Text Overlay Effectiveness in Social Media Communication

Stefania Farace
University of Bologna
Francisco Javier Villarroel Ordenes
University of Bologna
Dennis Herhausen
VU Amsterdam
Dhruv Grewal
Babson College
Ko de Ruyter
King's College

Paper from the 54th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, Spain, May 25-30, 2025

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Abstract

The overwhelming volume of content on social media platforms makes capturing audience attention highly challenging. One increasingly popular strategy to enhance engagement involves overlaying text (TOs) on images, where text is embedded directly into an image's visual space. This practice raises critical questions about how to balance the salience between textual and visual elements. The present study examines how and why specific features of TOs and images interact to drive consumer engagement. Three key attributes commonly leveraged by practitioners stand out as pivotal for engagement: the degree of dynamism or implied motion in images, along with the size and centrality of the TO. Using online experiments, the authors find that overly large, centrally placed TOs combined with dynamic images negatively impact consumer engagement. This occurs because such compositions are perceived as visually unattractive. Building on these insights, the authors provide managerial insights to assist content creators in designing more engaging multimodal social media content.

Keywords: Text overlays, images, social media engagement
Track: Digital Marketing and Social Media