STORIES VS. POSTS: THE EFFECT OF EPHEMERAL SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

Brands increasingly leverage ephemeral content, such as stories, in social media advertising. Experts praise stories for enabling an "in the moment" consumer experience and fostering unique engagement. Existing literature indicates that ephemeral content positively influences cognitive outcomes, such as brand recall. However, there is limited evidence on how exposure to ephemeral content impacts behavioral outcomes. In this paper, we examine the efficacy of ephemeral (vs permanent) content on consumer engagement. Unlike ephemeral stories, permanent posts afford consumers more control over their content consumption. We theorize that the fleeting nature of ephemeral content reduces consumers' perceived control, which in turn lowers their subsequent engagement with the content. Using a multimethod approach, including an Instagram field study, observational data on 116 brand campaigns from an influencer marketing agency, and a series of online experiments, we document the negative effects of exposure to ephemeral (vs. permanent) ads on engagement and identify perceived control as the key mechanism. We introduce content dynamism as a boundary condition to this effect. Our findings suggest that brands should prefer static posts for sponsored content to boost engagement, rather than dynamic posts, and that both static and dynamic content are equally effective for story content.

Keywords: *Social Media Advertising; Consumer Engagement; Influencer Marketing; Perceived Control; Mixed Methods.*