

HOW AUDIENCES VALUE SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT: A COMPARISON OF VIDEO AND IMAGE FORMATS

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceived value of social media content across four key dimensions – informational, entertainment, aesthetic, and social – by comparing video and image formats. Drawing on the theory of consumption values and advertising value theory, the paper offers a multidimensional framework of content value that moves beyond conventional engagement metrics. A 2x3 between-subjects experimental design was implemented, involving 403 participants exposed to either image or video-based posts on Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok over a seven-day period. Three-way ANOVA analyses revealed that perceptions of social media value vary by gender. Women prefer Instagram for both informational and entertainment value, while men favour TikTok for these aspects. Men see videos as more valuable, whereas women do not have a clear format preference. Women associate social value primarily with Instagram, while men connect it more to TikTok. However, aesthetic value perceptions are unaffected by age, gender, education, or social media usage. The findings contribute to the literature by refining the conceptualisation of content value on social media and offer actionable insights for marketers aiming to tailor content strategies to audience characteristics.

Implications for the Central European audience: This study highlights the need to align social media strategies with the target audience. Based on the findings, marketers should focus on Instagram for information and entertainment while targeting women, and TikTok when targeting men – segments found also across Central Europe. The results encourage moving beyond traditional engagement metrics to consider informational, entertainment, and social value. Additionally, the research supports format-specific content planning for more effective digital campaigns and better targeting in diverse markets.

Keywords: social media, content type, image, video, segmentation

JEL Classification: M31

Introduction

In digital marketing, social media platforms have become central to how brands communicate and engage with their audiences (Li et al., 2023). Visual content, especially images and videos, has emerged as a primary tool in capturing attention, fostering interaction, and driving consumer behaviour (Chan et al., 2023).

Previous research clearly shows a multifaceted nature of effective social media content, with characteristics such as vividness, interactivity, entertainment, and informativeness playing essential roles in shaping user engagement (Kujur & Singh, 2017). More recent studies further emphasise how various content formats, post frequency, and the strategic use of visual elements significantly influence user interaction with brand messaging (Aydin et al., 2021). However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to effective social media management, as engagement levels are shaped by a combination of content format, platform dynamics, and brand-specific strategies.

While a substantial body of research has explored content formats and their impact on user engagement (e.g., Annamalai et al., 2021; Einsle et al., 2025; Luarn et al., 2015), there remains a gap in understanding how users perceive the intrinsic value of different content types. This oversight is important because an effective social media strategy hinges not just on what content performs well, but why it resonates with users on a deeper level. Without understanding user value perceptions, marketers are left to rely on engagement metrics without fully grasping the underlying drivers of that engagement, leading to suboptimal content delivery across various audiences and social media platforms.

We directly address this critical gap by investigating user perceptions of social media content value, specifically through a direct comparison of video and image formats. To achieve this, we draw upon established theoretical frameworks. We first leverage the theory of consumption values (Sheth et al., 1991), which posits that perceived value is a multidimensional construct influencing consumer behaviour, encompassing functional, emotional, and social dimensions. Complementing this, we integrate insights from advertising value theory (Ducoffe, 1995), which highlights informativeness and entertainment as core evaluative dimensions of communication. From these foundational theories, we adopt a refined content value perspective tailored for the social media environment, focusing on four key dimensions: informational, entertainment, aesthetic, and social value. Thus, in the context of social media, informational value reflects the perceived utility, relevance, and educational benefit users derive from the content, while social value captures the extent to which content facilitates social interaction, fosters a sense of community belonging, and enables self-expression (Mathwick et al., 2008). Emotional value, encompassing amusement, sensory pleasure, and stylistic appreciation, is further delineated into entertainment value – the degree to which content is perceived as enjoyable or amusing –, and aesthetic value – the perceived beauty, artistic merit, or visual appeal of the content (Kim et al., 2011).

Understanding how these specific value dimensions manifest across distinct content types (i.e., image vs. video) is essential for refining social media communication strategies. Different formats may be uniquely suited to delivering on one or more of these dimensions, suggesting the need for a differentiated approach to content design and delivery. Hence, we investigate user perceptions of content value across the four key dimensions – informational,

entertainment, aesthetic, and social – by comparing video and image posts. Through a controlled experimental design, we aim to answer the following research questions:

- Do users perceive video content to offer higher informational value than image content?
- Is video perceived as more entertaining than static images?
- Does video content enhance the aesthetic experience more than image posts?
- Are video posts more effective in generating perceived social value?
- Do posts' perceived value vary across social media platforms for similar content?

By answering these questions, we offer a significant theoretical contribution by moving beyond aggregate engagement metrics to provide a better understanding of the perceived value drivers for different visual content types. From a practical perspective, these insights help social media marketers with the knowledge to design more impactful, visually appealing, and contextually relevant campaigns that genuinely resonate with target audiences and optimise social media communication strategies for enhanced overall value perception.

1 Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

1.1 Social media content type

Social media content can take various forms, including text, audio, images, or videos. Some researchers have concentrated their studies on evaluating the influence of different content types on consumer online behaviour, showing that the impact varies among them (Luarn et al., 2015) and is influenced by the context of the content (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2022). The media richness, however, has a significant impact on engagement behaviours, with visual content such as photos and videos generating the highest level of user interaction (Moran et al., 2020).

In a study conducted by Annamalai et al. (2021), photos, characterised by low vividness, received the highest number of likes and comments, while videos, which are high in vividness, were shared most frequently. According to Doyle et al. (2022), high-quality images tend to have higher engagement rates, resulting in more comments and likes. Photos seem to attract even more likes over time, but videos are the most effective format in receiving comments from consumers about the brand (Dhaoui & Webster, 2021). Annamalai et al. (2021) state that video content generates lower engagement, even though it is shared more frequently. Moreover, it appears that videos that do not include text tend to receive more likes, shares, and views. In contrast, videos with music or spoken language are saved to "favourites" more often (Einsle et al., 2025).

However, the data indicates that engagement is directly related to users' involvement with the product. When user involvement is low, engagement with brand posts tends to be higher, regardless of the format (text, image, or video) or type (hedonic vs. informative) of the content, including combinations of both formats (Barreto & Ramalho, 2019). In this context, it is important to consider that both hedonic and utilitarian values influence customer engagement, which manifests in multiple forms such as customer communication, complaints, and collaboration, offering a holistic perspective on the multifaceted nature of engagement (Żymkowska, 2018). Thus, beyond format and vividness, the value conveyed

by the content plays a crucial role in shaping how consumers interact with brands across different engagement dimensions.

1.2 Informational value

The concept of informational value refers to how much social media content offers useful, relevant, and timely information to its audience. When it comes to brand posting on social media, this value is essential for captivating users who want to gain knowledge or remain updated about the brand's products (Bates & Ferri, 2010). Rietveld et al. (2022) argue that engagement (likes and comments) is mainly driven by visually informative brand-related appeals encoded in brand content.

Fandrich et al. (2013) examined the impact of emotional and informative video content for various product types and determined that emotional videos are better for low involvement products, while informative video content should be used for high involvement products. The findings of Wahid et al. (2023) confirm that informational content mainly generates higher social media engagement than emotional content.

Information value is also of high importance in travel-related industries, as Wang and Yan (2022) found out that intention to visit a destination is mediated by the quality of social media information.

There has been some debate regarding whether excessive information can lead to cognitive overload. However, this issue appears to primarily concern text; visual elements like images and videos generally do not contribute to information overload (Wang et al., 2024). Instead, content should focus on being functional and effectively communicating product benefits to drive sales (Liadeli et al., 2023).

According to media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), richer media, such as video, are better suited for communicating complex messages because they incorporate multiple cues (visual, auditory), allow immediate feedback, and support the conveyance of emotions and nuances. Compared to static images, videos can sequence information over time, demonstrating product usage, features, or benefits in a more coherent and persuasive manner. This enables users to process content more effectively and engage more deeply with the message. As such, video content not only enhances cognitive processing but also increases the perceived utility and informativeness of brand communications. Therefore, our first research hypothesis is:

- **H1:** Users will perceive the informational value of video posts to be higher than that of image posts.

1.3 Entertainment value

The entertainment value of content refers to its capacity to engage, entertain, or captivate an audience. It is essential in shaping how consumers view and react to advertising messages, impacting their feelings about the brand being advertised (Khan et al., 2025).

Entertainment value has been shown to mediate the relationship between content marketing and customer engagement, serving as a significant driver of user interaction on digital platforms (Bazi et al., 2023). While entertaining content may stimulate moderate levels of engagement, some findings suggest that informational content may generate more

substantial behavioural responses, particularly in terms of shares, compared to likes and comments (Zhao et al., 2021).

A comparative study on Instagram further reinforces the idea that entertaining and remunerative appeals outperform other content types in generating user engagement, especially in terms of likes (Pathak & Kaushik, 2024). Similarly, research has identified entertainment, along with interactivity, aesthetic appeal, and trendiness, as key factors that enhance the perceived advertising value of social media ads (Hussain et al., 2022).

Notably, entertainment experiences in online environments are not generated solely by the content itself. User-generated comments that express enjoyment or appreciation for a video can significantly enhance the entertainment experience for new viewers, demonstrating the social reinforcement of entertainment value (Möller et al., 2019).

Moreover, a comparative study examining user-generated video ads for the same product across different categories found that entertainment-focused advertisements outperform informational ones in terms of attitude toward the ad and purchase intention, particularly in the food and household goods sectors. While informational ads yielded stronger cognitive responses in some categories (like garments), entertainment was overall more effective in influencing consumer perception and behaviour (Zhang et al., 2021).

Furthermore, entertainment and engagement values significantly influence consumer behaviours related to consuming, contributing, and creating content, with trendiness being particularly impactful on the creation aspect. Importantly, the behaviours of consuming and creating are linked to continued platform use and repurchase intentions, underlining the importance of entertaining content in digital consumer journeys (Cheung et al., 2021).

The dual-coding theory (Paivio, 1991) suggests that information presented both visually and auditorily is more likely to capture attention and be retained in memory. Video posts capitalise on this by combining motion, sound, and narrative, elements that enhance emotional engagement and foster a more immersive entertainment experience. Furthermore, empirical research in digital marketing has shown that video formats, through storytelling and dramatisation, are more likely to elicit affective responses, which are central to perceived entertainment value (Vorderer et al., 2004). This multi-sensory appeal allows videos to create a richer and more captivating user experience, thereby leading audiences to perceive them as more entertaining than images. Based on these, our proposed hypothesis is as follows:

- **H2:** Users will perceive the entertainment value of video posts to be higher than that of image posts.

1.4 Aesthetic value

Aesthetic value represents the perceived beauty and appeal of the visual content (images or videos) shared on social media. It includes aspects like design, colour palettes, textures, composition, and general visual attractiveness, all of which enhance the content's capacity to capture and hold the audience's attention (Bazi et al., 2023).

Hidayati et al. (2017) developed a method for predicting the popularity of images posted on social media by considering the visual aesthetic factor. Similarly, Khosla et al. (2014) aimed to understand what makes a photo popular. To predict the number of views a post would receive, they took into account both image content cues (such as colour, gradients, and

objects depicted) and social cues (including the number of friends and the amount of photos uploaded) as predictors of an image's popularity.

Aesthetic value, along with the other six dimensions in the Branded Content Experience (BCE) scale developed by Waqas et al. (2021), has been shown to predict consumer engagement on social media. Research from Aljukhadar et al. (2020) supports the notion that aesthetic value drives social media usage, resulting in varied consumer responses such as inspiration, habitual entertainment, and a sense of infinity.

Kusumasondjaja (2020) defines visual aesthetics as the pictorial appeal that presents a "clear and unique image or pleasing appearance of an image or object". It suggests that Instagram users engage more with content that is intricate, vibrant, and asymmetrical, rather than with simpler, less colourful, and more symmetrical visual content.

On the other hand, some authors have found that the visual aesthetics on Instagram, which often present idealised versions of oneself, are significant in shaping individual social identities. Users, particularly younger ones, are frequently influenced by the beauty standards and lifestyles showcased by influencers, which reinforces their tendency to compare themselves to these seemingly "perfect" images (Putra & Afrilian, 2025).

The multimodal nature of video allows for a more dynamic and layered aesthetic experience compared to static imagery. Video content, through its use of movement, transitions, layered compositions, lighting effects, and sound design, can achieve a higher level of aesthetic richness than static images. This dynamic presentation enables brands to create more immersive and visually engaging narratives, which are likely to be perceived by users as more aesthetically pleasing. Hence, our hypothesis is that:

- **H3:** Users will perceive the aesthetic value of video posts to be higher than that of image posts.

1.5 Social value

Social value refers to the advantages that people gain from social interactions and relationships encouraged by content on social media platforms. This concept highlights how content helps build community, enables self-expression, and shapes social identity, all of which enhance the user's feeling of belonging and overall social well-being. The social value of social media (SM) was analysed using the framework proposed by Kietzmann et al. (2011), which includes seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. It emphasises that sharing is a central focus of SM, leading to conversations and the formation of groups, which further enhance consumer value by allowing users to upload, organise, and share visual content related to products. Consumers achieve social value by connecting with others and fulfilling their needs for belonging and understanding with those who share similar norms, values, or interests (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Another study highlights two pathways for consumers to achieve psychological well-being. Those with a higher interdependent self-construal experience greater social value, which enhances psychological well-being through social identity. Conversely, consumers with a higher independent self-construal attain more content value, leading to improved psychological well-being via self-esteem (Jiao et al., 2017).

Jiao et al. (2018) state that consumers who have a collectivistic, extroverted, and extrinsic orientation derive social value from engaging in social media. Conversely, those with an individualistic and intrinsic orientation find content value.

A study conducted experimentally showed that the engagement provided by Instagram Stories, in contrast to more passive traditional Instagram ads, provides both practical and enjoyment-driven benefits to young female users. Furthermore, both enjoyment and social value had a significant impact on the intention to purchase brands (Kim et al., 2023).

According to Souki et al. (2022), the appeal of entertainment and social aspects positively influenced the chances of sharing commercial videos online. Additionally, the probability of sharing videos had a favourable effect on brand attachment and brand equity.

Video content possesses unique characteristics that make it particularly effective in fostering social value on social media platforms. Unlike static images, videos offer richer narrative and emotional depth, which can more effectively stimulate social interaction, self-expression, and community-building behaviours. The dynamic nature of video enables users to engage with content on a more personal level, videos often being designed with participatory culture in mind, where users replicate, remix, or respond to content trends, further reinforcing group identity and peer validation. This collaborative and performative nature of video supports stronger social presence and perceived connectedness among users, which are foundational elements of social value. As a result, we hypothesise that video posts are more likely to contribute to users' sense of social belonging and recognition within digital communities:

- **H4:** Users will perceive the social value of video posts to be higher than that of image posts.

1.6 The role of social media platforms

Social media platforms differ in their affordances, audience composition, norms of use, and content presentation formats. For instance, Facebook is commonly associated with diverse content types and broad social networks, Instagram is visually oriented and inclined toward aesthetic expression, and TikTok is dominated by short-form, algorithmically curated videos that emphasise entertainment and trend-driven engagement.

Prior research indicates that these platform-specific affordances can shape user behaviour, including how individuals interact with marketing content and what they expect from it (Omar & Dequan, 2020; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). These differences could theoretically influence how users perceive the value of posts encountered on each platform.

However, empirical evidence suggests that content-related factors may exert a stronger influence on perceived value than the platform itself, especially when the substantive content shown to users is held constant across platforms. Studies comparing identical or near-identical brand content posted on different platforms show that differences in perceived value tend to diminish when content quality is controlled (Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Voorveld et al., 2018). This is because users often respond primarily to the intrinsic properties of the content (e.g., narrative, visual quality) rather than the specific platform through which the content is delivered.

Furthermore, the increasing convergence of platform functionalities (e.g., reels on Instagram, shorts on YouTube, video features on Facebook) has reduced the distinctiveness of platform

affordances, contributing to more uniform user expectations for brand-generated content. As a result, platform differences may exert only a limited influence on the perceived value of posts when the same content is presented across multiple platforms.

Given this convergence and the evidence suggesting that content type plays a far greater role in shaping user perceptions than platform characteristics, we propose the following hypothesis:

- **H5:** The perceived value of posts will not differ across social media platforms, except when interacting with gender.

2 Research methodology

We tested our research hypotheses through an online, between-subjects experimental design. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions in a 3 (social media platform: Facebook vs. Instagram vs. TikTok) × 2 (content type: photo vs. video) design. Participants in each condition were instructed to follow posts created by a fictitious brand developed specifically for the study. For each platform, two separate brand accounts were created: one that published only photo-based content and another that published only video-based content. The photo and video posts were identical in thematic content and message across the three platforms, ensuring that any observed effects could be attributed to the manipulated factors rather than differences in post substance.

Over the course of seven consecutive days, participants viewed one post per day from the assigned brand account. Posts were uploaded at varying times throughout the day to simulate a realistic posting schedule and to minimise predictability. Participants were free to engage with the posts in the same way they would with any real social media content (i.e., viewing, liking, commenting, or sharing), though engagement was not mandatory. At the end of the seven-day exposure period, all participants received a follow-up online questionnaire assessing their perceptions of the posts they had viewed.

Initially, 515 responses were collected; however, after analysing the replies to the attention check questions included in the questionnaire and removing straight-line responses, 403 valid responses remained in the database. Of these, 216 participants followed photo posts, and 187 engaged with video posts. A total of 129 participants followed posts on our fictitious Facebook accounts, while another 129 engaged with content on TikTok. 145 individuals followed the daily posts on Instagram, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 | Sample distribution based on the experimental design

		Content type		Total
		Image	Video	
Social media	Facebook	74	55	129
	TikTok	63	66	129
	Instagram	79	66	145
Total		216	187	403

Source: authors' work

Table 2 indicates that 67.5% of the total respondents were female, while 32.5% were male. The most prevalent age group was 23–60 years, accounting for 51.6% of the total. We decided to divide the sample into two groups based on 22 years, as this value represents the median of our database.

Table 2 | Sample distribution based on demographics and behaviour

Variable	Total respondents	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	32.50%
	Of which	29% followed posts on Facebook
		25% followed posts on TikTok
		46% followed posts on Instagram
	Female	67.50%
	Of which	33% followed posts on Facebook
Age		35% followed posts on TikTok
		32% followed posts on Instagram
	18–22 years	48.40%
		28% followed posts on Facebook
	Of which	38% followed posts on TikTok
		34% followed posts on Instagram
Education	23–60 years	51.60%
		36% followed posts on Facebook
	Of which	26% followed posts on TikTok
		38% followed posts on Instagram
Social media usage	Secondary school/High school	45.40%
	Higher education	54.60%
	Less frequent users	27.30%
Social media usage	Medium user	39.70%
	Hard-core users	33.00%

Source: authors' work

We employed a convenience sampling approach, also referred to as availability sampling, which enabled us to select participants who were the easiest to access. This method does not involve random selection, resulting in unequal chances of inclusion for all members of the population. We opted for this approach due to time, budget, and logistical constraints that restricted our ability to implement more rigorous sampling methods.

All measurements used in this study were derived from validated scales found in existing literature. To evaluate the perceived informational and social value of the posts, we employed the 3-item scales proposed by Mathwick et al. (2008). For assessing entertainment and aesthetic content value, we utilized the scales developed by Kim et al. (2011). For all items included in this research, we provided Likert scale options ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree.

Using the reliability analysis of SPSS 25, the four variables measured demonstrated good internal consistency, as shown in Table 3. All Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above the threshold of 0.7, indicating excellent reliability according to established guidelines. To examine whether the four constructs were distinct, an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis with Varimax as a rotation method was conducted. The analysis yielded a four-factor solution, consistent with the theoretical structure, as all primary loadings were above the 0.4 threshold (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3 | Reliability and validity of scales

Variable	Item	Construct Distinctiveness				Construct Reliability
		Rotated Component Matrix				Cronbach's Alpha
		1	2	3	4	
Informational Value	INF1				0.812	0.869
	INF2				0.833	
	INF3				0.603	
Entertainment Value	ENT1		0.740			0.920
	ENT2		0.758			
	ENT3		0.701			
	ENT4		0.703			
Aesthetic Value	AEST1	0.873				0.942
	AEST2	0.846				
	AEST3	0.853				
Social Value	SOCV1			0.742		0.889
	SOCV2			0.855		
	SOCV3			0.851		

Source: authors' work

3 Results and Discussion

To test the proposed hypotheses, we first conducted a series of two-way ANOVA tests (see Table 4) to examine the effects of social media platform (Facebook vs. TikTok vs. Instagram) and content type (photo vs. video) on the perceived value of posts, according to our 2×3 between-subjects experimental design. The results showed that neither the main effect of social media (informational value: $F = 1.006$, $p = 0.367$, $\eta^2_p = 0.005$; entertainment value: $F = 1.299$, $p = 0.274$, $\eta^2_p = 0.007$; aesthetic value: $F = 1.740$, $p = 0.177$, $\eta^2_p = 0.009$; social value: $F = 0.229$, $p = 0.796$, $\eta^2_p = 0.001$), nor the main effect of content type (informational value: $F = 3.446$, $p = 0.064$, $\eta^2_p = 0.009$; entertainment value: $F = 2.467$, $p = 0.117$, $\eta^2_p = 0.006$; aesthetic value: $F = 0.483$, $p = 0.487$, $\eta^2_p = 0.001$; social value: $F = 2.497$, $p = 0.115$, $\eta^2_p = 0.006$) reached statistical significance. This indicates that, overall, the perceived value of posts did not differ meaningfully across platforms or between photo and video content, regardless of whether informational, entertainment, aesthetic, or social value was considered.

Similarly, the interaction between social media and content type was non-significant for all value categories (informational value: $F = 0.144$, $p = 0.866$, $\eta^2_p = 0.001$; entertainment value: $F = 0.652$, $p = 0.521$, $\eta^2_p = 0.003$; aesthetic value: $F = 0.089$, $p = 0.915$, $\eta^2_p = 0.000$; social value: $F = 1.592$, $p = 0.205$, $\eta^2_p = 0.008$). This suggests that the perceived value associated with photo versus video content did not vary across social media platforms for any of the value dimensions examined.

Table 4 | Two-way ANOVA tests' results for the perceived value of posts

		df	F	p-value	Effect size (η^2_p)
Informational value	Social media	2	1.006	0.367	0.005
	Content type	1	3.446	0.064	0.009
	Social media * Content type	2	0.144	0.866	0.001
Entertainment value	Social media	2	1.299	0.274	0.007
	Content type	1	2.467	0.117	0.006
	Social media * Content type	2	0.652	0.521	0.003
Aesthetic value	Social media	2	1.740	0.177	0.009
	Content type	1	0.483	0.487	0.001
	Social media * Content type	2	0.089	0.915	0.000
Social value	Social media	2	0.229	0.796	0.001
	Content type	1	2.497	0.115	0.006
	Social media * Content type	2	1.592	0.205	0.008

Source: authors' work

Building on these initial findings, we next conducted a series of three-way ANOVA tests to examine whether the effects of social media platform and content type on posts' perceived value were conditioned by key demographic and behavioural characteristics. Specifically, we tested the moderating role of educational level (users with secondary school or high school education vs. higher educated users), gender (men vs. women), age (users split based on the median age into up to 22 years vs. more than 22 years), and social media usage frequency (less frequent users, medium users, and hardcore users). This approach offered a more detailed understanding of whether perceptions varied not only overall but also within distinct subgroups.

3.1 Informational value

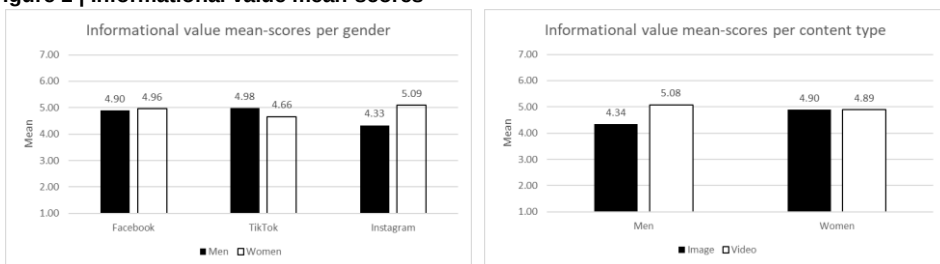
In what concerns informational value, our analysis (see Table 5) revealed significant interaction effects for social media $\times$ gender ($F = 4.691$, $p = 0.010$, $\eta^2_p = 0.023$), and for content type $\times$ gender ($F = 6.955$, $p = 0.009$, $\eta^2_p = 0.017$), indicating that gender meaningfully shapes how users evaluate the informational value of posts across platforms and content formats. These results suggest that men and women differ in how they assess informational value depending on the platform and whether the content is a photo or a video. Nevertheless, the three-way interaction (social media $\times$ content type $\times$ gender) did not reach significance ($F = 0.917$, $p = 0.401$, $\eta^2_p = 0.005$). This result suggests that the gender differences do not depend on the specific combination of platform and content type.

Table 5 | Three-way ANOVA tests' results for informational value

Moderators	Interaction terms	df	F	p-value	Effect size (η^2_p)
Gender	Social media * Gender	2	4.691	0.010	0.023
	Content type * Gender	1	6.955	0.009	0.017
	Social media * Content type * Gender	2	0.917	0.401	0.005
Age	Social media * Age	2	0.592	0.554	0.003
	Content type * Age	1	0.340	0.560	0.001
	Social media * Content type * Age	2	0.282	0.755	0.001
Education	Social media * Education	2	0.369	0.692	0.002
	Content type * Education	1	2.007	0.157	0.005
	Social media * Content type * Education	2	0.003	0.997	0.000
Usage frequency	Social media * Usage frequency	4	1.811	0.126	0.018
	Content type * Usage frequency	2	0.475	0.622	0.002
	Social media * Content type * Usage frequency	4	1.124	0.345	0.012

Source: authors' work

As can be seen in Figure 1, women consistently rated posts as slightly more informative than men on Instagram (women: $M = 5.09$; men: $M = 4.33$). In contrast, on TikTok, men reported higher informational value ($M = 4.98$) compared with women ($M = 4.66$). This suggests that the perceived informational value attributed to different platforms varies by gender, with women evaluating Instagram content more favourably, whereas men tend to perceive TikTok content as more informative. Moreover, men rated videos as notably more informative ($M = 5.08$) than images ($M = 4.34$), whereas women's evaluations were relatively stable across the two formats (image: $M = 4.90$; video: $M = 4.89$). This suggests that men are more sensitive to content modality, perceiving videos as offering substantially more informational value, while women maintain similar judgments regardless of format.

Figure 1 | Informational value mean-scores

Source: authors' work

As for the other demographic or behavioural variables considered, the analyses showed that they do not significantly condition how users judge the informational value of social media posts.

3.2 Entertainment value

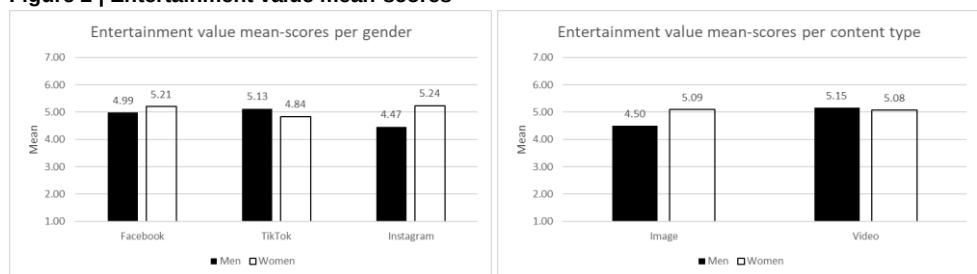
Regarding entertainment value, our research (see Table 6) showed substantial interaction effects for social media $\times$ gender ($F = 3.395$, $p = 0.035$, $\eta^2_p = 0.017$), and for content type $\times$ gender ($F = 4.049$, $p = 0.045$, $\eta^2_p = 0.010$), demonstrating that gender significantly influences how users perceive the entertainment value of posts across various platforms and content types. These findings imply that men and women evaluate entertainment value differently based on the platform used and whether the content is presented as a photo or a video. However, the three-way interaction (social media $\times$ content type $\times$ gender) was not statistically significant ($F = 0.673$, $p = 0.511$, $\eta^2_p = 0.003$). This indicates that the differences between genders are not contingent on the specific combination of platform and content type.

Table 6 | Three-way ANOVA tests' results for entertainment value

Moderators	Interaction terms	df	F	p-value	Effect size (η^2_p)
Gender	Social media * Gender	2	3.395	0.035	0.017
	Content type * Gender	1	4.049	0.045	0.010
	Social media * Content type * Gender	2	0.673	0.511	0.003
Age	Social media * Age	2	0.459	0.632	0.002
	Content type * Age	1	1.235	0.267	0.003
	Social media * Content type * Age	2	1.234	0.292	0.006
Education	Social media * Education	2	1.299	0.274	0.007
	Content type * Education	1	2.621	0.106	0.007
	Social media * Content type * Education	2	1.087	0.338	0.006
Usage frequency	Social media * Usage frequency	4	1.320	0.262	0.014
	Content type * Usage frequency	2	1.764	0.173	0.009
	Social media * Content type * Usage frequency	4	1.289	0.274	0.013

Source: authors' work

Figure 2 | Entertainment value mean-scores



Source: authors' work

As illustrated in Figure 2, women generally assessed posts as more entertaining than men on Facebook (women: $M = 5.21$; men: $M = 4.99$) and Instagram (women: $M = 5.24$; men: $M = 4.47$). However, on TikTok, men indicated a higher perceived entertainment value ($M = 5.13$) compared to women ($M = 4.84$). This indicates that the perception of entertainment value on various social media platforms differs by gender, with women rating

Facebook and Instagram content more positively, while men tend to find TikTok content more amusing. Additionally, men regarded videos as significantly more entertaining ($M = 5.15$) than images ($M = 4.50$), while women's ratings were relatively consistent between the two formats (image: $M = 5.09$; video: $M = 5.08$). This implies that men are more influenced by content format, viewing videos as providing much greater entertainment value, while women keep their evaluations similar regardless of the format.

Regarding the other demographic or behavioural variables analysed, the findings indicated that they do not have a significant impact on users' evaluation of the entertainment value of social media posts.

3.3 Aesthetic value

Regarding the evaluation of the aesthetic value of the image or video posts that the study participants saw over the 7 days, the data show that there are no significant differences in the evaluation of the aesthetic value of the posts, regardless of the demographic characteristics of the respondents (see Table 7). No p-values below the standard threshold of 5% were obtained. Thus, we can state that regardless of the content type or the platform on which it is posted, the perception of the aesthetic value of the post is not dependent on the individuals' age, gender, education or level of social media usage.

Table 7 | Three-way ANOVA tests' results for aesthetic value

Moderators	Interaction terms	df	F	p-value	Effect size (η^2_p)
Gender	Social media * Gender	2	0.834	0.435	0.004
	Content type * Gender	1	0.080	0.778	0.000
	Social media * Content type * Gender	2	1.119	0.327	0.006
Age	Social media * Age	2	0.633	0.532	0.003
	Content type * Age	1	0.809	0.369	0.002
	Social media * Content type * Age	2	0.265	0.767	0.001
Education	Social media * Education	2	2.285	0.103	0.012
	Content type * Education	1	0.276	0.599	0.001
	Social media * Content type * Education	2	0.963	0.383	0.005
Usage frequency	Social media * Usage frequency	4	0.785	0.536	0.008
	Content type * Usage frequency	2	1.227	0.294	0.006
	Social media * Content type * Usage frequency	4	0.283	0.889	0.003

Source: authors' work

3.4 Social value

The perceived social value of the post seems to be influenced by the social media platform and the gender of the respondents ($F = 3.729$, $p = 0.025$, $\eta^2_p = 0.019$). These results (see Table 8) suggest that men and women assess the social value of the content differently based on the social media platform they use. However, the interaction between content type x gender or the three-way interaction (social media x content type x gender) did not yield statistically significant results. This implies that the differences observed between genders

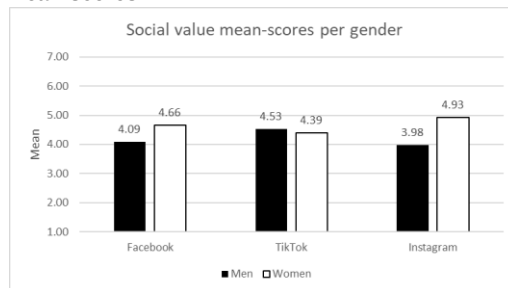
are not dependent on the content type or the specific intersection of platform and content type.

Table 8 | Three-way ANOVA tests' results for social value

Moderators	Interaction terms	df	F	p-value	Effect size (η^2_p)
Gender	Social media * Gender	2	3.729	0.025	0.019
	Content type * Gender	1	0.935	0.334	0.002
	Social media * Content type * Gender	2	0.538	0.584	0.003
Age	Social media * Age	2	0.602	0.548	0.003
	Content type * Age	1	0.835	0.361	0.002
	Social media * Content type * Age	2	0.102	0.903	0.002
Education	Social media * Education	2	1.491	0.226	0.003
	Content type * Education	1	0.575	0.449	0.002
	Social media * Content type * Education	2	0.307	0.736	0.001
Usage frequency	Social media * Usage frequency	4	0.608	0.657	0.006
	Content type * Usage frequency	2	1.680	0.188	0.009
	Social media * Content type * Usage frequency	4	2.040	0.088	0.021

Source: authors' work

Figure 3 | Social value mean-scores



Source: authors' work

As shown in Figure 3, women typically perceived the social value of the posts higher on Instagram ($M = 4.93$) and Facebook ($M = 4.66$) compared to men. Men, on the other side, evaluate TikTok posts to have the greatest social value ($M = 4.53$) compared with Instagram or Facebook. This suggests that the perception of social value across different social media platforms varies by gender, with women viewing content on Facebook and Instagram more favourably, while men tend to find TikTok content having a greater social value.

Concerning the other demographic or behavioural factors examined, the results showed that they do not significantly influence users' assessment of the social value of social media posts.

4 Managerial implications

The findings of this study have several practical implications for managers seeking to develop effective social media communication strategies, as presented briefly in Table 9. Given that

perceptions of informational, entertainment, and social value differ significantly by gender in terms of platform and content type, managers should adopt a differentiated approach. This approach should align content format, platform selection, and communication objectives with the preferences of specific audience segments.

Table 9 | Managerial recommendation towards segmentation

Value followed to be increased	Target audience preferences	
	Men	Women
Informational Value	TikTok + Video	Instagram + (Images + Video)
Entertainment Value	TikTok + Video	Instagram + (Images + Video)
Social Value	TikTok	Instagram

Source: authors' work

In terms of the informational value of social media posts, the results show that women attribute higher informational value to Instagram content, while men perceive TikTok as more informative. In addition, men tend to have preferences in terms of content type when it comes to the same informational value. Men are evaluating videos as more informative, while women evaluate images and videos almost equally.

These findings suggest that managers aiming to disseminate informational messages should consider gender-specific platform and format preferences. Managers should prioritise Instagram for female audiences, delivering educational content through a balanced mix of static and video formats. For male audiences, TikTok should be the primary platform, emphasising visually engaging videos for concise information.

Furthermore, the study shows that social media content's entertainment value differs by gender and platform. Women find Instagram more entertaining, while men prefer TikTok and video content, with no format distinction observed among women. Managers should consider these differences when designing entertainment-focused campaigns.

Content targeting women and focused on entertainment should be primarily shared on Instagram. This can include either static images or videos, based on the storytelling requirements of the campaign. In contrast, entertainment content aimed at male audiences should be prioritised on TikTok, using dynamic video formats that match the platform's fast-paced and humour-driven culture.

Perceptions of social value also differ by gender, with women attributing greater social value to Instagram, while men to TikTok. These differences may be explained by the fact that higher intensity of Instagram use fosters social comparison, which in turn increases the need for uniqueness, differentiation, and social conformity (Zhechev & Sekulova, 2024). These findings suggest that the platforms serve as distinct social spaces for different genders, which should inform brands how to better cultivate community and social interaction on their social media channels.

To strengthen perceived social value among women, managers should focus on community-building tools on Instagram. This includes using interactive stories, engaging with comments, collaborating with influencers, or implementing participatory features that encourage relational interactions. On the other hand, for male audiences, efforts should be leveraged on TikTok with activities such as duets, stitches, or even challenge formats. These types of

activities could help promote social engagement and content co-creation. By aligning strategies for social value with gender-specific norms, managers can better enhance community attachment and user engagement.

Conclusions

This study set out to explore how users perceive the informational, entertainment, aesthetic, and social value of social media content, comparing video and image posts across three major platforms, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Through a controlled experimental design and detailed subgroup analysis, we provide nuanced insights into how content format influences perceived value among different user segments.

The perceived informational value assigned to various platforms differs by gender. Women tend to evaluate content on Instagram more favourably, while men perceive TikTok content as more informative. Men are more sensitive to the type of content, viewing videos as offering significantly greater informational value, whereas women maintain relatively consistent judgments regardless of the format.

When it comes to perceived entertainment value, distinctions also arise between genders concerning social media platforms and content types. Women find Instagram to be more entertaining, while men generally prefer TikTok in this regard. In terms of content type, men consider videos to be more entertaining, whereas women do not show a distinct preference for either videos or images.

Furthermore, the perceived social value attributed to social media platforms varies significantly between genders. Women associate the social value primarily with Instagram, while men assign that value more to TikTok. On the other hand, regardless of the content type or platform, the perception of aesthetic value in a post is not influenced by an individual's age, gender, education, or level of social media usage.

This research has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First is the absence of a pre-test to ensure the equivalence of the stimuli, which restricts the ability to ascertain whether the observed effects result from the intended manipulations rather than unintended discrepancies between posts. Additionally, the sample was quite homogenous, mainly consisting of young individuals and predominantly female participants, which may lead to sample bias and limit the generalization of the findings to wider populations. Other methodological limitations identified include the absence of a pre-test for stimulus equivalence, the lack of multiplicity correction, and the utilization of ANOVA instead of regression or mixed-effects models. These factors represent significant constraints that may impact the robustness and interpretability of the findings. These factors emphasize the necessity for caution when interpreting the results and highlight the importance of future studies addressing these issues.

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