

Social Media Images' Visual Complexity Affects Consumers' Perceptions of Brands

Qicheng Zhao

*Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, Canada
qicheng.zhao@ryerson.ca*

Abstract: Visual complexity can be defined as the number of elements in an image or object, as well as the level of detail they convey. The term 'highly visual complex' refers to images that contain a wide variety of elements within their basic visual elements, such as features, designs, and variations. Currently, with the advancement of modern technology and the popularity of social media, brands are paying more attention to their social media images. In order to capture the needs of the market with visual marketing, social media images' visual complexity has become a key concern for brands. In this study, case descriptions with two types of cases that have different levels of visual complexity are performed in order to generate comparisons and analyses. Brands need to judge the level of visual complexity according to their own positioning and design. Consequently, consumers are able to form a more accurate perception of the brand. This is how brands can win the favor of consumers.

Keywords: brand, social media, image, vision, visual complexity

1. Introduction

Nowadays, people have various options for acquiring and disseminating information, using social media to spread the news and the Internet to acquire information. Furthermore, for brands, social media plays a critical role in spreading visual information about the brand. Brands use social media to build their brand image and promote their products through social channels, thus attracting the younger generation. Images and videos are used by brands in social media to build their brand image. However, visual complexity affects the way consumers process information, evaluate stimuli, and form first impressions [1]. In general, visual complexity refers to the detail or complexity contained in a visual display [2]. Also, information richness can be measured by visual complexity [3]. Since many brands have been widely disseminated on social media, a phenomenon known as social media visual complexity has emerged. Visual complexity in social media refers to the level of complexity in which information is disseminated. Using social media to share brand photographs can increase consumers' consumption and stimulate consumers' emotions. However, the dissemination of brand photographs has also led many brands to shift from brick-and-mortar stores to online retailing, resulting in consumers being able to purchase products online and changing their consumption patterns. Since social media has the tendency to spread information more frequently and more rapidly, when pictures of brands appear on social media, they will reach their target customers more efficiently and change the way in which brands spread information. Brands will also have to adjust their marketing strategies in order to adapt to the changes in communication methods. Through social media, business-to-consumer communication has shifted from one-way to bidirectional, allowing

brands to share information and capture consumers' interest. Brands can use social media to build an online community. In this way, they have a valuable chance to communicate their values and build a conscious brand image [4]. By spreading brand images on social media, the brand can also reach a broader demographic of consumers. Social media has become as influential as conventional media, and this has a significant impact on brands. Social media is a great tool to discover what people are saying about a brand and how they differ from its competitors [5]. The purpose of better publicity for brands is to attract more consumers. Social media is primarily used by brands for the purpose of promoting and marketing their brands in order to make them more widely known to consumers. This paper focuses on the representation of visual complexity in social media. Customers' perceptions of brands may differ depending on how brands use the variable of visual complexity. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of visual complexity in social media on customer perceptions of brands, comparing them to case studies of different brands. The positioning of various brands will provide people with an indication of the quality of visual complexity.

2. Case Description

2.1. Case Description with High Visual Complexity Images

As a result of the advent of social media, many brands have changed their marketing strategies. Brands are slowly shifting their marketing focus from the traditional way of offline store promotions to placing many advertisements online and running branded social media accounts. Due to the popularity of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and YouTube, corporations have established their social media presence and continue to engage their potential customers. A key aspect of social media activities is the sharing of visual content related to brands [6]. Compared to textual content, visual content can convey the brand message and the image the brand wants to convey faster and more effectively. Visual content is essential for brand communication and building brand engagement. In terms of visual complexity, it is the number of elements present in an object or image as well as the degree of detail they convey [7]. Generally, an advertisement is considered to have a high degree of visual complexity when it incorporates a wide range of features, designs, and variations within its basic visual elements. For example, products that use images of people on social media eCommerce pages are more appealing to consumers and create a sense of trust. A person's image can be used in an online environment to evoke an emotional response, which may lead to a favorable attitude toward the site. As demonstrated by Cyr et al., a higher level of trust is associated with a higher level of human image appeal [8]. The study showed that the more frequently the element of the human image appears, the higher the consumer's trust in the product. This increases the rate of purchase. In this case, the image of a person is a visual element of the website to promote the product. The higher frequency of the visual element implies a higher level of visual complexity. Visual complexity increases trust in the product and contributes to a positive impact.

In brand image and visual design, the integration of multiple cultural backgrounds and the inheritance of multicultural traditions is also a sign of a high degree of visual complexity. Kenzo is a perfect example of a brand background and design with a high degree of cultural integration. The brand's distinctive multicultural design was used as a key marketing concept on social media. Consumers recognize the unique design appeal of the brand's multicultural background. There is a more positive response to the brand's perception. As a French fashion brand, its founder is a Japanese designer Kenzo Takada. Moreover, all of Kenzo's longest-tenured Asian creative directors have grown up with a mix of Eastern and Western cultures. This experience makes them a bridge between cultures. It also gives Kenzo's brand identity and visual complexity a strong multicultural background. The brand is characterized by a natural hybrid identity. From Kenzo's "source domain," the real tiger,

the tiger icons were delicately transformed using embroidery and ancient Japanese colors. They have succeeded in maintaining a balance between fierceness and amiability. The distinctive Eastern character is highlighted through its colors and textures [9]. The details retain the traditional design aesthetics of the East, but at the same time, the overall icon structure is designed with the modern design concepts of the West. Eastern and Western design methods are combined. Finally, the cultural conversion was successfully completed. This is how the Tiger icon was born. It became the main signature of the brand's social media campaign. This move attracted consumers from all over the world. The brand's popularity and image became a huge success. Instead of taking the tradition as a starting point, Kenzo Takada invented his own Orient by looking backwards at Eastern traditions and by finding inspiration and tension in Western art and culture [9]. Based on this brand background and design philosophy, Kenzo has become a special cultural hybrid. The design elements of East and West also make the brand image more visual complexity. By doing so, consumers will naturally have a positive impression of the brand because the brand image and brand design of diverse cultural backgrounds can give the consumers a fresh feeling. It also has a beneficial effect on the understanding of East and West cultures and cultural exchange. It has been observed that visual images are more persuasive, more effective in triggering emotions, and frequently across cultural boundaries. In addition, they produce more complete conceptual representations than linguistic language [9]. Kenzo crosses cultural barriers through visual complexity. The brand image is conveyed. This attracts an international range of consumers.

The most important attribute of product marketing on social media is to grab people's attention quickly. This can be better achieved by using exaggerated, novel, and uncommon images that are not found in everyday life. In Skyy's product advertisement, bright colors and sexually suggestive complex elements are used [10]. Visual complexity is increased, creating a sensory stimulus that matches the perception of alcohol to the consumer. Social media images are made more relevant to the product, which influences the consumer's perception. The Skyy brings a sense of excitement to the consumer, implying a specific scenario where the product appears, e.g., a party or club, where everyone will be excited after drinking the alcohol. The Malibu rum commercial uses anthropomorphic visuals to create a vivid image for consumers. The product and the fruit are personified [10]. The product is represented as having a rich and fresh fruit flavor. At the same time, the advertisement uses blue color and island elements. It creates a relaxed atmosphere. The brand wanted to show that wine is a product that consumers drink when they want to unwind. Both advertisements use a high visual complexity to express their products. They use novel visuals and multiple, complex visual elements. Not only do they express the message of the product itself, but they also use the color of the information in the images to recreate the scene in which the product is used. Consumers can use the images to correspond to the scenarios of the products, which better helps them understand the brand and the concept of the products.

2.2. Case Description with Low Visual Complexity Images

If a brand's image is simple and clean visual complexity, they rarely advertise on social media, or the social media image does not bring good results to the brand. Because in fast-paced streaming media, there is a need for sharp, bright, and eye-catching images to attract consumers. In order for brands to be distinguished in the fast flow of information, they often need images that have the ability to make consumers stand out. The result is that popular social media images are often full of innovative design elements, which means a high level of visual complexity. However, if a brand's image is centered on a simple and clean concept, social media images are often low in visual complexity. It may be difficult for consumers to have a better perception of the brand and its products through its social media image. Although they have social media accounts, brands attract consumers mainly through the brand stores and the impressions created by the brand. Social media is not the primary method they use to promote

the brand. It is more about attracting consumers to go offline. Next, examples of MUJI and Uniqlo's brand marketing strategies will be analyzed in order to determine how they influence consumer perceptions. Initially, MUJI led to the first wave of popularity by creating a simple image of "No Brand". As the brand expanded, the number of offline stores increased rapidly without any evaluation criteria. Each store manager was responsible for the development of their own store, resulting in a different layout for each store [11]. This move destroyed the uniformity of the stores. It created a huge crisis for MUJI. After this crisis, MUJI learned from the experience and made adjustments to its brand marketing to systematize store development by combining its own brand characteristics. MUJI introduced visual marketing to create a brand image by unifying store layouts and decorations to communicate brand values. Because MUJI's products focus on comfort and simplicity, the store layout and merchandise display are arranged with this style as the standard. The shopping environment evokes the consumer's fantasy of the product and thus attracts them. MUJI stores are decorated like a home, clean and simple homes. This decoration allows consumers to enjoy and arrange all the products and will make people think that they need them [12]. If these products were randomly displayed in the store, then consumers would not purchase these products. MUJI's promotional practices both market the brand image and promote consumer perceptions of the brand at the same time. Similarly, Uniqlo utilizes a similar approach and incorporates visual merchandising (VMD), which is the visualization of visual marketing or product planning. The purpose of VMD is to show consumers the brand of physical advertising. First, it is aimed at attracting the attention of consumers through the visual display design and followed by the emotional design of the customer and the product to win the consumer's senses. Last the emotional sense of belonging through psychological resonance [13]. Uniqlo has made efforts for in-store layout and display. It gives the stores a warm and everyday feeling. Along with the rapid development of modern society, people care more about spiritual and emotional needs. Therefore, Uniqlo's emotional design can meet the needs of consumers and resonate with them. Brands with low visual complexity tend to use the overall product match and emotional design to engage consumers. This approach is often better reflected in offline stores. Social media images need to have a visual impact on attracting consumers. For the goal of retaining potential consumers, social media images need to be visually appealing. Then, through brand design and brand soul, consumers can realize brand awareness. There are often corresponding standards for the image elements to achieve the visual appeal of social media images. This results in a high level of visual complexity. Brands with low visual complexity of social media images will use the atmosphere created in offline stores as the main way to attract consumers' awareness.

3. Analysis

By comparing the mentioned visual complexity levels and their corresponding cases, one can find that in some scenarios and brand contexts, a high level of visual complexity has a better effect on consumer perception. For example, in social media eCommerce, consumers need to know as much information about the product as possible through its image. This leads to a more detailed understanding of the products of the respective brand. Simple visual complexity is too limited in terms of information delivered through images. Instead, it creates a sense of distrust among consumers. As a means of attracting consumers, social media images need to contain more information about the product. Also, according to the research, the more "people" elements are included in the image, the more consumers trust the product. Consequently, the higher the level of visual complexity, the more likely the brand is to draw in consumers in an online shopping situation. In addition, if the cultural background of the brand and the design background of the brand has a history of multicultural integration. Social media images need to contain both Eastern and Western design concepts and aesthetics. The image should include both Eastern and Western elements. The brand can reflect a brand image that crosses cultural barriers. This is a rare opportunity for most

brands. The social media image needs to deliver the brand's unique contextual message in a productive way. A high level of visual complexity is used to make consumers respond positively to the brand. Some brands need to use social media images to recreate the scene in which the product is used and the psychological implication that the product is intended to bring to the consumer. In these cases, the use of high visual complexity is preferred to express the product. The product uses novel visual effects and multiple complex visual elements. Consumers can use the images to correspond to product usage settings and better help them understand the brand and product concept. Some brands do not apply a high level of visual complexity. First of all, the design concept of the brand itself is simple and clean. If social media uses highly visual complex images, it does not match the brand's positioning and design. However, due to the high popularity of social media, information flow is fast. It is difficult to capture the attention of consumers with simple visual complexity in social media. Because the fewer elements contained in the image, the less visual impact it has. Therefore, such brands prefer to create an atmosphere in offline stores. Make consumers aware of the brand background and product information by using both environment and emotion.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, there is no doubt that a high level of visual complexity is more likely to attract consumers and influence their perceptions of the brand. They can contain more elements. This gives consumers a sense of reliability, provides more information about the brand's background and design philosophy, and better illustrates product information and product usage situations. Depending on the positioning of the brand, the message that the brand wants to articulate to the consumer varies. Highly visual complex images are not suitable for all types of brands. There are some brands that make use of product matching to achieve their brand atmosphere, while others make use of emotional matching. It is difficult to express atmosphere and emotion through images. These brands often choose to use images with low visual complexity in social media to attract consumers to go offline. This study is a reference for brands and consumers. On the surface, to take advantage of the popularity of social media, images with a high degree of visual complexity are more likely to attract potential consumers on social media. However, brands need to manage their social media images according to their brand identities and strengths. Social media images are more about highlighting the brand's characteristics and allowing consumers to understand the brand's core better. The social media image is more about highlighting the brand's features so that consumers can better understand the core of the brand, thus allowing them to have a clearer perception of the brand. Therefore, the positioning of some brands is not suitable for complex visual images. Instead, using low visual complexity images to attract consumers to go offline, thereby enabling consumers to understand the brand atmosphere and emotions through offline fully. Brands need to find their own character and use social media to promote them in order to achieve the best results.

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