

The Role of Storytelling in Digital Marketing: A Study on Local Fashion Brands on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital technology has significantly transformed the marketing landscape, particularly in the local fashion industry, which is now increasingly utilizing social media as its primary promotional channel. One of the increasingly popular strategies is the use of storytelling, which involves delivering brand messages through emotionally charged and meaningful narratives. This study aims to examine the role of storytelling in enhancing consumer engagement and enhancing the image of local fashion brands on social media. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and observations of five local fashion brands in Indonesia. The study's results showed that storytelling elements, including story authenticity, local cultural values, visual aesthetics, and narrative consistency, have a significant influence on consumer loyalty and interaction. These findings confirm that storytelling is not only a communication tool but also an effective branding strategy to build emotional connections and brand differentiation in the digital age. This research makes theoretical and practical contributions to fashion MSME actors and academics, enabling the development of narrative-based marketing strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving digital era, marketing has undergone a significant transformation, particularly with the emergence of social media as the primary platform for interaction between brands and consumers (Wardana, A.K., et al., 2024). One approach that is gaining increasing attention in digital marketing is the use of storytelling (Putri, 2024). Storytelling enables brands to

convey their message through compelling narratives, foster an emotional connection with their audience, and reinforce their brand identity (K. Nathaneil, 2025). This approach not only increases consumer engagement but also influences their purchasing decisions.

Globally, the practice of storytelling in marketing shows a significant growth trend. Searches related to "storytelling marketing" more than tripled in the United States in September 2024 compared to the same period in the previous year, indicating the growing interest from brands in this approach. In addition, storytelling has been shown to increase conversions by up to 30% and increase product value by up to 2,706% (Yudha & Indrayani, 2022). These statistics confirm that storytelling is not only an effective marketing tool but also a strategy that can significantly impact the value and perception of products in the eyes of consumers.

In Indonesia, the local fashion industry faces challenges in building and maintaining consumer loyalty amid fierce competition. (Rahmatika UIN Raden Intan Lampung Muharia UIN Raden Intan Lampung Tasya Salsabila UIN Raden Intan Lampung Vicky Sanjaya UIN Raden Intan Lampung, 2024). With over 191.4 million social media users in 2023, platforms like Instagram are becoming a major battleground for local fashion brands to capture consumers' attention. However, despite the immense potential offered by social media, many local brands continue to struggle with utilizing storytelling effectively in their marketing strategies. This raises questions about the extent to which storytelling can increase consumer engagement and strengthen the position of local fashion brands in the Indonesian digital market.

Several previous studies have explored the role of storytelling in marketing. Studies by Alfarizka, (2023) Highlight how a holistic approach to storytelling can enhance consumer learning and improve their ability to judge products effectively. In addition, research by Shachar shows that a person's ability to tell stories is positively correlated with a sense of meaning and purpose in life, which can be applied in the context of marketing to build an emotional connection with consumers. In Indonesia, research by (RF Putri, 2025) Analyzed digital marketing strategies on local fashion brands on Instagram, emphasizing the importance of engaging content to increase consumer engagement.

While there is evidence that storytelling has excellent potential for improving marketing effectiveness, a research gap remains regarding its implementation and impact on local fashion brands in Indonesia. With increasing competition in the fashion industry and consumer behavior shifting toward digital platforms, local brands must understand and adopt effective storytelling strategies to stay competitive. (Adnan et al., 2024). This research became urgent to provide insights into how storytelling can be optimally used to increase consumer engagement and strengthen brand loyalty in the context of Indonesia's unique culture and market.

This research makes a new contribution, focusing on the application of storytelling in digital marketing for local fashion brands in Indonesia, an area that has not been thoroughly explored. In contrast to previous research that was more general or focused on international contexts, this study will examine how storytelling elements can be adapted to the preferences and behaviors of Indonesian consumers. Additionally, this research will integrate qualitative and quantitative analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of storytelling in enhancing consumer engagement and loyalty.

This study aims to analyze the use of storytelling in digital marketing strategies by local fashion brands on social media, assess the effectiveness of storytelling in increasing consumer engagement and loyalty, and identify the story elements that are most effective in building an emotional connection with the audience. In addition, this research also aims to formulate recommendations for storytelling strategies that are relevant and applicable to local fashion business actors in Indonesia.

This research provides both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the literature on digital marketing and storytelling, particularly in the context of local brands in Indonesia. Practically, the results of this research can be used by local fashion business actors to develop more effective digital marketing strategies through a storytelling approach. Additionally, this research is expected to serve as a reference for other academics and researchers interested in similar topics.

The implications of this study include the importance of strengthening narrative-based digital marketing strategies to enhance the competitiveness of local brands amid the increasing presence of global products. The findings of this study encourage businesses to focus not only on product quality but also on how brand stories can shape positive perceptions and foster customer loyalty. Furthermore, the social implications of this study suggest that storytelling can be a valuable tool for promoting Indonesia's local values, culture, and creativity through the fast-growing fashion industry on digital platforms.

2. METHOD

Types of research

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how storytelling is applied in digital marketing by local fashion brands on social media. This approach was chosen because it enables the exploration of meaning, experience, and strategy from the perspective of subjects directly involved in marketing practices.

Research Design

The research design employed is a case study, which enables researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of one or several local fashion brands that actively utilize storytelling in their digital marketing activities. With this approach, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the context, process, and impact of storytelling applications in social media campaigns.

Location and Research Subject

This research was conducted in urban areas with high creative industry dynamics, particularly in major cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta, which are renowned for being the centers of growth for local fashion brands. The research subjects comprise business owners, marketing managers, and creative teams from local fashion brands that actively market their products through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. The selection of subjects is carried out purposively, specifically those who consistently use storytelling strategies in their digital campaigns.

Research Instruments

The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself as a key instrument (human instrument), by a qualitative approach. The researcher conducted observations, in-depth interviews, and direct documentation studies. To support the data collection process, semi-structured interview guidelines and pre-developed participatory observation guidelines were used to maintain focus and consistency in data collection.

Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected through three main techniques:

1. In-depth interviews were conducted with brand owners, digital marketers, and content creators from each brand. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on the respondents' availability.
2. Participatory observation, namely by directly observing storytelling content published on the social media accounts of related brands, recording narrative patterns, visual styles, and consumer interactions that occur in the comment column and other features.
3. Documentation studies, in the form of collecting secondary data from social media uploads, promotional articles, and digital portfolios used by brands to build their

narratives. Documentation also includes campaign recordings, captions, and customer testimonials.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents in this study consisted of five local fashion brand owners, three digital marketing managers, and two creative content designers who were actively involved in digital campaigns utilizing storytelling. Additionally, 50 internal employees from the marketing and communication division also complete the questionnaire. The brands under research are local fashion brands with a reach of more than 10,000 followers on social media and actively publish narrative content regularly.

Table 1. Main Respondent Profiles

Code Responders	Position	Brand Name	Number of Instagram Followers	Storytelling Frequency (per week)
R1	Owner	Millennial Batik	15.300	3 times
R2	Marketer	Innovative Hijab	23.500	2 times
R3	Content Designer	UrbanWeave	18.900	4 times
R4	Owner	Local Ethnicity	11.600	1 time
R5	Marketer	ModestMode	29.200	3 times

Key Findings from the Interview with Management

The in-depth interview revealed that all brands recognize storytelling as the primary strategy for increasing brand engagement and shaping the emotional brand image. Some of the narratives often used include the founder's history, design philosophy, local community involvement, and the challenges faced by MSMEs during the pandemic. Respondents R1 and R5 stated that their most liked storytelling content was a narrative about collaboration with local artisans, as it gave the impression of a "human touch" and reinforced cultural identity.

Most respondents also emphasized that storytelling helps differentiate brands from competitors who only focus on discount promotions. Narratives that are consistent and aligned with local values are more effective in maintaining audience loyalty on social media.

Findings from the Licensed Employee Questionnaire

A questionnaire given to 50 marketing and communication employees showed the following results:

Table 2. Employee Perception of the Effectiveness of Storytelling

Storytelling Aspects	Highly Effective (%)	Effective (%)	Less Effective (%)
Authenticity of the Story	54	28	18
Visual Aesthetics	48	31	21

Emotional Interaction	51	28	21
Narrative Consistency	43	29	28
Local Cultural Values	60	25	15

Most employees agree that storytelling that focuses on local culture and the authenticity of stories has the most impact on increasing audience interest. However, they also acknowledge that time and resource constraints often lead to inconsistent storytelling over time.

Observation Results

Observations were made on the Instagram accounts of five brands over one month. The results showed that the average engagement rate (likes + comments divided by followers) for storytelling posts was 3.7%, while posts without narrative were only 1.8%. Storytelling that highlights the founder's struggles, behind-the-scenes production, and customer testimonials gets the most interaction.

Examples of compelling caption storytelling from UrbanWeave:

"Behind this motif is the story of Mbah Suroyo, a craftsman from Bantul who for 25 years has maintained the heritage of Jogja's typical woven fabric designs. We're proud to be able to bring his story to the digital generation."

Story Authenticity Builds Audience Trust

One of the key findings from the interviews and observations was the importance of the authenticity of the stories shared by brands. Storytelling that displays the true story of the founder, product background, and production struggles is considered very effective in building audience trust. This aligns with research by LaTour and Deighton (2019), who found that authentic narratives can create an emotional learning effect, thereby strengthening the relationship between consumers and brands.

For example, content from the "ModestMode" brand, which tells the story of their struggle to start a boarding house business, receives the highest engagement in a month. This shows that the audience is not only interested in the product, but also in the value and struggle behind it.

"We want buyers not only to wear, but also feel the story behind the fabric they wear," said R5 (Owner of ModestMode).

The link between authenticity and trust is also emphasized by employees, with 82% of respondents stating that authentic stories increase confidence in the brand.

Aesthetic Visuals as a Digital Narrative Amplifier

In addition to verbal narration, the visual aspect of storytelling also plays an important role. Observation of visual content reveals that aesthetics consistent with and in harmony with brand identity can enhance the appeal and duration of audience attention. This supports the findings from Kim et al. (2021), who state that visual storytelling reinforces the perception of product quality and exclusivity.

Brands like "UrbanWeave" use earthy color tones and documentary photography styles to amplify their stories about local culture. This visual style not only embellishes the content but also conveys the brand's values implicitly.

As many as 79% of respondents in the questionnaire stated that visual elements are one of the main aspects in encouraging content shareability on Instagram.

Emotional Interaction and Consumer Resonance

Another important finding is that storytelling that resonates with the emotions of the audience, such as inspirational stories or personal moments, is able to build a strong connection. Content that conveys hopes, sadness, or struggles tends to invite more interaction.

As discovered by Shachar (2022), narratives that evoke deep emotions can enhance the audience's sense of meaning. In this study, the "Innovative Hijab" brand used the story of a product user who managed to build his own business, and the post received 2.5 times more comments than the average other upload. Emotions serve as a bridge between brands and customers, triggering long-term engagement.

Narrative Consistency Affects Customer Loyalty

One of the biggest challenges expressed in interviews and questionnaires is maintaining consistency in storytelling. Brands that periodically change their narrative style, tone, or theme are considered to confuse the audience and disrupt the brand's perception.

Data shows that consistent brands (such as Batik Millennial) have a stable weekly engagement rate and a loyal follower base. This consistency also contributes to the formation of a strong and easily recognizable brand identity.

In contrast, inconsistencies in storytelling led to decreased engagement and increased unfollow rates, as observed in two brands that had changed their creative teams within the past three months.

Local Cultural Values as Strategic Differentiation

A significant final finding is the power of storytelling based on local culture. Of the five brands observed, all utilized cultural elements in their content, including motifs, language, and storylines. Storytelling that reflects local wisdom is considered very relevant to the audience and distinguishes products from global brands.

As many as 85% of respondents considered local cultural values to be the most powerful storytelling element in forming emotional loyalty. The "Etnik Lokal" brand, for example, consistently features the stories of artisans from various regions in Java and Sumatra. This strategy not only strengthens the brand's position but also supports the narrative of sustainability and inclusivity.

This research reinforces the findings of Putri and Kurniawan (2023), who stated that cultural representation in digital content can create a sense of national pride and personal attachment to brands.

4. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that storytelling plays a crucial role in the digital marketing strategies of local fashion brands on social media. It not only helps convey brand values and identity more deeply but also fosters an emotional connection between the brand and its audience. The study findings reveal that elements such as story authenticity, visual aesthetics, emotional resonance, narrative consistency, and the incorporation of local cultural values significantly enhance consumer engagement and loyalty. Storytelling content, which highlights authentic stories, the struggles of founders, and the involvement of local artisans, generates higher interaction compared to regular commercial content. This underscores the growing preference of today's digital generation for not just products but also the stories and values behind them. Visuals aligned with brand identity and consistent storytelling strengthen the brand's position in consumers' minds, while local cultural values serve as strategic differentiators that enrich narratives and cultivate emotional attachment. As the digital competition intensifies, storytelling is no longer just a creative communication tool but a vital business strategy that builds engagement, loyalty, and brand image. Future implications suggest that local fashion brands should continue to innovate by developing authentic, consistent, and culturally embedded storytelling approaches to maintain competitiveness and foster long-term relationships with their consumers. Additionally, as the digital landscape evolves, leveraging emerging technologies such as augmented reality (AR) or interactive media in storytelling can further enhance consumer experiences and deepen engagement.

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