The power of the image: engaging, teaching, communicating
dos & dont’s
Social media is visual

As discussed in previous resources, images are processed more quickly than text, and we retain 80% of what we see compared to 20% of what we read.

On social media, there has been a shift in recent years towards using visuals. This superseded a previous trend towards shorter posts as a result of the growing impatience of users, and the growing need for instant information.

This presentation contains tips on how to get the most out of using images in social media.

“One picture is worth a thousand words” can never become a cliché. This AFP picture eloquently describes the feelings of this woman after crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey to Lesbos, and about thousands of other refugees who are risking their lives to arrive in Europe.

(credit: Aris Messinis)
Facts: How do images increase engagement?

Twitter

In 2013, Twitter acknowledged the importance of pictures by showing them by default in the newsfeed. An experiment by Buffer, a company that creates a client to manage social network accounts, showed that:

1. Tweets with images received more clicks than those without
2. Tweets with images received 89% more favorites (now called ‘likes’)
3. Tweets with images received 150% more retweets
Facebook’s switch to Timeline placed a bigger emphasis on photos. The larger size of photos within and the big cover photo make images an important draw for users attention.

In 2014, Research by Socialbakers showed that photos are the main type of content posted on Facebook pages (75% of total content), and that photos receive the highest interaction from Facebook users (87%).
The rise of image-based social networks

Pinterest

The proven power of the image on social media resulted in the creation of image-based networks and applications: the most popular among them are Instagram and Pinterest.

1. Pinterest is full of ideas for fashion, decorating, and recipes; many companies in these industries have a strong presence here.

2. The most popular age groups on are 18-29 and 30-49, according to Pew Research Center.

3. 7% of Pinterest users interact with food related content.

4. 84% of all users are women.

5. Over 80% of pins (shared images) are repins.
Instagram

Instagram users share their daily lives through photos. The use of filters and tags are integral to how photos are presented on this platform.

1. In June 2016, Instagram announced it has more than 500 million users, at least 300 million of whom use it every single day

2. More than 95 million photos and videos shared per day each day

3. The daily posts pull in 1.2 billion likes per day

4. The biggest percentage of Instagram users are aged 18-29

5. There is a more balanced male-female presence, according to Pew Research Center.
What makes a good photo?

a. Choose high resolution photos when possible

In order to see high response rates on all social networks, you must share good quality photos. That does not mean you always need professional photographers to take photos for your social media networks, but when you take a photo or choose one from the internet, try to meet some technical metrics.

A high-res photo is more attractive and appealing: always choose a high resolution image over a lower resolution one.

Scaling down a large image doesn’t compromise its quality, whereas scaling up a low resolution image will cause distortion; keep this in mind when altering images to fit different platforms. In other resources in this week you will be introduced to tools that help you resize your photo.

If you are using a camera, make sure it is set to its highest resolution and image quality; if you are looking for pictures online, seek out high resolution ones.
b. Choose photos with strong center of interest

The subject should dominate the image. This will make sure the viewer focuses on the subject and not on other elements. In this photo the main subject takes central position and is in focus.

Caption: Forced to grow up too soon in Lebanon: Mahmoud
Image credit: UNHCR/S. Baldwin.
c. Place your subject off-center

Rather than placing your main subject in the middle of the frame, place it to one side and let the remainder of the image be a background that doesn’t distract from the subject.

To compose your frame, try applying the ‘rule of thirds’: mentally divide the image into thirds both horizontally and vertically, and placing the important elements either along these lines, or where the lines intersect.

This rule helps you produce better balanced and engaging photos, but it should not be followed blindly. Take it as a guideline; sometimes you will break this to have a better image.

The rule of thirds can also give space to add text to your pictures.

Image credit: School Of Digital Photography.
d. Balance the photo elements

Applying the rule of thirds by placing your main subject to one side sometimes leaves a void in the picture.

Balance the ‘weight’ of your subject by including another object of lesser importance to fill the space or by placing your subject in a relevant and interesting background.

Image credit: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency
e. Make your subject look at the camera

When taking a picture of someone to use it in a personal story, ask them to look at the camera.

Direct eye contact can be as engaging in a picture as it is in real life, as you can see in this picture posted on the @MSF_Iraq Twitter account.

Sulav, #IDP from Bashiqa talks about her work as a midwife in @MSF new maternity clinic in Tal Maraq #Iraq bit.ly/2iXcVRh
f. Crop the image when necessary

It can be effective to crop your image:

1. To focus on the main subject
2. To zoom in on a subject
3. To improve the overall composition
4. To remove distracting elements
5. To correct framing mistakes

The iconic photo of Che Guevara taken by Alberto Korda in 1960 was cropped to focus on his facial expressions.
g. Be careful while cropping

Badly cropped images can be less appealing but can also give a wrong impression and even a wrong message.

This image is a good example of how cropping can change the perception of a photo.

The original picture, of U.S. Marines helping an Iraqi soldier with water, was taken by AP Japanese photographer Itsuo Inouye.

The original caption of the photo reads:

U.S. Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit help an Iraqi soldier with water from a canteen in southern Iraq, on Friday, March 21, 2003. Some 200 Iraqi soldiers surrendered to the U.S. 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit just after an hour after it crossed the border into Iraq from northern Kuwait.
What are the characteristics of engaging photos on social media?

Not only must you share high-quality photos, you must also share photos that interest your target audience and make them stop scrolling down and engage with them. What are the qualities of engaging photos on social media?

a. They are relevant and consistent

Content with relevant images gets more views. If you are sharing a photo as a separate type of content, it should be relevant to your work and consistent with the content you usually share.

This screenshot of the NewInternationalist feed on Instagram shows its consistency in the types, style, and context of its images.
b. They complement a story or information

In his book *My Name is Red*, Orhan Pamuk says: “An illustration that does not complement a story, in the end, will become but a false idol. Since we cannot possibly believe in an absent story, we will naturally begin believing in the picture itself.”

This piece of information tweeted by Oxfam was accompanied by a relevant photo that didn’t need to be captioned because it played a role of an illustration that complements a text.
c. They evoke an emotion

As stated in previous resources, a content that evokes an emotion is more engaging. Emotions can be joy, hope, inspiration as well as compassion and pathos.

Consider the ethical implications of the photos your choose: what statements are you making about your subject? If you share photos about refugees, do they look like victims, or like people?

Image Credit: Alba Soler
d. They tell a story

Visual storytelling is incredibly powerful. Sharing photos that tell a story, usually a personal story, will lead to increased engagement.

In this tweet from @RFERL, the story is apparent without reading the caption - but together they give a more complete message.
e. They are informative

Since people love pictures, but love to know also even if they are lazy on social media. You can simply insert information in a picture and share it.

Charts and infographics are another type of images which prompt engagement. You don’t need to be an expert at data visualization to create engaging charts and infographics for social media. There are free online tools such as the chart maker Beam to create infographics.
f. They are creative

Dare to be creative in your images as long as you stay relevant.

This example from UNHCR Twitter account is a photo taken to illustrate the quote of a stateless person who calls himself “a shadow” and is not able to follow a road. The picture picks up on his metaphor and visualises it.

“I don’t feel physical – this is statelessness. I know the road but I am not able to follow it. I am just a shadow.”

Ned, 24 in Italy
Common types of images on social media

Since images are a very engaging tool on social media, they are used in different forms:

1. As a complementary element with content such as text or a link with a headline
2. As a content on their own with a caption or a quote from the person pictured
3. As a support element for a quote, a piece of information, or a call to action

a. A picture with a link and a headline:

![Example image](https://example.com/image.png)

Did you know @MSF employ anthropologists? Cross-cultural understanding is integral to our work. Read more from Bea: [bit.ly/2fJWiKZ](https://bit.ly/2fJWiKZ)
b. A picture with a quote

In this example the IFRC use a quote from their Secretary General Elhadj As Sy, set over an image related to their work to bring an end of year message to their Twitter followers.

There are free and easy tools online (such as Pablo) to help you add quotes to your images.
c. A picture with a call to action:

Here is an example of a call to action added to a picture. A Greenpeace campaign to defend the Amazon Reef from the environmental consequences of oil exploration.
Image requirements on different networks

Each social network has a different layout that requires different image sizes.

The current social media image sizes (width by height) for the most popular social networks are:

**Twitter**
Profile picture: 400px x 400px
Cover image: 1500px x 500px
Shared content image: 1024px x 512px

**Google +**
Profile picture: 250px x 250px
Cover image: 1080px x 608px
Shared content image: 506px x 284px

**Instagram**
Profile picture: 110px x 110px
Cover image: Pulls random images from your posts
Shared content image: 640px x 640px

**Facebook**
Profile picture: 180px x 180px
Cover image: 851px x 315px
Shared content image (timeline): 1200px x 900px
Shared content image (newsfeed): 1200px x 1200px

**Pinterest**
Profile picture: 165px X 165px
Cover image: 215px x 145px
Shared content image: 735px x unlimited (Expanded Pin)
Quick tips: Dos

1. Only post images that you have created or that you have a right to publish.

2. Mix up different types of images: photos alone, photos with quotes, photos with figures, banners, infographics, etc.

3. Take impromptu photos on your smartphone and post them in real time.

4. Post “Caption This” photos: post a picture on your page and ask fans to offer their caption for it (be prepared to moderate any submissions).
Quick tips: Don’t’s

1. Don’t let long periods of time pass without posting anything.

2. Don’t post photos in a row (unless they are part of a single story), space them out.

3. Don’t overuse hashtags: your goal is to have real followers and create a real loyal community of people who are interested in what you’re posting.

4. Don’t put too many words in a picture.

5. Don’t put text over faces, use space in the picture that doesn’t contain important elements.
Conclusions

- Social media is all about visuals and especially pictures

- An engaging photo on social media can be emotional, a storyteller, inspirational, made to complement a story, informative

- You can say a lot in one picture: dare to use it as an independent type of content

- Images can be used with captions, links, headlines, text, quotations or a calls-to-action

- You don’t need to be an expert in photography to take good photos or choose engaging ones, the basics are easy to learn

- Be aware that the image requirements of each social network are unique

- A good photo is high resolution, clear, well-composed, and gives special care to its subject
In the next resource we will be looking at the power of videos.