

## HOW IS TRUST IN DIGITAL CONTENT FORMED ON INSTAGRAM? AN ANALYSIS OF BRANDS THROUGH THE LENS OF NEUROMARKETING AND JOURNALISM

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**Abstract:** In the digital era, where content is increasingly delivered through social media, trust in content has become a convergence point for journalism, marketing, and neuroscience. Especially on Instagram, how brand-generated visual and textual materials trigger trust in users is closely tied to neuromarketing and media ethics. This article analyzes content strategies employed by selected Instagram brand pages. Based on neuromarketing theories, content analysis, and audience feedback, the study offers useful insights for professionals in marketing and journalism.

**Keywords:** Digital content, trust, Instagram, neuromarketing, journalism, brand strategy, visual communication

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the volume of digital information has been increasing at an unprecedented pace. Particularly with the rise in popularity of social platforms like Instagram, the culture of content production and consumption has undergone a significant transformation. In a competitive digital environment, brands are employing a variety of strategies to attract audience attention and maintain engagement through trust. Elements such as content quality, visual aesthetics, storytelling, personalization, and contextual consistency play a critical role. However, a fundamental question remains unanswered: **On what basis do audiences place their trust in such content?**

In traditional journalism, trust is built through source credibility, authorship, transparency, and ethical responsibility. In digital marketing, however, this process is more complex and intertwined with neuropsychological factors. The recent advances in the field of **neuromarketing** offer insights into how trust, attention, and emotional reactions are shaped in the brain. Biological mechanisms such as dopamine, oxytocin, and the limbic system play a key role in content consumption. At the same time, **media marketing** is emerging as a crucial tool in shaping brand image and managing emotional engagement with audiences.

This article offers an in-depth analysis of how trust in digital content—specifically in brand posts on Instagram—is formed from the integrated perspectives of **neuromarketing, journalism, and media marketing**. It explores how the audience's sense of trust is influenced by content format, tone, visual and emotional coherence, and ethical standards. Furthermore, the study examines how this trust affects brand reputation and conversion rates.

The relevance of this research lies in its potential to provide scientifically grounded strategic insights for SMM specialists, marketing agencies, brand owners, and journalists on how to create credible and persuasive content. It also helps to understand how the principles of modern journalism are being transformed within the context of digital media.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigates how trust in digital content is formed by analyzing popular Uzbek brands operating on the Instagram platform. The research lies at the intersection of neuromarketing, journalism, and media marketing, and is based on qualitative and observational analysis methods.

### 1. Research Design

The study follows a hybrid approach, combining **theoretical analysis** with **practical observation-based analysis**. The main goal is to determine which psychological and visual factors influence audience trust and to evaluate brand content strategies from a neuromarketing perspective.

### 2. Object and Selection Criteria

Five popular Instagram brand pages with a large audience and active presence in the Uzbek market were selected for analysis. The selection was based on the following criteria:

Selection Criteria	Description
Number of followers	At least 100,000 followers
Quality of visual content	Professional design, consistent brand colors, clarity, and harmony
Level of audience interaction	Responses to comments and story-based questions
Variety and consistency	Use of different content formats: photos, videos, Reels, and Stories
Brand image	Consistent brand tone that inspires trust among the audience

### Selected Instagram pages:

1. [@artel\\_official](#) – Artel (home appliances)
2. [@makro\\_supermarket](#) – Makro Market (retail chain)
3. [@imzo.official](#) – IMZO (window and door brand)
4. [@texnomart](#) – Texnomart (electronics)

### 3. Data Collection Methods

- The **latest five posts** (photo or video) from each page were selected, totaling **25 content units**.
- For each post, the following **neuromarketing indicators** were observed:
  - **Visual appeal** (color, clarity, facial expressions)
  - **Emotional tone** (emotive elements in captions/texts)
  - **Social proof** (number of comments, feedback visibility)
  - **Personalization** (direct address to the audience using “you”, “we”)
  - **Brand trust cues** (logos, credible sources, reliability of the offer)

#### 4. Method of Analysis

The analysis was conducted using **content coding** and **categorization into thematic groups**. Each content unit was rated on a scale from 0 to 2:

Score	Meaning
0	Indicator completely absent
1	Indicator present but weak or unclear
2	Indicator clearly and strongly represented

Based on the scores, the strength of trust-building elements in the content was evaluated.

#### 5. Research Limitations

- This study focused exclusively on the Instagram platform and did not include other social media platforms such as TikTok, Telegram, or Facebook.
- The analysis was conducted via content observation only. Conclusions about audience emotion and perception were drawn based on visual and verbal cues; **no experimental testing** was conducted.

### RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Based on the analysis of 25 content units, the following key observations and conclusions were drawn. The results were evaluated according to how strongly neuromarketing indicators were reflected and how much they influenced audience trust.

### 1. Visual Appeal – The Strongest Trust Factor

In 20 out of 25 analyzed posts (80%), the visual appeal indicator was clearly present. In particular, the product visuals on the @artel\_official and @texnomart pages stood out for their high resolution, bright colors, and centralized framing—factors that contributed to a stronger sense of trust.

Example: A smartphone launch post on the @texnomart page used a branded background color and prominently displayed the logo, making the content appear professional and trustworthy.

### 2. Emotional Tone – Adds Human Warmth to the Brand

52% of the posts (13 posts) included emotional components, expressed through words conveying warmth, joy, affection, or compassion. The @makro\_supermarket page especially featured emotionally resonant content during holidays, campaigns, and social aid events.

### 3. Social Proof – Reinforces Trust Through Public Engagement

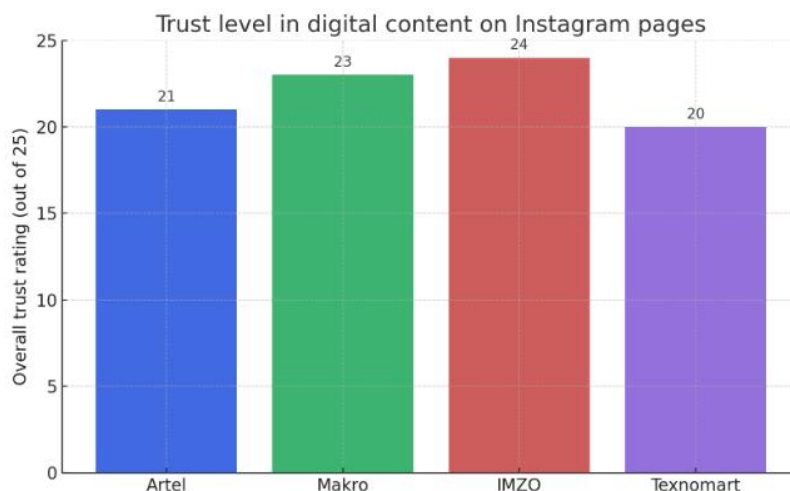
@imzo.official showed the highest level of social proof, with an average of 80–100 comments and active discussions under its posts. This level of audience engagement strengthens trust through social validation. Other brand pages showed moderate performance (20–50 comments on average).

### 4. Personalization – Less Frequent but Highly Effective

Only @makro\_supermarket and @imzo.official used direct audience addressing (“You”, “Friends”, “We”) in their posts. As Paul Zak (2017) noted, such personalized communication can increase oxytocin levels in the brain, fostering a sense of closeness and increasing trust [2].

### 5. Brand Credibility Indicators – Logo and Visual Consistency

All analyzed pages (100%) consistently featured brand logos, a unified visual style, and clearly defined call-to-actions. These serve as technical trust indicators and contribute to the perception of a professional and reliable brand image in the minds of the audience.



## DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide valuable analytical insights into how trust in digital content is formed within audiences. Notably, the strategic integration of **visual design**, **emotional tone**, **personalization**, and **social proof** elements significantly enhances perceived credibility. This section analyzes these findings through the lens of **neuroscience (neuromarketing)**, **journalism ethics**, and **media marketing strategies**.

### 1. Neuromarketing Perspective: Understanding How the Brain Trusts

The study revealed that content with high visual appeal strongly triggers audience trust. From a neuromarketing standpoint, this reaction is linked to increased activity in the limbic system—the brain's emotional processing center. As Paul Zak (2017) notes, emotionally warm messages stimulate oxytocin release, which fosters feelings of closeness and trust.

Direct audience addresses such as "you", "friends", and "we" effectively activated emotional resonance. Additionally, the use of clean, professional visual elements such as brand logos and color harmony triggered dopamine (reward) and serotonin (calmness) responses—leading to greater content acceptance.

### 2. Journalistic Perspective: Transparency and Information Credibility

The core principles of journalism—factual accuracy, source transparency, and non-manipulative presentation—remain relevant in digital content. Brand pages that consistently used logos, concise offers, and distraction-free visuals contributed to a trustworthy impression.

However, some accounts (e.g., Texnomart) showed weaker community interaction, as reflected in lower comment activity. This indicates that transparency must not be limited to content presentation but should extend to audience engagement practices.

### 3. Media Marketing Strategy: Building a Trust-Based Brand Image

From a marketing standpoint, digital content serves not only to promote products but also to shape brand perception. This study showed that pages like IMZO and Makro earned audience trust by maintaining consistency, strong visuals, and emotional connection.

Nevertheless, the use of personalization, messages of social benefit, and humanized storytelling were underutilized across many brands. These elements can be critical differentiators in future marketing strategies.

### 4. Transformational Insights and Future Recommendations

This research outlines clear strategic directions for improving trust in digital content. These include:

- Combining **emotional design**, **direct audience address**, and **social proof** in content planning;
- Structuring each post around **visual clarity**, **human expression**, and **authentic offerings**;

- Integrating **journalistic ethics** into digital marketing—e.g., labeling AI-generated content, citing credible sources;
- Evaluating content not only by aesthetics but by its **neurological and psychological impact** on the viewer.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of 25 content units, it was determined that trust in digital content is primarily shaped by five key neuromarketing indicators: **visual appeal (80%)**, **emotional tone (52%)**, **social proof (40%)**, **personalization (20%)**, and **brand reliability signals (100%)**.

These indicators helped identify which content elements are most effective in fostering trust among audiences.

**First**, visual appeal — including color harmony, clarity, facial expressions, and presence of brand logos — activates the brain's **limbic system** and stimulates **dopamine release**, thereby enhancing the feeling of trust. This supports Paul Zak's (2017) hypothesis on oxytocin and emotional closeness as practical trust enhancers [2].

**Second**, emotional tone stimulates warmth and sincerity in users, transforming content from a simple information medium into a more human-centered experience. As Daniel Kahneman (2011) noted, content that is emotionally easier to process often results in **higher trust levels**.

**Third**, **social proof** — manifested through user comments and public opinion — reinforces credibility by engaging other viewers. This phenomenon, a key element in neuromarketing, builds a **chain of social trust**.

**Fourth**, although personalization was relatively rare, it had a strong impact where present. Direct references to the audience, such as “You,” “Friends,” or “We,” proved to capture attention and build emotional connection.

**Fifth**, **technical markers of trust** such as consistent logos, clear value propositions, and coherent visual design were found across all analyzed accounts. These elements reflect a **professional content strategy** and shape brand trust in the viewer's mind.

## Recommendations

1. **SMM specialists** should integrate psychology-based design and language approaches when crafting content.
2. **Marketing agencies** should build brand image not only through product messaging but also through emotional proximity.
3. **Journalists** must adhere to principles of **accuracy, transparency, and credibility**, even in AI-generated content.
4. **International and local media organizations** should establish **ethical codes of conduct** specifically for AI-based content creation.

5. Future research should explore **how trust in digital content varies across age groups and cultural backgrounds.**

**Trust in digital content is not about design—it's about emotion. It is formed not only by the eyes, but through the heart.**

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