



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### IMAGE PRESENTED IN ONLINE PLATFORM INFLUENCE ONLINE FRIENDSHIP

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#### ABSTRACT

An image usually defines one's first impression. In fact, based on one's first impression, a good image can be used as a basis for the formation of lasting relationships. On the online social platforms such as Facebook, images are important in online interactions as they enable an individual to garner attention from friends and other followers and to stimulate further interactions. Individuals tend to post images that are loveable and acceptable by their online friends. Therefore, the images posted on social media promote and nurture the online interactions for online friendship.

## INTRODUCTION

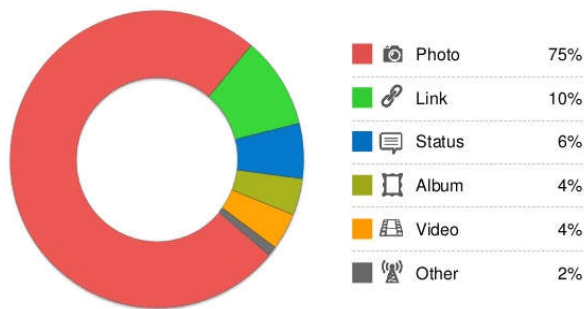
It is very rare that one gets a second chance to make a first impression. The first impression is determined by the image we exemplify (Schau & Gilly, 2003). The image we present of ourselves forms a foundation on how people perceive us. This happens to be true both in person presentation and on social media platforms. A good image can have a positive outcome as it creates a good first impression that could lead to long lasting benefits and the opposite is true. Since the image is an external representation of self, it is also possible that individuals will represent themselves selectively (Westlake, 2008). A user on social media platform agrees to exhibit self by using the platform of choice. However, they also get to choose what version of self they want to show thereby creating their characters. What we see on social media is merely a version of one's truth, which is not necessarily their authentic self (Hogan, 2010). Having noted how an image could impact on an individual's social interactions, this article will further look into the importance of image on Facebook, reasons why users choose a certain image over another and how this influences social interactions.

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### The importance of image in social media sites

There is a famous saying that says 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. This also directly applies in the case of social media such that, 'images on social media are worth a million likes' (Moreno, Swanson, Royer, & Roberts, 2011). Images speak volumes; they grab attention even before one is drawn to reading the context (Pittman & Reich, 2016). According to research, it was found out that photos were the primary content of items posted and shared on Facebook (Winston, 2013). The chart below illustrates the type of content posted by Facebook users. According to psychologists, the human brain is wired to process images at an alarming speed (Liu, Agam, Madsen, & Kreiman, 2009), therefore making images very powerful visual elements. From a user's point of view, images are quite engaging and stimulate high interactions with Facebook friends (Osterrieder, 2013). They also help in telling a story, for example, one can add a caption and can also attach a link to redirect the reader to more content once they have their attention. From the followers' point of view, images give them a general picture of the user and help them determine whether to follow them or not. Once a person sends a friend request on Facebook, the request is usually presented with a profile picture icon and is typically the first thing the receiver sees even before they click on view profile (Chalfen, 2002).



Source: (Social Bakers, 2014)

**Chart I. Primary type of content posted by Facebook brand pages**

From the review above, it is evident that images play a critical role in social media interactions. They enable a user to get the attention of friends and potential followers thus stimulate interest for further interactions. Both social media experts and psychologists have emphasized the power in an image as cited in-text.

### The image people intend to post online – and why

Social media presentation has raised interest in studies seeking an understanding of how users represent themselves online and why they do it the way they do. Identity is usually managed in online networking (Gil-Or, Levi-Belz, & Turel, 2015). When we look at images posted on Facebook, we often look at them as traces of authenticity that have captured and upheld our history; we will rarely look at these images and acknowledge the editing facets that have been applied to make the image idealized and presented in a more desirable character of the user (Chalfen, 2002). According to a research analysis done on online identity and interactions by scholars from the University of Sheffield, it was found out that contrary to the belief that people engage in the process of whole identity adoption online, individuals were actually very keen in recreating their offline self on the online platforms. Although the online self is a mirror of their offline self, they used editing facets to enhance their profiles (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

The image users present is more of a marketing tool; to represent an attractive persona that will be acceptable. The first step in using social media is learning how to navigate around but that is not enough to maintain a social media status (Miller & Arnold, 2009). In addition to learning this, it is important that an individual figures out whom they want to be in order to 'sell' themselves (Muntinga, Marjolein, & Smit, 2015). A user has the option of choosing a persona to represent on Facebook, which could either be a character that other users will love or a controversial one (Collins & Miller, 1994). Due to the desire to fit in, users will tend to use their best photos including using editing capabilities available on social media to enhance the images to bring out a more idealized character. According to Goffman, when people present themselves in public they tend to incline to certain rules and conventions that help save face (Goffman, 1990). Most of the time users will incline to a character that is lovable and accepted thus choosing their best photos and editing them to look more attractive. The editing capabilities on Facebook allow people to enhance images and present a selective self. The better version of self a user presents, the more the likes and interactions.

### The influence of the image presented on Facebook in the formation and the development of online friendship

As earlier noted, the power in visual aids, the image is a critical part of establishing and maintaining friendships on Facebook. While in the past people loved to get a hold of a good text, today's world is characterized by a population that is more responsive to images than it is to texts (Wittkower, 2014). Images are an expressive way of self-disclosure on Facebook, and as studies have shown, there is a direct correlation between self-disclosure and liking (Collins & Miller, 1994), thereby making images the best in stimulating interest in interactions among Facebook friends. Unlike most social media platforms, most Facebook users use the platform to maintain even offline friendships as much as they also intend to gain new ones (Pettijohn, LaPiene, Pettijohn, & Horting, 2012). The desire to maintain friendships stimulates interest in keeping in touch with what fellow friends are up to, and images are quite effective visual aids as they help tell a story, they capture emotions, and in addition to this, expressive images help people to remember (Kumpel, Karnoisky, & Keyilling, 2015). Research shows that the average interactions on photos are much higher compared to other elements of Facebook with over 300 million photos being uploaded on a daily basis (Bowe, 2010). Images can communicate a lot at a glance and are quite effective when it comes to establishing and maintaining online friendships. From the initiating of friendship on Facebook, users can read a lot about an individual from their profile picture and cover photo, which is enough information to make a decision on whether or not to engage in interactions with a particular individual. Further, images help in actualizing events and keeping users updated on their friends' activities making them feel like a part of their lives even though virtually.

### Conclusion

Images are very effective visual aids of communication. They add value to posts on social media networks and help engage users in deeper interactions. The editing capabilities provided by Facebook enable users to present a more attractive version of them, thus stimulating great interest among online friends. In addition to that, users can change their profile picture whenever they want thus ensuring that the feeds are current.

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