



XXII SIM Conference 2025
***The Marketing-Innovation Nexus:
Past Insights for Future Challenges***

Università degli Studi di Napoli "Parthenope"
Dipartimento di Studi Aziendali e Quantitativi
10-12 settembre 2025

PROCEEDINGS

Editors: Maria Rosaria Napolitano, Michele Simoni, Paola Signori, Tindara Abbate



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Introduzione alla Conferenza

La Società Italiana Marketing (SIM) rappresenta, dal 2002, la principale comunità accademica italiana dedicata allo sviluppo e alla diffusione degli studi di marketing. La SIM promuove la collaborazione scientifica tra studiosi, istituzioni e imprese, favorendo il dialogo interdisciplinare e il trasferimento di conoscenze verso il sistema economico e sociale. Attraverso conferenze, pubblicazioni e gruppi di ricerca, la SIM contribuisce alla crescita culturale e metodologica del marketing come disciplina e come pratica manageriale.

La SIM Conference è la conferenza annuale della Società Italiana Marketing e rappresenta il più importante momento di incontro della comunità scientifica nazionale nell'area del marketing. Ogni anno, studiosi, ricercatori e professionisti si confrontano sui temi emergenti della disciplina, condividendo evidenze empiriche, prospettive teoriche e implicazioni manageriali. La conferenza offre un contesto stimolante per il dibattito accademico, la creazione di reti collaborative e lo sviluppo di progettualità di ricerca.

La XXII edizione svoltasi nel 2025 è stata dedicata al rapporto tra marketing e innovazione, un legame che ha profondamente influenzato l'evoluzione dei mercati e delle strategie aziendali. Il tema *“The Marketing-Innovation Nexus. Past Insights for Future Challenges”* ha invitato a riflettere su come le intuizioni del passato possano guidare la gestione di sfide future caratterizzate da trasformazioni tecnologiche, digitalizzazione, sostenibilità e nuovi modelli di consumo. L'obiettivo era favorire un dialogo critico capace di integrare le radici storiche della disciplina con i più recenti sviluppi concettuali e applicativi, in modo da delineare scenari di ricerca e pratiche manageriali orientate all'innovazione responsabile e al valore per la società.

Il Presidente SIM, Prof. Daniele Dalli, afferma:

“Ci siamo specializzati sia lato ricerca che lato professione nel cercare di prevedere e anticipare il futuro. Abbiamo pensato che il marketing fosse lo strumento per capire dove andare e, a volte, ci siamo dimenticati di guardare nello specchietto retrovisore. Il marketing può essere la chiave di lettura che tiene insieme queste due dimensioni: la necessità di innovare e di muoversi verso il futuro, e l'importanza della direzione da cui veniamo per non perdere autenticità, credibilità e identità.” -

Il Prof. Michele Simoni, Co-chair della XXII SIM Conference, aggiunge:

“Il nesso tra marketing e innovazione si manifesta in un interplay continuo tra tradizione e futuro. La comunità della Società Italiana Marketing si distingue per energia, rigore e spirito di collaborazione: ogni Conference è un'occasione stimolante e piacevole di confronto e crescita.”

Conclude la Prof. ssa Maria Rosaria Napolitano, Co-chair della XXII SIM Conference:

“Nell'heritage delle organizzazioni risiede la genesi del futuro. Valorizzare il passato e le radici consente di leggere il presente e progettare l'avvenire. L'edizione 2025 conferma lo slancio della comunità SIM, con ampia partecipazione di studiosi, imprese e ospiti internazionali.”

Introduction to the Conference

Founded in 2002, the Italian Marketing Society (SIM) is the leading academic community in Italy dedicated to the advancement and dissemination of marketing studies. SIM promotes scientific collaboration among scholars, institutions, and businesses, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and the transfer of knowledge to the economic and social system. Through conferences, publications, and research groups, the Society contributes to the cultural and methodological development of marketing as both an academic discipline and a managerial practice.

The SIM Conference is the Italian Marketing Society annual gathering and represents the most important event for the national academic community in the field of marketing. Each year, scholars, researchers, and professionals come together to discuss emerging issues in the discipline, sharing empirical evidence, theoretical perspectives, and managerial implications. The conference provides a stimulating environment for academic debate, the creation of collaborative networks, and the development of research projects.

The XXII edition, held in 2025, was dedicated to the relationship between marketing and innovation, a nexus that has profoundly shaped the evolution of markets and business strategies. The theme *“The Marketing–Innovation Nexus: Past Insights for Future Challenges”* invited participants to reflect on how insights from the past can guide the management of future challenges, shaped by technological transformation, digitalization, sustainability, and new consumption models. The goal was to foster a critical dialogue that integrates the historical foundations of the discipline with its most recent conceptual and managerial developments, aiming to outline research paths and practices that promote responsible innovation and societal value.

Professor Daniele Dalli, President of the SIM, notes:

“We have specialized, both in research and in professional practice, in trying to foresee and anticipate the future. We believed that marketing was the tool to understand where to go and, at times, we forgot to look in the rear-view mirror. Marketing can be the interpretive key that holds these two dimensions together: the need to innovate and move toward the future, and the importance of the direction we come from, so as not to lose authenticity, credibility, and identity.”

Professor Michele Simoni, Co-chair of the XXII SIM Conference, adds:

“The nexus between marketing and innovation emerges in a continuous interplay between tradition and the future. The community of the Italian Marketing Society stands out for its energy, rigor, and collaborative spirit: every Conference is an inspiring and enjoyable opportunity for dialogue and growth.”

Professor Maria Rosaria Napolitano, also Co-chair of the XXII SIM Conference, concludes:

“Within the heritage of organizations lies the genesis of the future. Enhancing the past and one’s roots allows us to interpret the present and shape what is yet to come. The 2025 edition confirms the momentum of the SIM community, with broad participation from scholars, companies, and international guests

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The Italian Marketing Society (SIM) extends its gratitude to the University of Naples "Parthenope" for hosting the event, to the local institutions for their support, and to all sponsors and partners who contributed to the realization of the 2025 Conference. A special thank-you goes to all scholars and professionals whose participation keeps the SIM mission alive: fostering knowledge creation and promoting innovation in marketing.

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Seen Together: How the Visual Co-Presence of Helpers and Victims Affects Social Media Engagement

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Introduction and Theoretical Framework

In the last decade, social media has become a strategic tool for nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to raise awareness, engage supporters, and secure funding. Institutions like the UNDP describe this environment as a fast-moving, overcrowded space where attention is fleeting and continuous adaptation is essential (UNDP, 2024). In this context, visual storytelling is critical to capturing attention and fostering emotional engagement. Research shows that human faces, especially those of identifiable beneficiaries, foster empathy and prosocial behavior (Small & Loewenstein, 2003; Nikulina et al., 2024). As research has largely focused on the persuasive role of beneficiaries, with little attention to operators' visual presence, this study examines how the co-presence of operators and beneficiaries, compared to beneficiaries alone, influences Instagram engagement. A long-standing body of research in social psychology demonstrates that individuals are less likely to engage in helping behavior when others are perceived to be present, a phenomenon known as the bystander effect. As originally proposed by Darley and Latané (1968), the Diffusion of Responsibility Theory posits that when multiple potential helpers are present, the responsibility to intervene becomes psychologically shared, leading to a reduced sense of personal obligation to act. This process is well documented through the lens of the bystander effect (Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2017) whereby observers may feel that the moral "quota" has already been met by others, thus reducing their own motivation to help. In particular, the presence of humanitarian workers in visual content might lead viewers to infer that someone is already "taking care of it", thereby reducing their own felt responsibility. For this reason, we state:

H1: The co-presence of both beneficiaries and operators in an image is associated with lower engagement.

If co-presence of operator and beneficiary reduces engagement, possibly through diffusion of responsibility, it is crucial to examine whether face visibility can weaken or strengthen this effect. In co-presence conditions, showing operator's face may help counterbalance the negative effect of shared responsibility by introducing a recognizable prosocial agent into the visual narrative. The face of the humanitarian worker may trigger a different psychological response, such as identification with the helper, admiration, or a sense of social connection with those providing aid. Drawing on theories of social presence (Short et al., 1976), emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993), and prosocial modeling (Bandura, 1977), we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: When both a beneficiary and a operator are depicted in the image (co-presence), showing the face of the operator increases engagement.

While prior studies have demonstrated that showing a beneficiary's face increases empathy and engagement (Small & Loewenstein, 2003), these effects may not generalize to all visual configurations. Specifically, when a humanitarian worker is also present in the image, the emotional impact of the beneficiary's face may be altered. One possible explanation is that the presence of a second actor (the

humanitarian worker) modifies how viewers interpret the image. According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), when emotional cues appear embedded within an explicitly designed narrative, viewers may perceive the image as strategically crafted, reducing authenticity and prompting resistance. Accordingly, we posit:

H3: When both a beneficiary and an operator are depicted in the image (co-presence), showing the face of the beneficiary decreases engagement.

Methodology

We conducted a field study analyzing Instagram posts from seven major Italian nonprofit organizations. Data were collected via Apify, which enabled automated scraping of public posts published between May and August 2024. Only image-based posts were included; videos were excluded to ensure visual consistency.

Each image was manually annotated for: co-presence of beneficiaries and operators (e.g., humanitarian workers), visibility of each subject's face, presence of logos, and overlay text (TO). We also extracted caption data and coded the following control variables: word count, emoji count (using the Para classifier; Luangrath et al., 2022), valence/arousal scores (computed via the VAD lexicon; Mohammad, 2018), organization's sector, follower count. The dependent variable (Total Engagement) is a non-negative count variable, highly right-skewed, with variance (2639.1²) far exceeding the mean (1287.3), indicating overdispersion.

Results

The overall model was statistically significant, and the test for overdispersion confirmed the appropriateness of the negative binomial specification over a Poisson model. Results show that co-presence of beneficiaries and operators was significantly associated with a decrease in total engagement, compared to posts featuring only beneficiaries ($B = -1.110$, $p < .001$), confirming H1. The interaction between copresence and operator's face visibility was positive and significant ($B = 1.380$, $p = .005$), possibly indicating that when both subjects are present, the visibility of the operator's face may help counteract the negative effect of co-presence, in line with H2. Conversely, the interaction between co-presence and beneficiaries' face visibility was negative and statistically significant ($B = -1.018$, $p = .023$) coherently with H3.

Conclusions and Future Development

These findings highlight how subtle variations in visual composition may influence how viewers interpret nonprofit imagery. This study is not without limitations. First, as a field study based on real-world data, it may be affected by contextual and platform-specific factors that cannot be fully controlled. For this reason, we plan to conduct experimental studies to test the effect of co-presence on engagement under controlled conditions and to investigate the psychological mechanisms, such as perceived authenticity, diffusion of responsibility, empathy, and reactance, that may help explain the patterns observed in the field.

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