

Department of Marketing



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How consumers use brands to show off on (visual) social media

Abstract: The past few years have seen a significant shift of the social media landscape towards the visual. This trend is illustrated by the rapid rise of platforms like Snapchat, Instagram and Youtube, which are characterized by an emphasis on the creation and sharing of visual information. Although much research has been devoted to social media use, thus far, few studies have specifically addressed this trend. Social media are ideal platforms for self-presentation and convey a favorable impression of the self to others, as the information one shares online is easier to control and curate than the information one reveals during interpersonal interactions. Images seem particularly popular for self-presentation purposes. Nascent research on the topic indeed suggests that individuals tend to carefully construct, select, and edit the images they share on social media. Prior research suggests that the effects of self-presentation activities may be regarded as “bragging” and (therefore) disliked by others. As a result, such efforts may in fact be counterproductive. The question that remains unanswered, however, is: when, or under what conditions are social media posts about brands interpreted as bragging, and how do they influence impression formation online? Drawing on the literatures on self-presentation and conspicuous consumption, the present research aims to answer these questions.