VISUAL BRAND COMMUNICATION TOWARD BRAND CONTENT

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Abstract: The surge of communication technology has induced the way people live. The consumers are moving towards social media that makes each brand adapts the way they position by succeeding consumers to social media. To establish the engagement toward brand content, the brand needs to stand out by making it vital to understand the kind of visual preferences their target customer needs. This article will align a collection of research that focuses in establishing visual brand communication for brand content.

Keywords: Visual communication, brand construction, visual literacy, social media

1.   Introduction

The development in communication technology has led to radical change in the way brand reaches the intended shopper. The usage of social media in brand construction and other interactive media emerge as platform in modern marketplace. With such a two-way symmetrical communication platform, consumers are not only interested in the functions, price, and location of a specific product, but they also pay much more attention to the story, personality, and lifestyle behind a brand (The Pew Research Centre, 2020). The Pew Research Centre (2020) presented the statistics of American adults who use social media which reported that YouTube and Facebook are the most widely online platforms with 73% and 69% respectively, followed by Instagram with 37%. The usage of social media is part of daily routine with roughly three quarter of Facebook users and around six-in-ten Instagram users visit these sites at least once a day.

Towards media functionality and user motivations, there have been two main types of social media; relation-based and visual-based (Chen, 2011). According to previous uses and gratification studies (Fahmy et al., 2015), the use of relation based social media is primarily to build and maintain interpersonal relationships and connections with other users such as Facebook for loneliness avoidance and surveillance (Fahmy et al., 2015; Krause et al., 2014), LinkedIn for professional information and career connection (Smock et al., 2011), and Yelp for advisement and reservation (Fahmy et al., 2015). In comparison, visual-based social media is more about self-expression, visual representation, multimedia storytelling, visual documentation, and coolness such as Instagram "Selfies" and Pinterest "Pins" (Highfield, 2015).

A study in visual communication and graphic design typically uses experiments to handle visual elements such as colour, shape, or view perspective, then remarks change of branding influences caused by such variables (Krause et al., 2014). A research in media and advertising has the tendency in exploring the influence of symbolic meaning and representation behind visual branding on brand constructions (Smock et al., 2011). This article reviews existing academic literature of visual communication in relation to brand construction focusing on social media.

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2.   Visual Literacy

When a creator creates a photo or video, usually they want to communicate certain information to the people who will view the image (Highfield, 2015). The Toledo Museum of Art (2016) states that visual literacy is being able to read, comprehend, and write visual language. Visual literacy is centred on the notion that pictures, and videos can be read, and that message can be passed through a process of reading (Fahmy et al., 2015). This skill or ability equips viewers to comprehend and evaluate the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and technical components in an image (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2011).

When a person sees an image an idea, concept or subject is triggered (Jamieson, 2007), resulting to development of emotional responses and prompting imagination prior to logical reasoning (Fahmy et al., 2015). The ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning of the codes in an image, as complemented by the creator, makes for a more visually literate image viewer (Fahmy et al., 2015).

Currently, people are constantly bombarded and exposed to images and information constantly from different sources like social media, TV and billboard screens on the street (Choon Lee, 2019). Due to the huge effect of images on consumers as compared to text, companies are constantly using images on both their traditional and online advertisements. Even though there is a general agreement among researchers that images have effects on consumers, little is known regarding visual communication in an interactive environment (Fahmy et al., 2015).

3.   Digital Visual Engagement

Definitions of digital engagement can vary, and most of scholars agree that digital engagement presumes some form of active online behaviour, which is characterized by high personal involvement with the content, organization, brand, or cause presented in an online public space (Dhanesh, 2017; Muntinga et al., 2011). Digital engagement can have different intensities and stimulate different levels of active online behaviour, not simply liking and commenting (Bakhshi et al., 2014). Recent research indicates that digital engagement includes different levels of personal involvement with branded digital content and can typically be classified into three forms of active online behaviour namely consuming, contributing and creating (Muntinga et al., 2011). Consuming refers to the behaviours of those digital publics who limit themselves to viewing branded images or videos, downloading branded widgets or following online threads. Contributing refers to those behaviours that include active participation in branded conversations, for example, when digital publics comment on social media posts. Finally, creating refers to the highest level of involvement and depicts those digital publics who create, upload and publish brand-related contents (Valentini et al., 2018).

As indicated by a recent study on corporate communication managers (Zerfass et al., 2017), organizations are increasingly interested in enhancing their digital communications through visual content that is engaging. Organizations are increasing the production and distribution of digital visual content because such content responds to the digital publics' demand for visual contents and indirectly contributes to positive corporate reputations and purchase intentions (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Zerfass et al., 2017). Marketing and advertising research show that evoking emotions and cultural meanings with powerful images that resonate with consumers' imaginary has a persuasive impact on consumers (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Dhanesh, 2017) and influences digital users' decision making (Dhanesh, 2017). Images can provoke such emotions as they convey meanings and act on individual reminiscence by using specific codes of colour, framing and public context (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2011).

4.   Social Media

Social media is an ever-evolving field due to the constant technological advancements made by the social media companies towards improving the user experience (Aral & Zhou, 2019). The amount people and of time that people have been spending on social media has been constantly on the rise (Highfield, 2015). This makes social media a very effective and efficient tool for brand to use to create, communicate, deliver value, and exchange offerings to its stakeholders (Kohli et al., 2015). Due to technological advancements, opportunities created by social media and easy accessibility to internet by consumers more companies are utilizing social media, its channels, and software (Kohli et al., 2015).

Customers are constantly scrolling up and down looking for relevant content to satisfy their need. For brands to get users to pay attention to their content, they need to understand what their target audience in the social media platforms are looking for (Alalwan, 2018). Visuals are the first things that most users look at in most social media platforms even before reading the text; therefore, they are a very important part of grabbing users first attention to the content (Choon Lee, 2019).

Gruzd, Jacobson, Mai and Dubois (2018) found social media is widely used in the private sector for communication purposes to facilitate selling and promotion of products and services while the public sector used it as a tool for information sharing and driving engagement with the users. Usually both private and public organizations utilize relationship marketing strategies to construct long-standing relationships that are reciprocally beneficial for both parties involved (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010). There are several social media platforms available but depending on what the organization is aiming to achieve, certain social media platforms are chosen (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010). This is because different social media platforms have different feature that makes them unique and better at achieving certain goals (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010).

5.   Visual Attention, Memory, and Attitude

Catching attention is the first step to influencing people's decision making (Lee & Ahn, 2012). Visual researchers have attempted to examine the relationship among attention, memory, and attitude by conducting eye-tracking analyses e.g., (Goodrich, 2011; Pieters et al., 2002). Goodrich (2011) found ad type, location, and page had significant effects on the amount of attention to an ad. While attention and ad recall were positively related, attention were negatively related to brand attitude. After testing eye fixations on brand, text, and pictures from original and familiar advertisements, Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel (2002) made a similar argument that the brand memory were positively and directly affected by brand attention.

The relationship between visual attention and attitude were tested by eye-tracking experiments mainly based on mere exposure effect e.g., (Coates et al., 2006; Goodrich, 2011). Mere exposure effect suggests that "brief and repeated exposure to a stimulus can encourage people to have familiarity and a more favourable attitude toward that stimulus at an unconscious level, that is, even when they cannot recollect being exposed to it" (Lee & Ahn, 2012). Since mere exposure happens in low-attention and unconscious situations (Heath, 2006), the mere exposure effect should be stronger when an individual does not realize the disclosure (Bornstein & Agostino, 1992). As such, the level of attention had negative influence on attitude (Goodrich, 2011). A number of studies have proved that mere exposure stimulus, such as short exposure duration, led to more favourable attitudes toward brand, however the longer the exposure was, the less favourable attitude would have (Bornstein & Agostino, 1992).

6.   Conclusion

The impact of visual in constructing the brand indicates that the ability of this approach has a great potential to make the brand more establish. With the usage of social media as a platform, the outreach of brand content is extensive to reach potential shopper. Each business entity will definitely utilise this approach to make the product or services offered reachable. The successful of brand familiarity on brand content must consider the element of visual to gain a visual attention in the specific ad campaign.

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