

Social Media Post Styles in Digital Culture: Message Interaction and Value Construction under Construal Level Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study examines social media post styles not only as tools of advertising persuasion but also as critical digital cultural practices that shape user interaction and value construction. Drawing on Construal Level Theory (CLT), the research focuses on the interaction effects of two variables—image proximity (distant vs. close-up) and message type (narrative vs. informational). A 2 (image proximity) × 2 (message type) quasi-experimental mixed design was employed, with data collected from experienced social media users. A total of 408 valid responses were analyzed using two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The results indicate that narrative messages significantly outperformed informational messages in terms of advertising affect and advertising evaluation, underscoring the central role of narrative in evoking emotional resonance and fostering cultural identification in digital culture. Furthermore, a significant interaction between image proximity and message type was observed: under distant framing, narrative messages enhanced affect, evaluation, sharing intention, and purchase intention; under close-up framing, informational messages performed better in affect and purchase intention. These findings reveal a three-stage psychological process—“emotional resonance → evaluative judgment → behavioral intention”—and demonstrate how the interplay of visuals and text shapes users' digital experiences and behavioral tendencies. This study not only validates the applicability of CLT in the context of digital culture but also highlights how visual and narrative strategies in social media influence individual attitudes and decisions while contributing to the reproduction of cultural meaning and social interaction online.

Keywords: Construal Level Theory; social media; digital culture; post styles; narrative communication; cultural value

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is widely regarded as an era of accelerated information flow. With rapid technological innovations and the global proliferation of the internet, the digital environment has profoundly reshaped people's lifestyles and cultural practices (Castells, 2010). In this context of information explosion, the channels through which individuals access and interpret information have become increasingly diverse. The rise of social media has further enabled information transmission to transcend national and generational boundaries, becoming a central platform for cultural exchange and social interaction (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Social media is not only a space for

personal expression and interaction but also a key arena for the circulation of advertisements, brands, and cultural symbols, continuously shaping individuals' consumption choices, values, and identities (Marwick, 2013).

Within this landscape, digital advertising demonstrates a high degree of diversity and immediacy, with an influence that has already surpassed the traditional domain of marketing, permeating social and cultural spheres (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As users browse posts in their everyday lives, they are simultaneously influenced by textual and visual elements, leading to the formation of implicit attitudinal preferences. These preferences not only affect subsequent consumer behaviors but also reflect how society interprets visual representations and narrative forms on a cultural level (Highfield, 2016). Nevertheless, existing studies have primarily focused on interface design, visual consistency, or advertising persuasiveness, while lacking integrative investigations into how "post styles" simultaneously shape both psychological responses and cultural value construction.

To address this research gap, this study adopts Construal Level Theory (CLT) as its analytical framework. CLT posits that individuals engage in different levels of mental construal depending on the perceived psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010). This theory provides a robust foundation for understanding how "image presentation styles" and "message narratives" influence user attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, this study examines two dimensions: first, image proximity, referring to whether product or situational images are presented through distant framing (wide shots) or close-up framing; and second, message type, whether post copy adopts a narrative storytelling approach or an informational presentation. This research design helps to clarify the psychological processes underlying the interaction between image and message, and explains how such combinations affect audiences' emotional responses, evaluative judgments, and behavioral intentions.

In summary, this study seeks not only to examine how post styles influence user attitudes and behaviors but also to uncover the cultural meanings and digital interaction patterns embedded within them. The specific research objectives are as follows:

1. To examine how image proximity influences users' psychological attitudes, behavioral responses, and cultural interpretations in social media contexts.
2. To compare narrative and informational messages in terms of their roles in cultural meaning construction and social participation.
3. To investigate the interaction between image proximity and message type, and analyze their impact on digital culture and user behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Construal Level Theory

Construal Level Theory (CLT), proposed by Trope and Liberman (2003, 2010), explains how individuals' interpretations of events, objects, and social phenomena are shaped by "psychological distance." This framework identifies four dimensions—temporal, spatial, social, and hypothetical distance—that influence whether people construe information abstractly or concretely. Greater distance tends to elicit abstract, decontextualized thinking, while closer distance leads to concrete and detail-oriented processing (Trope & Liberman, 2010). These differences highlight that psychological distance is not only a cognitive mechanism but also deeply embedded in cultural contexts (Spence, Poortinga, & Pidgeon, 2012).

Each of the four dimensions has distinct implications: distant future events are abstracted more than imminent ones (Trope & Liberman, 2003); geographically distant events are construed less concretely than nearby ones; strangers or marginalized groups are represented in more abstract ways than close relations; and improbable events are processed abstractly, while certain events are processed concretely (Bar-Anan, Liberman, & Trope, 2006). Research in digital media has extended CLT's application, showing that distant perspectives in advertising or social media imagery foster abstract emotional associations, while close-up visuals enhance contextual realism and vividness (Kim, Rao, & Lee, 2009).

Beyond image framing, message style also interacts with psychological distance. Studies suggest that narrative versus informational messages can be analyzed through the CLT framework to understand how distance shapes interpretation and interaction (Liberman & Trope, 2014; Kim, Lee, & Oh, 2023). Although Kim et al. (2023) examined corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, their findings on psychological distance mechanisms are highly relevant to post style research. Cultural scholars further emphasize that psychological distance is intertwined with digital cultural practices and social interactions, as symbolic forms shape how groups construct shared meaning (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Schroeder, 2002). In sum, CLT provides a robust theoretical basis not only for psychology but also for examining digital culture, social media interaction, and media communication.

Image Proximity and Digital Visual Culture

In the environment of digital social media, images have become a central mode of communication, functioning not only as carriers of information but also as cultural symbols and vehicles of social interaction (Kress & van

Leeuwen, 2006). Within this context, *image proximity* refers to the perceived distance of visual framing, such as distant shots (distant framing) versus close-up shots (close-up framing). Different visual distances not only shape users' perceptual modes but also construct cultural meanings and social relationships. Close-up images tend to emphasize detail and intimacy, reducing perceived psychological distance and thereby eliciting stronger emotional resonance (Messaris, 1997). On social media, selfies, product close-ups, and other near-distance visuals are often used to create a sense of "presence" and "authenticity," making users feel more connected to the content (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). In contrast, distant images provide a broader field of vision, highlighting contextual settings or collective atmospheres, and are particularly suited to conveying abstract cultural values and collective meanings. For example, wide-angle shots in travel advertising often stress openness, exploration, and cultural ambiance rather than product detail (Schroeder, 2002).

Within the framework of Construal Level Theory (CLT), image proximity serves as a crucial cue for psychological distance. Distant images tend to activate high-level construals, encouraging abstract interpretations that connect content to broader values and meanings; close-up images, by contrast, trigger low-level construals that foreground concrete detail and immediate experience (Trope & Liberman, 2010). These visual effects not only influence individual attitudes and behaviors but also reveal how "distance" is represented and manipulated in digital culture. Moreover, visual practices on digital platforms demonstrate cultural variations. Research suggests that Western users prefer close-up images to construct identities of "individuality" and "authenticity," whereas users in East Asian cultures more often employ group photos or distant shots to emphasize social ties and collective belonging (Kim & Papacharissi, 2003). Such differences indicate that image proximity is not merely a visual choice but also a cultural practice, reflecting how different societies define relationships between "self" and "others" (Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2024).

In summary, image proximity plays a dual role in digital culture: first, as a form of visual framing that influences users' psychological distance and perceptual patterns; and second, as a cultural practice that reflects how communities employ visual strategies to express values and social relationships. These dimensions are crucial for understanding the cultural implications of post styles in social media and provide both psychological and cultural foundations for this study.

Message Types: Informational vs. Narrative

In the environment of digital social media, modes of message delivery profoundly shape users' engagement and interpretation. Previous studies have generally divided post content into two major categories: informational and narrative. Narrative messages typically center on plot, characters, and emotional connections, using storytelling to guide audiences into specific contexts and thereby fostering emotional resonance and cultural identification (Green & Brock, 2000; Escalas, 2004). By contrast, informational messages focus on product features, functions, or factual statements, emphasizing rationality and the communication of concrete information to meet users' needs for utility and efficiency (Wang & Calder, 2006).

Narrative content has become increasingly significant in digital culture. Storytelling is not only a persuasive strategy but also a cultural practice that constructs frameworks for understanding the world (Fisher, 1984). Within the context of social media, narrative messages can amplify the emotional impact of advertising and help users connect their own experiences with brands or issues, thereby fostering social and cultural identification (Van Laer et al., 2014). For example, environmental advocacy posts presented in narrative form are often more effective at evoking empathy and motivating action than those relying solely on data or factual information (Shen, Sheer, & Li, 2015). Nonetheless, informational messages remain indispensable in consumer decision-making, particularly in contexts involving utilitarian products or situations requiring rational comparison. Informational content helps reduce uncertainty, provides verifiable evidence, and strengthens users' confidence in their decisions (Adaval & Wyer, 1998). However, in the cultural atmosphere of social media, overly rational messages often lack participatory and sharing incentives, making a complementary balance with narrative content necessary.

From the perspective of Construal Level Theory (CLT), narrative and informational messages can be seen as different manipulations of psychological distance. Narrative messages tend to trigger high-level construals, highlighting abstract meanings and values that enable audiences to interpret information in a broader, more holistic manner. In contrast, informational messages correspond to low-level construals, emphasizing concrete details and direct comprehension (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Kim et al., 2023). Thus, message type not only influences attitudes and behaviors but also serves as a crucial element in the cultural framework through which social interaction and meaning are constructed. In summary, narrative and informational messages are not strictly dichotomous but represent two interwoven strategies within digital culture. Narrative messages highlight cultural values and community belonging, whereas informational messages safeguard rational judgment and informational transparency. Understanding how these two forms operate across different cultural contexts is essential for analyzing the cultural implications of social media post styles.

RESEARCH METHOD

Pretest of Advertising Product and Questionnaire Scale

To control for the potential influence of product involvement on the experimental results, this study conducted a product pretest prior to the formal experiment to identify a stimulus product with relatively neutral involvement. Twelve common product categories were listed, including power banks, computer mice, casual shoes, cameras, watches, computers, perfume, cosmetics, earphones, speakers, clothing, and mobile phones. Thirty-seven participants with prior social media experience were invited to evaluate these products. The measurement tool was adapted from Zaichkowsky's (1985) product involvement inventory, and two items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): (1) "The [product] is important to me" and (2) "The [product] plays an important role in my life."

The analysis revealed that most products showed strong tendencies toward either utilitarian or hedonic attributes. However, perfume exhibited the most neutral overall involvement level, reflecting a balance between functional utility and sensory pleasure. This neutrality made perfume particularly suitable as the experimental stimulus, as it avoided extreme involvement biases that might otherwise confound participants' responses to advertising styles. Consequently, perfume was selected as the focal product ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.89$), ensuring that the stimulus represented both neutrality and cultural relevance, while allowing the study to focus on the effects of "image proximity \times message type" on users' psychological and behavioral intentions.

For the questionnaire scale pretest, measurement items were adapted from prior studies on advertising attitudes and consumer behavior, covering four constructs: advertising affect, advertising evaluation, sharing intention, and purchase intention (Lutz, MacKenzie, & Belch, 1983; Kwek, Tan, & Lau, 2010; Lee, Goh, & Mohd Noor, 2019; Meyer-Waarden, Bruwer, & Galan, 2023). Each construct originally contained four items, totaling 16 items, all measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Prior to the formal survey, 37 students with social media experience participated in the pretest. The initial reliability analysis showed an overall Cronbach's α of 0.744. After removing four items with weak correlations or ambiguous wording, the Cronbach's α increased to 0.958. The final refined scale consisted of 12 items (three per construct), with Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.857 to 0.938, all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). These results confirmed that the scale demonstrated strong reliability and construct validity, making it suitable for use in the main experiment.

Development of Experimental Stimuli

To ensure that the research design realistically reflected the usage context of social media, this study selected perfume—identified in the pretest as a product with relatively neutral involvement—as the experimental stimulus. This choice reduced the likelihood that product attributes with extreme hedonic or utilitarian tendencies would bias participants' responses, allowing the study to focus more directly on the effects of post style.

The construction of experimental stimuli comprised two components: image design and message formulation. In terms of image design, and following the framework of Construal Level Theory (CLT), two versions were created: distant framing and close-up framing. The distant framing emphasized an open spatial context, highlighting ambiance and abstract meanings that correspond to greater psychological distance. By contrast, the close-up framing accentuated product details and texture, generating a sense of intimacy and concreteness associated with closer psychological distance.

In terms of message design, two versions were developed: narrative and informational. The narrative messages employed storytelling techniques to depict product usage scenarios, highlighting emotional connections and cultural imagination. The informational messages, on the other hand, presented product features and functions in a concise and straightforward manner, emphasizing rational judgment and utilitarian value.

All stimuli were formatted in line with the Instagram post layout, including a 4:5 image ratio, headline text, interactive icons (e.g., "like," "comment," "share"), and relevant hashtags, to enhance participants' sense of presence and realism. In total, four sets of experimental posts were produced, representing the combinations of image proximity and message type: (1) distant framing \times narrative, (2) close-up framing \times narrative, (3) distant framing \times informational, and (4) close-up framing \times informational (Figures 1; Table 1). These stimuli were designed not only to test the effects of different post styles on psychological and behavioral responses but also to illustrate how visual and narrative strategies in digital culture participate in the reproduction of meaning and the construction of value.

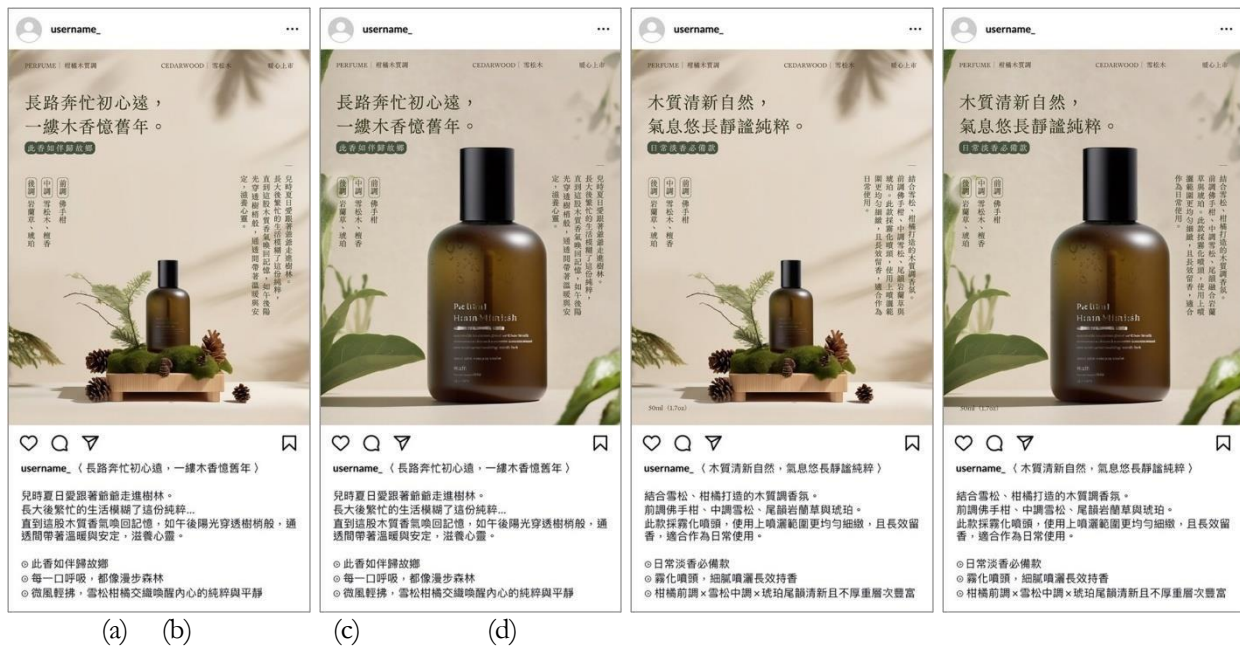


Figure 1. Development of Experimental Stimuli: (a) Distant framing × Narrative message; (b) Close-up framing × Narrative message; (c) Distant framing × Informational message; (d) Close-up framing × Informational message.

Table 1. Description of Social Media Advertising Post Content

Message Type	Ad Post Content
Narrative message	<p>〈A Long Journey, A Scent of Wood, A Memory of Home〉</p> <p>As a child, I loved following my grandfather into the summer woods. As life grew busier, that purity faded—until this woody fragrance called it back, like afternoon sunlight breaking through treetops: warm, steady, and nourishing to the soul.</p> <p>#this scent feels like home #every breath is a walk in the forest #cedar and citrus awaken inner peace</p>
	<p>〈Woody Freshness, Natural Clarity, Long-Lasting Serenity〉</p> <p>A woody fragrance crafted with cedar and citrus. Top notes of bergamot, heart of cedarwood, and a base of vetiver and amber. With a fine mist sprayer for an even, delicate application, this scent lingers effortlessly—perfect for daily wear.</p> <p>#every day essential fragrance #fine mist long lasting #citrus top notes × cedar heart × amber base</p>
Informational message	<p>結合雪松、柑橘打透的木質調香氣。 前調佛手柑、中調雪松、尾韻岩蘭草與琥珀。 此款探霧化噴頭，使用上噴灑範圍更均勻細緻，且長效留香，適合作為日常使用。</p> <p>◎日常淡香必備款 ◎霧化噴頭，細膩噴灑長效持香 ◎柑橘前調×雪松中調×琥珀尾韻清新且不厚重層次豐富</p>

Formal Experiment and Participant Description

In the formal experiment, a quasi-experimental mixed design was employed, with two independent variables: 2 (image proximity: distant framing vs. close-up framing) × 2 (message type: narrative vs. informational). The dependent variables covered four constructs: advertising affect, advertising evaluation, sharing intention, and purchase intention.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, targeting Taiwanese internet users with prior social media experience. A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed, and 204 valid responses were collected, yielding a response rate of 92.7% and generating 408 responses in total. The demographic profile of participants was as follows: 169 females (82.8%) and 35 males (17.2%). The majority were members of Generation Z aged 18–24 (96.6%), with a small number under 18 or between 25–34 years old (Table 2).

The sample composition indicated that most participants were university students with high levels of social media engagement, consistent with recent research identifying Generation Z as the primary group for social media

usage and interaction (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2023). To ensure compliance with ethical standards, all participants received a study explanation and signed informed consent prior to participation. Anonymity and confidentiality of data were assured throughout the study. Each experimental session lasted approximately 20–30 minutes, including an introduction to the study, exposure to the stimuli, and completion of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant Background	Category	Number of Participants (N = 204)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	35	17.2	17.2
	Female	169	82.8	100.0
Age	Under 18	5	2.5	2.5
	18–24 years	197	96.6	99.0
	25–34 years	2	1.0	100.0
Education level	High school	2	1.0	1.0
	Vocational college	3	1.5	2.5
	University	196	96.1	98.5
	Graduate school	3	1.5	100.0
Social media usage (per day)	Less than 1 hour	5	2.5	2.5
	1–2 hours	20	9.8	12.3
	2–5 hours	81	39.7	52.0
	More than 5 hours	98	48.0	100.0

Measurement of Variables

The dependent variable in this study was the evaluation of social media advertising effectiveness. The measurement scale was adapted from prior research on advertising attitudes and consumer behavior (Lutz et al., 1983; Kwek et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2019; Meyer-Waarden et al., 2023). The scale comprised four constructs: advertising affect, advertising evaluation, sharing intention, and purchase intention, with three items per construct, totaling 12 items. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), and participants were instructed to evaluate the overall post (i.e., the integration of image and text), rather than individual elements in isolation.

Following data collection, internal consistency reliability was assessed. The Cronbach's α values for each construct ranged from 0.914 to 0.958, all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating high reliability and stability of the instrument. The constructs, reliability coefficients, and sample items are as follows:

1. Advertising Affect ($\alpha = 0.918$): Assesses whether the advertisement evokes pleasant or positive emotions (e.g., "This advertisement makes me feel happy," "This advertisement is convincing," "This advertisement is likable").
2. Advertising Evaluation ($\alpha = 0.914$): Measures respondents' overall impression and perceived professionalism of the advertisement (e.g., "This advertisement gives me a good overall impression," "This advertisement successfully attracts my attention," "This advertisement's overall design is professional and trustworthy").
3. Sharing Intention ($\alpha = 0.939$): Evaluates whether respondents are willing to share or recommend the advertisement content (e.g., "I would recommend this advertisement to friends who may be interested," "This advertisement is worth recommending to family and friends," "This advertisement makes me want to discuss it with friends on social media").
4. Purchase Intention ($\alpha = 0.958$): Measures respondents' actual purchase tendency (e.g., "This advertisement makes me feel the product is worth trying," "If possible, I would purchase the product promoted in this advertisement," "This advertisement makes me feel that purchasing this product is worthwhile").

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

This study conducted descriptive statistical analyses for the four dependent variables—advertising affect, advertising evaluation, sharing intention, and purchase intention—across different combinations of image proximity (distant vs. close-up) and message type (narrative vs. informational).

As shown in Table 3, under the distant framing condition, posts adopting a narrative message yielded higher mean scores across all four constructs compared with informational messages. Specifically, narrative messages scored higher in advertising affect ($M_{\text{narrative}} = 5.07$, $SD = 1.25$ vs. $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.40$, $SD = 1.24$), advertising

evaluation ($M_{\text{narrative}} = 5.13, SD = 1.31$ vs. $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.62, SD = 1.29$), sharing intention ($M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.74, SD = 1.22$ vs. $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.28, SD = 1.41$), and purchase intention ($M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.66, SD = 1.39$ vs. $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.11, SD = 1.28$).

In contrast, under the close-up framing condition, informational messages consistently produced higher mean scores than narrative messages. Specifically, informational messages scored higher in advertising affect ($M_{\text{informational}} = 4.81, SD = 1.21$ vs. $M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.68, SD = 1.22$), advertising evaluation ($M_{\text{informational}} = 4.90, SD = 1.24$ vs. $M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.71, SD = 1.20$), sharing intention ($M_{\text{informational}} = 4.67, SD = 1.35$ vs. $M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.42, SD = 1.42$), and purchase intention ($M_{\text{informational}} = 4.64, SD = 1.36$ vs. $M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.40, SD = 1.31$). In sum, the preliminary descriptive statistics indicate that narrative messages outperform informational ones under distant framing, while informational messages outperform narrative ones under close-up framing. These findings suggest that the relative effectiveness of message type is contingent on image proximity.

Table 3. Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent Variables

Variables		Social Media Advertising Effectiveness				
Image Proximity	Message Type	N	Advertising Affect	Advertising Evaluation	Sharing Intention	Purchase Intention
			<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Distant	Narrative	93	5.07 (1.25)	5.13 (1.31)	4.74 (1.22)	4.66 (1.39)
	Informational	111	4.40 (1.24)	4.62 (1.29)	4.28 (1.41)	4.11 (1.28)
	Total	204	4.74 (1.25)	4.88 (1.30)	4.51 (1.32)	4.39 (1.34)
Close-up	Narrative	93	4.68 (1.22)	4.71 (1.20)	4.42 (1.42)	4.40 (1.31)
	Informational	111	4.81 (1.21)	4.90 (1.24)	4.67 (1.35)	4.64 (1.36)
	Total	204	4.75 (1.22)	4.81 (1.22)	4.57 (1.33)	4.52 (1.33)

Reliability and Validity Analysis

This study evaluated the measurement model’s reliability and validity using factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 4, all factor loadings exceeded 0.60 (Sharma, 1996), CR values were above 0.70, AVE values were greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and Cronbach’s α coefficients all surpassed 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating strong convergent validity and internal consistency.

Discriminant validity was also examined (Table 5). Spearman correlations ranged from 0.819 to 0.869, and in all cases the square root of AVE exceeded inter-construct correlations, with all correlations statistically significant. These results satisfy the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), confirming that the scale demonstrates adequate construct validity.

Table 4. Convergent Validity and Reliability of Constructs

Construct	Items	Factor loadings	CR(>0.7)	AVE(>0.5)	Cronbach’s α
Advertising affect	Q1	0.848	0.906	0.763	0.918
	Q2	0.892			
	Q3	0.880			
	Q4	0.863			
Advertising evaluation	Q5	0.893	0.903	0.757	0.914
	Q6	0.854			
	Q7	0.870			
Sharing intention	Q8	0.895	0.906	0.762	0.939
	Q9	0.855			
	Q10	0.865			
Purchase intention	Q11	0.845	0.889	0.728	0.958
	Q12	0.849			

Table 5. Discriminant Validity Analysis of Constructs

Construct	1	2	3	4
Advertising affect	0.873			
Advertising evaluation	0.862**	0.870		
Sharing intention	0.819**	0.825**	0.872	
Purchase intention	0.857**	0.853**	0.869**	0.853

Note: Diagonal values show the square roots of AVE, which should exceed the corresponding off-diagonal correlations. All inter-construct correlations are significant at $\alpha = 0.01$.

Tests of Interaction Effects and Simple Main Effects

A two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the effects of image proximity (independent variable 1) and message type (independent variable 2) on social media advertising outcomes, including advertising affect, advertising evaluation, sharing intention, and purchase intention. As shown in Table 6, image proximity alone did not have a statistically significant effect on any of the four dependent variables ($p > .05$). By contrast, message type showed significant effects on two dimensions. Specifically, advertising affect ($F_{(1, 407)} = 8.85, p = .003$) and sharing intention ($F_{(1, 407)} = 11.38, p = .001$) reached significance at the $p < .01$ level, whereas advertising evaluation and purchase intention did not reach statistical significance ($p > .05$). Further examination revealed that narrative messages outperformed informational messages on both significant dimensions (advertising affect: $M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.94 > M_{\text{informational}} = 4.58$; sharing intention: $M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.74 > M_{\text{informational}} = 4.08$).

In addition, significant interaction effects were found between image proximity and message type on three dependent variables: advertising affect ($F_{(1, 407)} = 6.47, p = .01$), advertising evaluation ($F_{(1, 407)} = 3.99, p = .046$), and purchase intention ($F_{(1, 407)} = 4.42, p = .036$) (Table 6). These results indicate that participants' responses in terms of affect, evaluation, and purchase intention varied depending on the combined effects of image proximity and message type. To further clarify these effects, simple main effects analyses were conducted to determine how each independent variable influenced the dependent variables under specific conditions. Where significant effects were identified, post hoc comparisons of means were subsequently performed.

Table 6. ANOVA Summary for the Effects of Image Proximity and Message Type on Social Media Advertising

Source of Variance		<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Advertising affect	Image proximity (A)	0.31	1	0.31	0.22	.641
	Message type (B)	12.79	1	12.79	8.85	.003**
	A × B	9.74	1	9.74	6.74	.010*
Advertising evaluation	Image proximity (A)	.078	1	0.08	0.05	.829
	Message type (B)	6.36	1	6.36	3.79	.052
	A × B	6.70	1	6.70	3.99	.046*
Sharing intention	Image proximity (A)	1.85	1	1.85	0.99	.319
	Message type (B)	21.18	1	21.18	11.38	.001**
	A × B	4.20	1	4.20	2.26	.134
Purchase intention	Image proximity (A)	5.61	1	5.61	2.80	.095
	Message type (B)	6.31	1	6.31	3.14	.077

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

As shown in the main effects test results in Table 7, under the condition of informational messages, close-up images elicited significantly higher advertising affect and purchase intention compared to distant images (advertising affect: $F_{(1, 221)} = 5.40, p < .05, M_{\text{close-up}} = 4.77 > M_{\text{distant}} = 4.40$; purchase intention: $F_{(1, 221)} = 7.70, p < .01, M_{\text{close-up}} = 4.65 > M_{\text{distant}} = 4.12$).

In addition, under the condition of distant framing, narrative messages produced significantly higher scores than informational messages across four dimensions: advertising affect, advertising evaluation, sharing intention, and purchase intention. Specifically, narrative messages outperformed informational messages on advertising affect

($F_{(1, 186)} = 15.92, p < .001, M_{\text{narrative}} = 5.07 > M_{\text{informational}} = 4.40$), advertising evaluation ($F_{(1, 186)} = 7.69, p < .01, M_{\text{narrative}} = 5.13 > M_{\text{informational}} = 4.62$), sharing intention ($F_{(1, 186)} = 12.54, p < .001, M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.74 > M_{\text{informational}} = 4.08$), and purchase intention ($F_{(1, 186)} = 7.21, p < .01, M_{\text{narrative}} = 4.66 > M_{\text{informational}} = 4.11$).

Table 7. Summary of Analysis of Variance for Simple Main Effects

Source of Variance	<i>SS</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	Post hoc test
Advertising affect	Image proximity (A) in Narrative (B1)	3.0	3.01	1.97	.162	—
	in Informational (B2)	7.4	7.43	5.40	.021*	A2>A1
	Message type (B)	3				
Advertising evaluation	in Distant (A1)	22.43	22.4	15.92	.000***	B1>B2
	in Close-up (A2) Image proximity (A) in Narrative (B1)	1.70	1.70	1.01	.315	—
	in Informational (B2)	2.45	2.45	1.46	.229	—
	Message type (B)	4.51	4.51	2.67	.103	—
	in Distant (A1)	13.06	13.0	7.69	.006**	B1>B2
	in Close-up (A2) Image proximity (A) in Narrative (B1)	0.22	0.22	0.13	.719	—
Sharing intention	in Informational (B2)	6.38	6.38	3.16	.077	—
	Message type (B)	8				
	in Distant (A1)	22.12	22.1	12.5	.000***	B1>B2
Sharing intention	in Close-up (A2) Image proximity (A) in Narrative (B1)	3.26	3.26	1.66	.199	—
	in Informational (B2)	15.70	15.7	7.70	.006**	A2>A1
	Message type (B)	0				

in Distant (A1)	09	9	7.21	.008**	B1 > B2
in Close-up (A2)	1	0.11	0.57	.811	—

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .01$

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Findings and Contributions

Grounded in Construal Level Theory (CLT), this study examined the effects of image proximity (distant vs. close-up framing) and message type (narrative vs. informational) on the effectiveness of social media advertising, measured across four dimensions: advertising affect, advertising evaluation, sharing intention, and purchase intention. The results first revealed that image proximity, when treated as a single factor, did not produce significant effects on any of the four dimensions. However, message type significantly influenced two outcomes: advertising

affect and sharing intention, with narrative messages clearly outperforming informational ones. This suggests that contextualized storytelling strategies are more effective in eliciting emotional resonance and fostering social interaction tendencies among audiences.

Further interaction analyses indicated a significant interaction between image proximity and message type. Under the distant framing condition, narrative messages outperformed informational messages across all four dimensions. In contrast, under the close-up framing condition, informational messages yielded higher scores for advertising affect and purchase intention compared to narrative messages. These findings demonstrate that advertising effectiveness is not driven by a single factor but by the interplay of visual and textual strategies, reflecting the CLT principle that psychological distance shapes levels of information processing (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence on how post styles operate within digital culture and extends the application of CLT to the fields of advertising and cultural research. The findings highlight that different combinations of visual distance and narrative framing guide audiences toward distinct levels of construal and meaning-making processes. Specifically, posts with distant framing and narrative messages encouraged higher-level, abstract processing, linking advertising content to cultural imagination and lifestyle narratives, thereby enhancing affective responses, social sharing, and purchase intentions. Conversely, posts with close-up framing and informational messages prompted lower-level, concrete processing, directing audiences' attention toward product details, functions, and usage contexts. This contrast underscores how psychological distance influences advertising interpretation in digital culture, while also showing that narrative and informational strategies play complementary roles in social media interaction.

These results not only support Kim et al.'s (2023) claim that psychological distance moderates audiences' preferences for narrative versus analytic messages, but also align with Escalas (2004) and Van Laer et al. (2014), who emphasized the role of narrative in helping consumers build brand connections and shared cultural meaning. In other words, this study not only validates the theoretical propositions of CLT but also reveals how digital natives, in their everyday engagement with social media, shape attitudes and values through visual and textual strategies.

Practical Implications and Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the importance of aligning image framing with message content. Posts using distant framing combined with narrative messages were found to evoke stronger cultural context and emotional atmosphere, particularly enhancing advertising affect and sharing intention. By contrast, close-up framing paired with informational messages emphasized product details and practical value, strengthening rational judgment and purchase intention. These results are consistent with Pieters and Wedel's (2004) assertion that congruence between visual and textual elements enhances advertising persuasiveness. Moreover, the findings reaffirm the general advantage of narrative strategies in digital culture. Narrative messages can elicit emotional resonance and cultural identification, which in turn enhance brand connections and willingness to share content (Escalas, 2004; Van Laer et al., 2014). Accordingly, when designing social media posts, brands should prioritize narrative strategies to build cultural value through storytelling and foster broader community engagement.

This study also emphasizes the critical role of psychological distance in digital advertising strategy. When the design of images and messages aligns with audiences' perceived psychological distance, the acceptance and persuasiveness of posts can be effectively improved (Liberman & Trope, 2014). The results suggest that the distant–narrative combination is suitable for conveying abstract lifestyles and cultural meanings, whereas the close-up–informational combination is better for highlighting concrete product functions and rational value. These findings reveal a sequential process of advertising effectiveness—emotion → evaluation → purchase intention—in which affective responses serve as the foundation, evaluation acts as the mediator, and purchase intention represents the ultimate behavioral outcome. This psychological mechanism echoes Holbrook and Batra's (1987) attitude formation model and further strengthens the applicability of CLT to digital culture and social interaction. From a practical perspective, brand managers and advertising designers should flexibly adjust the pairing of visuals and text to accommodate different product attributes and audience needs, thereby formulating post strategies that balance emotional resonance with

rational judgment.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite employing a rigorous experimental design to verify the effects of image proximity and message type on social media advertising outcomes, this study has several limitations. First, the experimental stimuli were simulated Instagram posts. Although efforts were made to replicate the platform's interface and interactive symbols, participants were not fully immersed in authentic browsing and interaction contexts, which may limit external validity (Sundar, 2008). Second, the sample primarily consisted of Generation Z students aged 18–24. While this aligns with reports identifying Gen Z as the main users of social media (Pew Research Center, 2023), audiences from different age groups or cultural backgrounds may perceive psychological distance and respond to advertising differently, thus constraining the generalizability of the findings. Third, the manipulated variables were limited to image proximity and message type, without accounting for other potential influencing factors such as color schemes, layout design, or interactive features. As a result, the explanation of post styles remains somewhat constrained.

Based on these limitations, future research could extend in three directions. First, field experiments conducted on actual social media platforms or in combination with big data analytics are recommended to improve ecological validity. Second, sample selection could be broadened to include participants from diverse cultural contexts and age groups, enabling cross-cultural and cross-generational comparisons of psychological distance and advertising responses, thereby testing the universality of CLT across audiences (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Finally, future studies may incorporate additional design elements—such as color schemes, interactive mechanisms, or dynamic content—and examine how these interact with image and message factors to jointly influence advertising effectiveness. Such extensions would deepen our understanding of how social media posts, situated at the intersection of psychological, design, and cultural contexts, shape audiences' attitudes and behavioral intentions.

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