A picture does tell a story, and moreover, people prefer visual stimulation rather than text-rich alternatives. When a person visits a restroom, there will likely be a visual representation of a person on each door. Humans respond more favorably to images that are not cognitively taxing. This research intends to identify consumer behavior to persuasive messaging on Instagram.

We hypothesized Instagram users would engage with photos that represented physical items they did not possess. We also hypothesized that Instagram users would engage with photos that represented locations where they were not physically located. Engagement was defined as liking, commenting or the cease of scrolling on a photo for more than four seconds.

The majority of foodservice operators understand the difficulty of reaching new customers and the volatility of the industry. We expect food service operators could benefit from this knowledge in their marketing practices; however, persuasion and marketing and sales tactics associated with persuasion cognitively taxing and should be executed with high regard to ethics and morality.

Participants were 25 - 51 years of age who stated they travel via aircraft at least four times per year, stayed at a hotel at least 12 times during the previous year and belong to at least one travel or hospitality loyalty program.

Participants were placed in a lab environment that consisted of couches, carpet, end tables, a television and wall fixtures to represent a typical living room in North America. The television was not functional to limit distractions to participants. Additionally, the participants were given a smart phone with all apps disabled with exception to a fabricated Instagram application. The replication of the Instagram application shared all of the attributes of a working Instagram feed. The feed was filled with 100 hundred photos. Each photo was randomly provided likes and comments. The photos that were used in the replication were of food items, selfies, scenery, pets, and landmarks. These five categories represent the five most common Instagram photo categories. Every tenth frame we inserted a photo that represented a sponsored ad from a company selling a product or service. Two sponsored ads were for fictional software companies, two sponsored ads were for fictional ride-sharing applications, two sponsored ads were for fictional shoes, two sponsored ads were for fictional hotels, and the last two sponsored ads were for fictional food and beverage. The shoe ad was designed as gender neutral. There was a 10:1 ratio of organic content to sponsor content, similar to a recent Instagram strategy.

Data was collected for the quantity and frequency of likes and comments by participants and the type of photo that received engagement from the participant. Additionally, data was collected on the length of time each participant remained on each photo. Furthermore, we collected the total number of words typed in the comments section and the frequency of each word. Human eye tracking data was not collected during this research.

We analyzed the quantity and frequency of likes and comments, and what we have found was 98 percent of all participants engaged with at least one photo. When participants scrolled through the fabricated Instagram feed, 92 percent of participants engaged with at least one photo of the first ten photos that were observed. Additionally, each participant that engaged with at least one of the first ten photos did so by offering at least one "like." Less than 10 percent of all participants engaged with a comment during the first ten photos, and less than three percent engaged with more than one comment. The quantity of engagements decreased by more than 50 percent for photos listed 11 through 25 and an additional 30 percent for photos listed 26 through 100. Less than one percent of participants engaged with photos numbered between 80 and 100.

We contributed this to the cognitively taxing number of photos. Although images are easier to process than text-rich alternatives, the vast quantity of photos placed additional information processing on the consumer's decision task. After being over taxed, the consumer was less likely to engage with photos. To increase engagement, marketers could purchase Instagram ads that appear in the consumer's first ten photos upon using the application. Ad placement requires a larger marketing budget but could increase the return on investment.

Additionally, we analyzed the type of photos that received engagement. What we have found was that 41 percent of all engagements consisted of photos with clear images and excess sunlight. Within the 41 percent, the majority of participant's engaged with photos that contained food or beverage. Half of the food and beverage photos that received engagement consisted of a branded image on or near the food and beverage packaging. Thirty-three percent of all engagements consisted of scenery or landmarks, and 26 percent of all engagement consisted of selfies. Humans are attracted to other people and visually stimulating images, regardless if it is a location we wish to visit or if it is a food or beverage item. The photos add salience to the food and beverage, and marketers could use this information to design their images for content marketing.

Furthermore, we analyzed the length of time each participant observed each photo. What we have found was the mean time participants observed a photo was 3.76 seconds. The longest time was 21.12 seconds, which was removed from the data due to being more than two standard deviations from the mean. Food and beverage photos received a median observation time 4.11 seconds, the longest of any category, which was slightly longer than the mean observation rate for selfies at 4.01 seconds. Marketers could increase the quality of their photos and increase the frequency to capitalize on the stimulating power of food and beverage.

Lastly, we collected data on jealousy, which was measured by keywords. The most common keywords used during participant engagement were (1) wish, (2) I want to and (3) beautiful, respectively. Wish ranked at 4.67 percent all of the keywords, followed by I want to at 1.12 percent of all keywords and beautiful at 0.91 percent of all keywords.

We recommend organizations compare these findings to who their consumers are today, and whom the consumers want to be in the future. The information presented in this article when combined with the practitioner's data could be fruitful to future marketing campaigns. Moreover, we caution that any time an organization chooses to implement persuasively framed messages, they do so with strong ethics for their organization and the consumer.

Marketing research is never complete. We recommend organizations conduct further research with HET to measure how consumers visually engage with the tested images. Lastly, we recommend organizations implement beta testing or A/B test campaigns to measure the short term call-to-action effectiveness of these campaigns until more

data regarding their respective target audience is identified.

This research has opened a door for future research and has offered us information for persuasively framed messages on Instagram. It is important to note that many of our findings could be applied to other digital platforms. Limiting the results of the research to Instagram could be lost potential for an organization. However if this research is desired to be implemented, I recommend it be used with care, caution, and ethics.

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