The power of narrative images

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Summary

The present dissertation provides an in-depth discussion of visual semiotic theory, as applied to the marketing and consumer behavior fields, using experimental methods, content analysis of images, and text mining. In three chapters, I have shown that by using visual semiotics as an enabling framework, we can obtain relevant theoretical and practical insights regarding the power of narrative images in consumer and brand messages shared on social media.

Chapter 2 shows how consumer selfies are powerful tools for companies to spread a message about a brand or product. This Chapter contributes to the marketing literature by challenging the belief that photos merely serve as memorable representations of consumers' personal life stories. In considering visual aspects such as the narrative perspective, content, and photographic style, we show that consumer photos function as messages that trigger viewer response in terms of eWOM.

Chapter 3 shifts to the context of company-generated content (i.e., ads) shared on social media platforms. Online channels such as Twitter and Facebook have become crucial to engage consumers with brand-related narratives. However, content managers struggle in composing narrative messages that are engaging consumers. In using experiments and content analysis of social media brand posts, this chapter sheds light on compositional aspects that can strengthen the persuasiveness of a social media post. Specifically, we investigate how the alignment (visual patterns) of visual objects affects consumer evaluation. Chapter 3 thus contributes to research on social media marketing by offering a more nuanced understanding of social media brand messages composition and their implication for consumer evaluations and sharing.

Chapter 4 provides insights into the role of storytelling in social media conversations. This Chapter emphasizes the power of narrative images in conveying a message to consumers. In using real posts across two social media platforms, i.e., Twitter and Facebook, we are able to show that narrative images are shared more than non-narrative ones. However, there are visual aspects that may negatively affect the relationship between narrative images and consumer sharing. For example, the actors portrayed in the narrative, and textual features, i.e., text within the image and caption complexity, can harm consumer sharing of brand-related narratives. Chapter 4 thus contributes to research on social media marketing and storytelling by providing a novel understanding of brand-related narratives for social media conversations.