Advertising Appeals of Nike Sportswear and User Engagement

AP Research

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Introduction:

With the growth of social media, many clothing companies, particularly sportswear enterprises, have shifted their marketing online. Instagram allows companies to connect with their consumers through an online platform and branding. Many industries, including athletic apparel, utilize Instagram to market their products and collections through posts. One of these successful athletic apparel brands is Nike, known for being the largest sports brand in the world and worth close to $16 billion (Cole 2018). Nike Sportswear, an Instagram account created by Nike, highlights the activewear marketing of Nike's clothing line. Despite not being their main Instagram account, Nike Sportswear gained over 7 million followers as of 2021 according to their following count, showing the great branding it has accomplished to gain an online consumer following. Nike Sportswear focuses on many sportswear collections, but mainly highlights their sneaker marketing. Nike Sportswear utilizes three kinds of advertising appeals across these posts: emotional, rational, and social, but it is uncertain which ones work best in terms of generating the greatest consumer engagement on their Instagram.

Instagram marketing through posts is a vast concept that mostly corresponds to three sorts of appeals on those posts. The first type of appeal is emotional appeal, where the company provides emotional messages in publicity to increase the consumer's attention to the advertisement (Otamendi and Sutil Martin 2020). The second type of appeal is rational appeal, where informational advertising appeals are designed to persuade the audience through rational thought and processes (McKay-Nesbitt, Manchanda, Smith, & Huhmann, 2011; Taute, McQuitty, & Sautter, 2011). Third, social appeal emphasizes the social and influential aspects of owning a product through the use of status, recognition, and fame incentives. These appeals are known to engage consumers in different ways, and can be used together as well. This study aims to explore

the emotional, rational, and social appeal Nike Sportswear utilizes to market their sneakers on Instagram perform the best in terms of how social media consumers engage with the posts in 2021.

<u>Literature Review:</u>

There are three major papers that provide greater context as to how marketing tactics are studied based on user engagement will be analyzed in this literature review. First, "The Impact of Social Media on E-Commerce Decision Making Process" by Curzi et al studies the concept of how content can impact the way consumers decide to buy products marketed on social media. This study establishes the development of consumers' online purchasing habits and the way businesses promote their products on social media. Furthermore, they state how certain social media factors can promote brand awareness and help overcome customer's reliance to make a purchase. They conducted exploratory research by synthesizing secondary data regarding shopping behavior influence, such as brand reputation and writing reviews. The research suggested that using social media marketing effectively by understanding the aspects that work best can generate positive consumer reactions. Similarly, "Just Post It: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Nike's Instagram" by Jillian Cataldo explains how Nike utilizes "non-traditional" advertising strategies to make social statements and evoke emotions from the audience. Cataldo analyzed twelve Nike Instagram posts from 2019 and analyzed which athletes were featured, their nationality, and their gender as well. These themes were presented as categories to understand why Nike chose to market themselves as an inspirational-fitness brand instead of any other clothing company.

In the conversation of how Nike promotes themselves on Instagram, in "Nike on Instagram: Themes of Branded Content and their Engagement Power" by Carmen Balan, he

researched various themes of branded content and their ability to generate likes, comments, and views (Balan 13). They did study to see if Nike's posts in February 2017 had a significant difference in engagement power based on the type of content they uploaded. Furthermore, they limited their reach to only accounts run by Nike, including Nike Sportswear, and not accounts generated by fans or other influencers.

Although Curzi et al. and Cataldo were both able to highlight the visual aspects that can impact consumer engagement positively on social media websites, both of their scopes were too large in terms of variables. Curzi et al. focuses on all social media pages, ranging from Facebook to Twitter and Instagram, without looking at a specific brand. Cataldo's study analyzes Nike's posts on Instagram from a social aspect, however they did not factor in the other two types of appeals: emotional and rational. On the other hand, Balan's study looked at the content themes of athletic posts across seventeen verified Nike-owned accounts, one of them being Nike Sportswear. While the researcher does look at Nike Sportswear's posts and the type of branded content it posted, like values, fashion, and user experience, he does not study the visual appeals they play into creating these posts. More specifically, none of the research focuses strictly on Nike Sportswear; while Balan does conduct his study on their Instagram page, he also takes into account sixteen other Nike Instagram accounts. When focused on Nike sneaker marketing, the gap in my research is a lack of evidence on which visual appeals function best in terms of customer interaction. In terms of doing a content analysis of an athletic Instagram's products, many sources were compatible with my study subject, but they failed to recognise the specific posts where Nike Sportswear is marketing sneakers. They focused on Nike's Instagram page as a whole, while this study will focus on a specific product. Furthermore, my focus has been limited to their posts in the timeframe of 2021. While the research "The Impact of Social Media on

E-Commerce Decision Making Process" looked at the connection between businesses and customers on Instagram, Nike's marketing approach was scarcely acknowledged.

Additionally, in "Content Analysis of Athletic Brand Posts" by Pallavi and Knight, they aimed to explain the online brand marketing strategy by undertaking a content analysis of Lululemon and Nike's Instagram posts. Rather than looking at only one brand, they compared two similar brands to examine if their visual characteristics aligned and if it impacted user engagement. Similar to the previous studies, they look at the brands' page as a whole without focusing on one specific product or factor. They defined numerous significant communication concepts, such as "brand communication," "engagement," and "message appeals," all of which are crucial when discussing appeal marketing. The posts were divided into five categories: appeals, message orientation, picture content, interaction, and popularity. They then divided those five into a smaller group of twelve. These categories were counted based on how frequently they appeared in a post, indicating the popularity of various tools employed by Nike and Lululemon. My study will measure the frequency of emotional, social, and rational appeals in each post containing Nike sneakers on Nike Sportswear's Instagram account in 2021.

Methods:

Overview:

There are four main steps in my method: 1) collect Nike sneaker posts on Nike Sportswear's Instagram page, 2) categorize and record the emotional, rational, and social appeal variables of the posts, 3) record data measuring the frequency of each variable and engagement through likes and comments 4) analyze the data for correlations between advertising appeals and user engagement.

Sampling:

In this study, I analyzed Nike Sportswear's Instagram posts that contain the sneaker marketing posts. I did not aim for a specific number of posts, however I planned to analyze every post that met my stated criteria in the time from 2021. More specifically, I started reverse chronologically from December and ended with January posts. Since Instagram organizes posts by the most recent post, it was more convenient for me to organize my posts starting from the latest post. I chose to collect my posts from Nike Sportswear as the account is not only the focus of my research, but also Nike's focus page for advertising their new sportswear and sneaker collections on Instagram. I only sampled photo posts and not videos or reels to ensure my sample criteria would all be equal. Moreover, I sampled these posts solely from Nike Sportswear's Instagram account and not other Nike accounts, the explore page, or reposts as I am focusing specifically on how Nike Sportswear uses visual appeals to engage with their own followers and users. This method of sampling most closely resembles that of the study "Content Analysis of Athletic Brand Posts on Instagram," where the researchers sampled posts from Nike and Lululemon in a consecutive chronological order and included accompanying textual communication. Since these researchers analyzed two brands, they had to ensure to sample an equal amount of posts for each account. The posts from Nike Sportswear sampled in this research study were not chosen through a quota, but rather by if they fit the timeline and product criteria.

The conditions for a post from Nike Sportswear to qualify for sampling are as follows: First, the post must include Nike sneakers which can be from any model as long as it is from that product collection. Second, the post must have the sneakers as the main product or shoe being marketed, meaning no other shoes, like slippers or boots, should be the focus of that post. Extra products and shoes in the post could possibly affect the appeal factor of how sneakers are

perceived on Nike Sportswear if another shoe is contributing towards those appeals. Third, the post must come from Nike Sportswear's Instagram account. Reposts from other social media influencers, celebrities, or Nike's other accounts will count towards the sampling. While I am measuring the frequency of emotional, social, and rational appeal present in the posts, the posts do not have to have it for it to be considered for sampling. If there is no certain type of appeal, then the frequency of that appeal in the post will simply be 0.

The purpose of having numerous conditions and a very strict sampling size is to allow me to cover all parts of Nike Sportswear's sneaker posts and also to avoid any lurking variables that could skew the data. Thus, these extra steps will allow me to analyze and create highly accurate conclusions about what visual aspects increase user engagement on social media.

<u>Categorizing Visual Appeals:</u>

After I establish that a post satisfies the stated criteria, I record their frequency of advertising appeals' variables. Similar to the study referenced in sampling, I will first be identifying the appeal and their variables. The appeals I am looking for are if the variables of emotional, social, or social appeal are present in the post; if it is, then the frequency will be translated into a 1 through a codebook. Essentially, I am counting up how many times a variable is present in my sample size. In addition, I will be looking at both visual and textual aspects of the post to ensure each variable is represented accurately. In these variables, I have the categories of happiness, motivation, and confidence for emotional appeal; performance, quality, and price for rational appeal; and the amount of people (solo, duo, or group) and gender. To eliminate personal bias when analyzing the subcategories in emotional appeal, I will first be following the Cambridge Dictionary of "happiness", which is the "the feeling of being happy", which can be represented in posts through smiling and laughing. Furthermore, since motivation and confidence

can be demonstrated similarly through the visual characteristics of the posts, I have decided to use textual keywords to determine if the post is trying to motivate others to buy the sneaker or the post is displaying confidence when wearing the sneaker. For example, keywords such as "embracing" and "self-expression" illustrate confidence when wearing the sneaker. On the other hand, keywords like "impact" and "influence" signify the idea of motivating other people to wear the sneaker. Additionally, to eliminate bias in the subcategories of the rational appeal, I will be using keywords in the caption to determine if advertising quality characteristics are present in the post. For example, keywords such as "shine" and "comfort" highlight the quality aspects of the sneaker. Depending on which subcategory is present, it will be translated into a 1 or 0 through the codebook.

Gathering "engagement" data:

After I recorded which appeals and subcategories each post fell into for the advertising appeals, I recorded data about the posts' perceived "engagement" through the likes and comments of each one. First, I recorded the like count of each post. The main reason to like a post marketing a certain product is because users find the post appealing to them. By looking at posts from one brand, one can assume that the majority of users are liking the post because they found a visual aspect of the post appealing to them. Therefore, you can use likes to measure how certain posts can increase user engagement. Since all the posts are from the same brand, I compared posts that had higher likes and which visual appeals were more frequent in them to those that had lower likes and which visual appeals were used in those posts.

Second, I also recorded the amount of comments on each post. Rather than looking at certain signal words or phrases in the comments, I chose to analyze the amount of comments in each post because it is a way to measure user engagement. Whether the comments were negative

or positive, the Instagram user still interacted with the post, showing an increase in user engagement. The purpose of my research is to explore which visual appeals can increase user engagement rather than appeal, so it is not necessary to see if the comments were positive or negative. Thus, you can use comments to measure how a post can increase user engagement through visual appeals.

Data Analysis Overview:

After gathering my qualitative data, which are the advertising appeal variables of the posts, I will translate them into frequencies in order to get my quantitative data. If the category is present, it will be translated into a "1" for every time it is frequent. If it is not present, it will be translated into a "0". After I have my quantitative data, I will set up ratios for the appeals and user engagement. The ratio for the appeal will be (frequency of variable/number of total posts), and it will be my x-axis. The ratio for the user engagement will be (number of likes + number of comments)/(frequency amount of characteristic), and that will be my y-axis. Afterwards, I will run linear regression tests and create the x and y-axis graphs for each advertising appeal. When I finish creating my scatterplots, Google Spreadsheets will run the regression analysis. The calculated r-value, depending on if it is closer to 1 or -1, will determine if there is a correlation between a certain advertising appeal and the user engagement.

Data & Analysis:

Statistical Test:

Seeing as how the user engagement data and advertising variables are quantitative, I will be using a linear regression to examine the correlation between those two data sets. A linear regression test is used to predict how strong the relationship is between the variable on the x and y-axis. In this case, a linear regression test would show how strong the correlation is between the

user engagement ratio on the y-axis to the frequency of characteristic on the x-axis. In order to run the regression analysis, I will have to create scatter plots for each appeal and their corresponding user engagement ratios. When plotted on to Google Spreadsheet, a generated R^2 value will be shown. Based on the r-value, if it is closer to -1 or 1, then there is a stronger correlation between the variables. If it is closer to 0, then there is an extremely weak correlation. The image below shows my raw data collection of the sampled posts.

Date of post	Performance / quality / price (rational)	Amount of people (social)	Gender (social)	Confidence, motivation, happiness	# of likes	# of comments
December 8, 2021	Quality	Group	Female & Male	Happiness	32,333	65
November 29, 2021	Quality	Solo	Female	Confidence	13,090	29
November 19, 2021	Performance	Solo	Female	Motivation	11,426	30
November 12, 2021	Quality	Solo	Male	Motivation	11,900	48
November 10, 2021	Quality	Duo	Female & Male	Confidence	23,983	181
November 8, 2021	Performance	Duo	Female & Male	Happiness	7,094	51
November 4, 2021	Quality	Solo	Male	Confidence	17,703	99
November 2, 2021	Performance	Solo	Female	Confidence	27,947	1,013
October 20, 2021	Performance	Solo	Female	Confidence	17,283	146
October 12, 2021	Performance	Group	Female	Motivation	17,233	46
October 6, 2021	Performance	Solo	Male	Confidence	37,459	182
September 10, 2021	Performance	Group	Female	Motivation	9,295	64
September 9, 2021	Quality	Group	Female	Confidence	34,117	276
September 7, 2021	Quality	Duo	Male	Confidence	22,374	51
September 3, 2021	Quality	Solo	Female	Motivation	21,345	136
September 2, 2021	Performance	Solo	Female	Happiness	6,631	25
August 11, 2021	Quality	Group	Female & Male	Motivation	98,482	190
August 7, 2021	Performance	Group	Female & Male	Motivation	55,438	169
August 5, 2021	Quality	Duo	Female & Male	Confidence	28,222	94
August 4, 2021	Performance	Solo	Male	Happiness	32,335	63
August 3, 2021	Performance	Solo	Female	Motivation	28,888	58
July 31, 2021	Quality	Group	Female	Happiness	13,700	68
July 15, 2021	Quality	Solo	Female	Motivation	40085	133
July 2, 2021	Performance	Solo	Female	Motivation	18044	54
June 29, 2021	Quality	Solo	Female & Male	Motivation	64,814	237
May 1, 2021	Quality	Duo	Female & Male	Motivation	25281	182
April 26, 2021	Performance	Solo	Female	Motivation	21731	131
March 11, 2021	Perforamnce	Solo	Female	Motivation	72654	197
March 4, 2021	Quality	Solo	Male	Confidence	40087	292

The data collection organizes the posts' reverse chronological order with the data, appeal, and user engagement specified. There are a total of 29 posts in my data set. Each appeal is measured by its sub variables based on if the characteristic is present in the post. Afterwards, the frequency of each characteristic is totaled and matched with their respective user engagement ratios for generating the scatter plots; this ratio is shown in the image below.

| Rational	Social	Social	Emotional
Quality: 15. Ratio: 32639.8	Group: 7. Ratio: 37,353.7143	Male: 6. Ratio: 27,098.833	Motivation: 14. Ratio: 35592.21
Performance: 14. Ratio: 26,120.5	Solo: 17. Ratio: 27,833.8824	Female: 15. Ratio: 23725	Happiness: 5. Ratio: 18473
Price: 0. Ratio: 0	Duo: 5. Ratio: Ratio: 21,502.5	Female & Male: 8 Ratio: 42,102	Confidence: 10. Ratio: 26462.8

<u>Results:</u>

The four scatter plots below show the linear regression between each of the advertising appeals. Furthermore, a trendline is drawn from the points to find the line of best fit. Since Google Spreadsheets generates the R^2 value, taking the square root will give me the r-value.
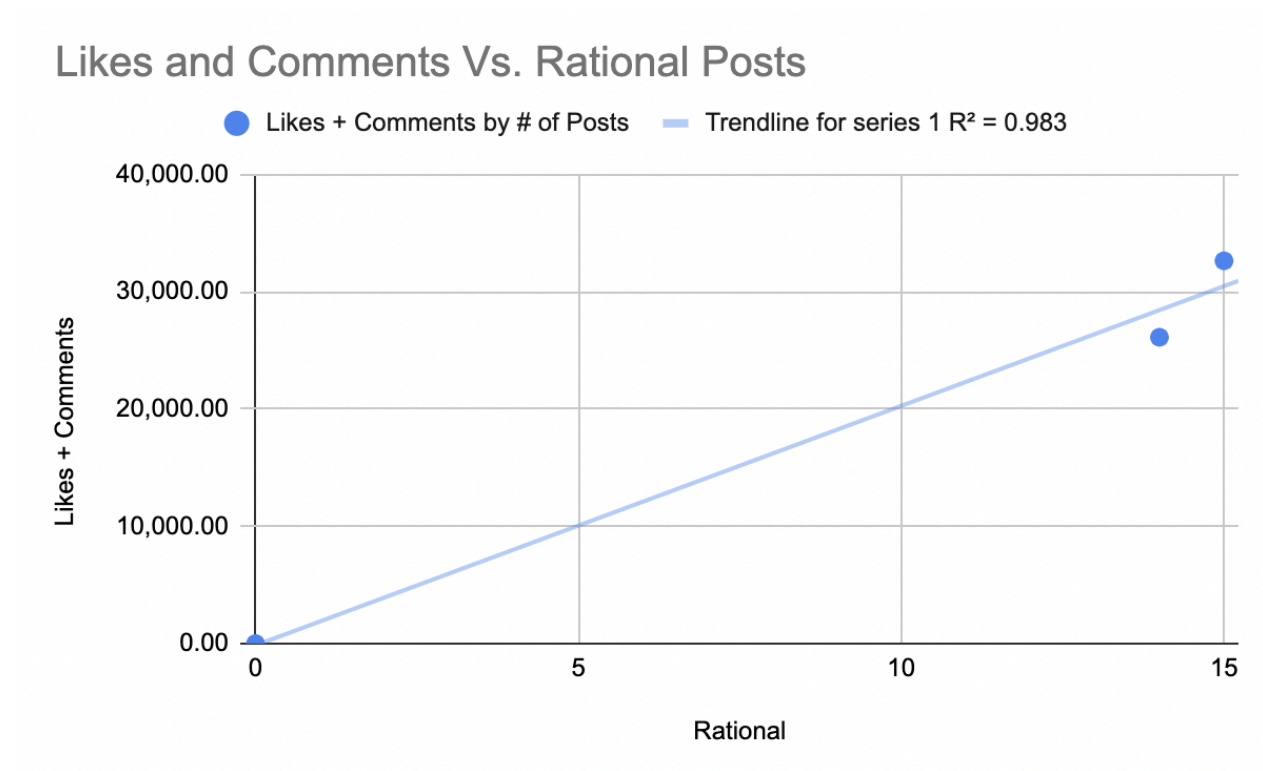

This is the scatter plot for Nike Sportswear's posts containing rational appeal characteristics compared to the likes and comments of their respective posts. The r-value is .991 after taking the square root. Since .991 is extremely close to 1, it can be interpreted that there is possibly a high correlation between those rational appeal posts and the user engagement.

Likes and Comments Vs. Social(# of People) Posts

● Likes + Comments by # of Posts ▬ Trendline for Likes and Comments to Frequency Ratio R² = 0.002
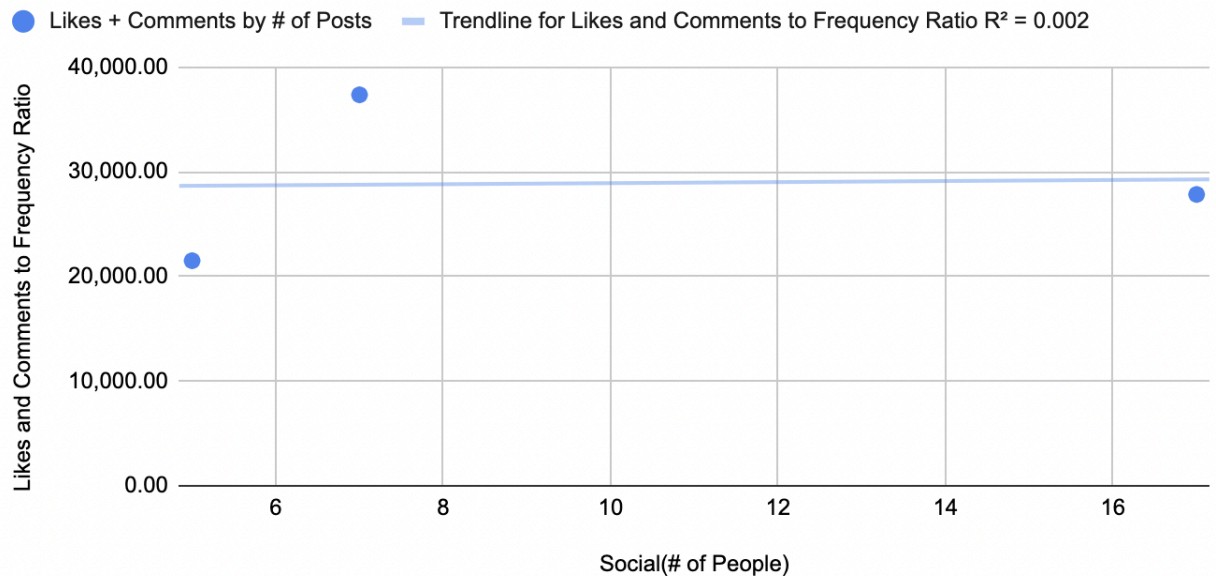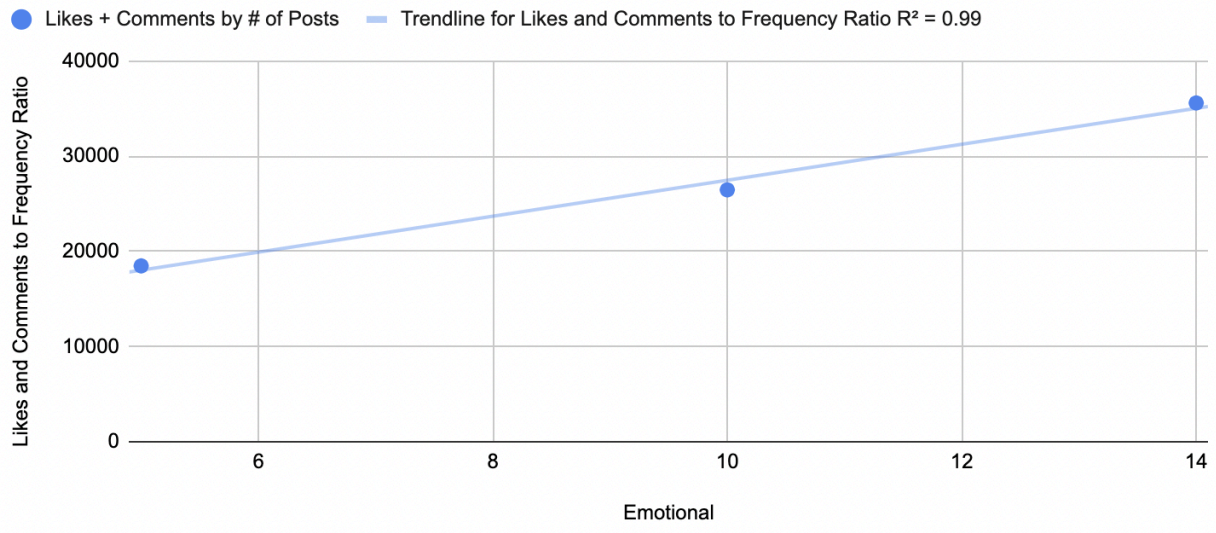

Next, this is the scatter plot for the social appeal based on the amount of people in the

post. The r-value is .0447, therefore it is not closer to -1 or 1. Instead, it is closer to 0. Since the

r-value is low, it is difficult to claim or interpret that the social appeal based on the number of

people in a post and user engagement have a correlation.

Likes and Comments Vs. Social (Gender) Posts
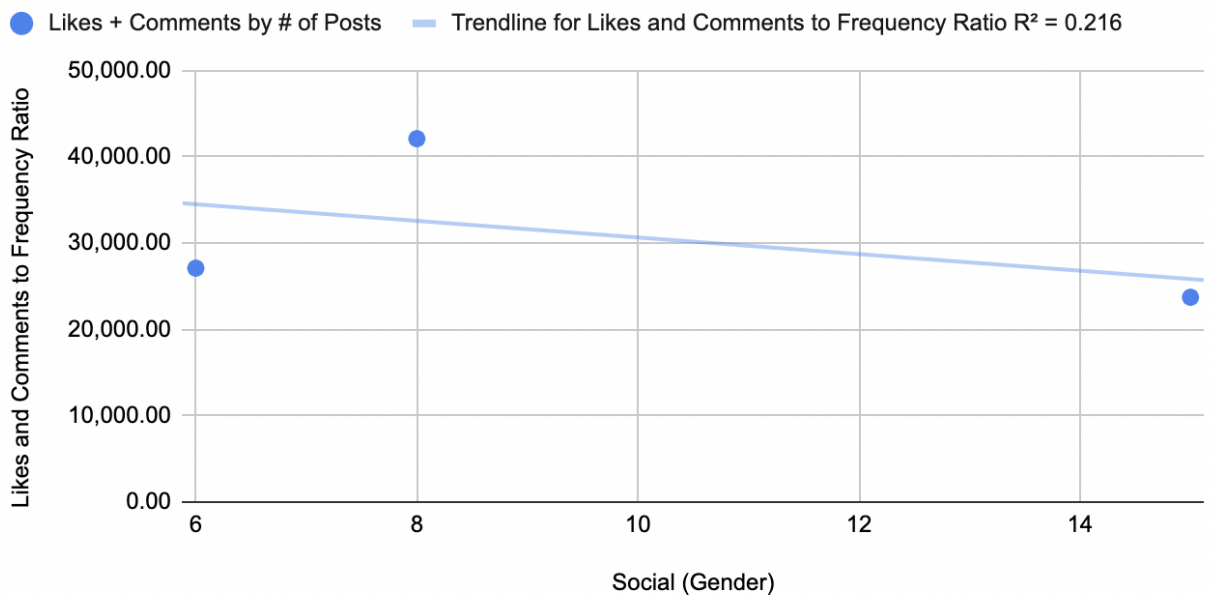
In addition to social appeal, this is the scatter plot based on the gender variable of social appeal. The r-value is -.465, indicating a negative trendline. Based on the negative relationship, it can be inferred that as the more posts containing social gender appeal, the user engagement ratio decreases. Moreover, since the r-value is not close to -1 or 1, then there is not a strong correlation between those two variables.

Likes and Comments Vs. Emotional Posts

● Likes + Comments by # of Posts ▬ Trendline for Likes and Comments to Frequency Ratio R² = 0.99

Lastly, this is the scatter plot for emotional appeal. The r-value after taking the square root is .999, indicating that it is extremely close to 1. Based on the r-value, it can be inferred that posts with emotional appeal have a strong correlation to generating user engagement. This r-value is the highest out of all the scatter plots.

Based on the 4 graphs, I analyzed that emotional and rational appeal had the strongest correlation with user engagement since they had the highest r-value. Both social appeal variables had the weakest correlation with user engagement, as they had the r-value closest to 0.

Conclusion:

Prior to data collection and analysis, I initially hypothesized that rational and social appeal would have the greatest impact on user engagement for Nike Sportswear's sneaker marketing posts, as they focus more on a product's quality and reputation. From the analysis of the four scatter plots, I found that rational and emotional appeal actually had the greatest correlation, which disproved my initial hypothesis. In fact, emotional appeal had the greatest correlation at a r-value of .999, indicating an extremely strong correlation between emotional appeal and user engagement.

Furthermore, it was intriguing to see that there was a negative trendline for the social appeal focusing on gender characteristics. With a negative trendline, there is actually a negative relationship between the gender variables and user engagement. For example, when more gender variables are used in the post, user engagement can decrease. Additionally, social appeal had the lowest correlation and r-value in my study, which disproved my hypothesis. Therefore, to a certain extent, rational and emotional appeals attract more Instagram user engagement compared to social appeal for Nike Sportswear's sneaker marketing.

Limitations:

While these conclusions and analyses reflect on my data, there are some limitations within my data collection process. To begin, I had a relatively small sample size at 29 posts. Due to my specific scope on sneaker marketing for Nike Sportswear, I had to ensure my criteria for sampling posts would be followed throughout. Therefore, I had to disregard many posts that did not have Nike sneakers as the main product being marketed. Furthermore, I was unable to avoid lurking variables, such as user bias and algorithms on Nike Sportswear's page. Due to the Instagram algorithm, some posts may show up on a user's feed while others do not, indicating that some posts may have more exposure and user engagement naturally than others.

Future Research & Implications:

While this study focuses on Nike Sportswear's sneaker marketing on Instagram in 2021, there are still many gaps in the athletic social media scope that can be explored by future researchers. For those who wish to continue this research, I recommend looking into gaps that have not been addressed yet, such as smaller brands. While a lot of research has been conducted on popular athletic Instagram pages as a whole, I suggest narrowing the scope on a specific product other than sneakers. Furthermore, with this research topic, it is important to define the

research question and scope clearly as to what the study is planning on exploring. As Instagram is expanding their post genre I also suggest widen the scope to include analyzing videos and reels posted on Instagram as a greater sample size will allow for a larger set of sample data. Lastly, I would suggest comparing two brands together instead of focusing on one as it could also reveal information about if all companies market and advertise themselves in the same way.

Overall, the research I have conducted also plays a significant role in the social media marketing industry with its many implications. The first being that athletic apparels wanting to market on Instagram now know to apply productive appeals on their posts to obtain the most user engagement on their posts. By doing this strategy, these athletic companies will see an increase in viewership in their products and thus leading to increased sales for them. Furthermore, this research's greatest implication is that it highlights the fact that social media marketing and advertising is still a fairly new field and not much knowledge is known about it. With my research and future works similar to this study, the social media advertising industry can understand the use of advertising appeals to increase user engagement.

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