

@Maksudas_Id and Visual Narrative: Digital Branding Strategy in Pekanbaru

@Maksudas_Id dan Narasi Visual: Strategi Branding Digital di Pekanbaru

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the visual narrative-based digital branding strategy implemented by the Instagram account @maksudas_id as a representation of creative local marketing practices in Pekanbaru. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through content observation, visual element analysis, and open interviews with the account manager. The findings reveal that narrative visual strength, consistent color tones, and cultural themes are key to attracting attention and organically building brand identity. Collaboration with local communities and the use of features such as Reels and Stories also enhanced audience engagement. The study concludes that @maksudas_id successfully integrates visual elements, locality, and storytelling as an effective digital branding strategy in the age of visual marketing.

Keywords : digital branding, visual narrative, Instagram, Pekanbaru, creative account.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi branding digital berbasis narasi visual yang diterapkan oleh akun Instagram @maksudas_id sebagai representasi praktik pemasaran kreatif lokal di Pekanbaru. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi konten, analisis elemen visual, serta wawancara terbuka dengan pengelola akun. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kekuatan narasi visual, konsistensi tone warna, dan tema budaya menjadi kunci dalam menarik perhatian serta membangun identitas merek secara organik. Kolaborasi dengan komunitas lokal dan pemanfaatan fitur seperti Reels dan Stories juga meningkatkan keterlibatan audiens. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa @maksudas_id berhasil mengintegrasikan elemen visual, lokalitas, dan storytelling sebagai strategi branding digital yang efektif di era pemasaran visual.

Kata kunci: branding digital, narasi visual, Instagram, Pekanbaru, akun kreatif.

1. Introduction

The era of digital transformation has revolutionized how brands communicate and build relationships with their audiences. Social media, particularly Instagram, has emerged not only as a platform for interaction but also as a strategic space for cultivating brand identity and shaping consumer perception (Lee et al., 2015; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Previous studies highlight that Instagram use is strongly driven by motivations related to self-expression, social interaction, and visual appeal, making it an effective medium for branding activities.

Within this landscape, visual storytelling has been increasingly recognized as a critical tool for digital branding. Lim and Childs (2020) argue that visual narratives create telepresence, allowing audiences to experience brand stories in immersive ways. Similarly, Yang, Kim, and Tanoff (2021) emphasize that personalization and vividness in brand content foster higher consumer engagement. These insights align with the growing dominance of short-form and “snackable” content such as Instagram Reels and Stories, which have been shown to effectively capture attention and influence consumer attitudes (Gross et al., 2023; Høgsnes & Strand, 2024).

Moreover, the role of influencer marketing has received significant scholarly attention. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) and Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrate that credibility and follower dynamics shape consumer trust in branded content, while Evans et al. (2017) and Stubb and Colliander (2019) note that disclosure practices and eWOM significantly affect consumer responses. However, most of these studies examine influencers or brands with global and large-scale reach, leaving limited understanding of how smaller creative accounts or local brands employ visual narratives.

Research has also shown that strategic social media marketing frameworks and activities contribute to brand equity (Felix et al., 2017; Koay et al., 2020; Cheung et al., 2020). Godey et al. (2016) highlight that even in luxury branding, consistent digital engagement strategies enhance consumer behavior. Extending this idea, Yoo, Kim, and Kim (2023) find that aesthetics and brand prominence significantly influence consumer engagement, while Rogers (2021) introduces visual media analysis as a methodological approach to decode Instagram's visual culture. Kaur and Kumar (2024) further argue that digital storytelling directly improves brand image and purchase intention, suggesting the transformative potential of narrative-based branding.

In Indonesia, particularly in Pekanbaru, social media has become an essential platform for local entrepreneurs and creative communities. The Instagram account @maksudas_id exemplifies a creative approach that integrates visual aesthetics, cultural narratives, and informal communication to build an authentic brand identity. Unlike global studies that often focus on large influencers, this research situates itself in the local digital ecosystem, where content strategy must adapt to cultural context, audience characteristics, and locality-specific preferences (Miguel et al., 2024; Theresia & Antonio, 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on Instagram branding, influencer marketing, and visual storytelling, there is still a lack of empirical studies exploring how local creative accounts in secondary Indonesian cities employ visual narratives to construct brand identity. Previous studies have predominantly focused on global influencers (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019), luxury brands (Godey et al., 2016), or broad social media frameworks (Felix et al., 2017), leaving contextual dynamics of local branding underexplored.

This study contributes by presenting a case study of @maksudas_id, a local Instagram account in Pekanbaru, as a representation of how visual narratives, locality, and cultural elements are strategically integrated into digital branding. The novelty lies in highlighting how everyday cultural storytelling and consistent visual aesthetics create authentic audience engagement, offering insights for both academic discourse and practical application in the field of local creative branding.

2. Literature Review

Social Media and Digital Branding

Social media has become a primary space for brands to build relationships with their audiences. Research shows that motivations for using Instagram are strongly linked to self-expression, social interaction, and visual appeal (Lee et al., 2015; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). This makes Instagram an effective platform for enhancing brand image and equity (Koay et al., 2020; Cheung et al., 2020). Even in the context of luxury branding, Godey et al. (2016) highlight that digital marketing strategies positively influence consumer behavior and brand equity.

Visual Storytelling in Branding

Visual storytelling is a strategy of delivering brand messages through visual content that is not only aesthetic but also contains a narrative flow. Lim and Childs (2020) emphasize that visual narratives create a sense of telepresence, strengthening emotional connection between audiences and brands. Similarly, Kaur and Kumar (2024) found that digital storytelling significantly enhances brand image and purchase intention. Recent studies also demonstrate that aesthetics and brand prominence in visual messages on Instagram play a crucial role in boosting consumer engagement (Yoo et al., 2023).

Content Formats: Reels, Stories, and Short Videos

Shifts in media consumption behavior have fueled the popularity of short-form or snackable content. Gross et al. (2023) show that short videos on social media are highly effective in attracting consumer attention. Høgsnes and Strand (2024) further argue that the ephemeral nature of Instagram Stories affects how audiences process messages and respond to brands. These findings illustrate the importance of using features such as Stories, Reels, and Highlights in digital branding strategies.

Influencer Marketing and Content Credibility

Influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant strategy in digital branding. De Veirman et al. (2017) emphasize that follower count and product congruence shape consumer attitudes toward brands, while Lou and Yuan (2019) highlight that message credibility fosters consumer trust in branded content. At the same time, disclosure practices play a critical role in shaping audience perceptions, as shown by Evans et al. (2017) and Stubb and Colliander (2019).

Engagement and Interactivity

Audience engagement is a key factor in digital branding. Tafesse and Wood (2021) demonstrate that content type, message source, and interactivity influence the level of engagement with brand-related posts. Similarly, Yang et al. (2021) stress that personalization and vividness in Instagram content strengthen consumers' emotional attachment to brands. Rogers (2021) adds a methodological perspective, introducing visual media analysis as an approach to understanding Instagram's visual culture.

3. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, to understand in depth how Instagram accounts @maksudas_id developed a digital branding strategy through visual narratives within the context of Pekanbaru's local culture and audience. This approach allowed researchers to explore contextual and subjective meanings and communication patterns, in keeping with the nature of social media as a discursive space (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The object of this research is an Instagram account @maksudas_id, which was selected purposively due to its consistent visual uploads, active audience interaction, and content relevance to contemporary visual communication trends. The observation focused on uploads from March to June 2025, when this account experienced a significant increase in exposure and engagement based on the number of views and public interactions.

Data collected through three main techniques, namely: digital observation, semi structured interviews, and content documentation. Digital observation is done by tracing uploads @maksudas_id reflects visual narrative strategies, such as Reels, Stories, and the main feed. Researchers examined elements such as color tone, captions, visual brand identity, and audience interaction patterns. Online interviews with account managers were conducted to explore the motives behind content strategies, audience perceptions, and challenges in building a brand image on social media. Documentation was carried out by storing and recording upload metadata as a basis for content analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, consisting of an open coding stage to find patterns of visual strategies, axial coding to group strategies according to narrative themes (cultural, aesthetic, promotional), and selective coding to identify the main narrative of the implemented digital branding strategy. This procedure refers to the analysis technique of Strauss and Corbin (1998), which allows researchers to inductively compile thematic categories based on field data.

To ensure the validity of the findings, researchers conducted technical triangulation by comparing observation data, interviews, and uploaded documentation. Validation was also strengthened through member checking, which involved confirming the interpretation of the

results with the account informants to ensure accuracy. Thus, the results of this study have the depth of analysis that befits the characteristics of a qualitative study.

4. Results and Discussion

Results

The research results show that the Instagram account @maksudas_id builds a digital branding strategy through a strong, consistent visual approach imbued with local meaning. During the observation period, the account displayed a curated visual style dominated by warm colors and high contrast, along with narrative captions written in the casual language typical of Pekanbaru's youth. The content not only showcases products or activities but also tells stories: about traditional foods, regional languages, city atmospheres, and everyday experiences that resonate with the local audience.

One prominent thematic pattern is the use of local-based visual narratives. In several Reels posts, for example, @maksudas_id captures snippets of Pekanbaru's urban life: queues for street food, conversations at coffee shops, and community interactions at local events. These visuals are framed with a fast-paced editing style, paired with music trending on TikTok or Instagram Reels, thus strengthening emotional resonance with the young audience. According to the account manager, this strategy is implemented to build emotional connections and create a sense of belonging among their followers, rather than simply displaying aesthetically pleasing visuals.

Another identified strategy is strengthening identity through consistent aesthetics. The account visually maintains a uniform color palette and composition—elements that form a recognizable digital visual identity. @maksudas_id also consciously chooses to display authenticity by not always using professional models or artificial lighting, but instead prioritizing spontaneous images that still have narrative power.

In terms of digital engagement, content with storytelling captions and local humor was found to receive higher engagement than direct promotional content. Audiences appeared to respond more to posts that "tell a story" than those that simply "announce." Interactions such as comments in local languages, tagging friends' accounts, and even funny emoticon reactions demonstrate that audiences are not just watching but actively participating.

Interviews with account managers confirmed that their branding strategy does not rely on paid advertising, but rather on building a community that feels engaged. They focus more on strengthening the perception that @maksudas_id is not just an entertainment account, but the digital face of Pekanbaru's local urban lifestyle.

It can be concluded that the success of @maksudas_id in digital branding lies in three key aspects: the power of visual narrative, recognizable aesthetic consistency, and the ability to build cultural connections with audiences.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with previous research showing that visual storytelling plays a central role in digital branding. Lim and Childs (2020) emphasize that visual narratives create telepresence, which helps brands foster stronger emotional connections. This is consistent with how @maksudas_id uses storytelling in Reels and captions to strengthen audience attachment.

The emphasis on short-form content such as Reels resonates with the work of Gross et al. (2023), who found that snackable videos are particularly effective at capturing attention on social media. Similarly, the use of Instagram Stories and ephemeral content reflects Høgsnes and Strand's (2024) findings that temporary posts impact consumer processing and brand outcomes.

Consistency in aesthetics, as observed in @maksudas_id's warm tone and visual uniformity, is an essential component of brand identity. This finding reinforces Kapoor et al. (2021) and Yoo et al. (2023), who argue that aesthetics and brand prominence are key drivers of consumer engagement in digital spaces.

In terms of engagement, the study reveals that storytelling captions and local humor generate higher interaction than direct promotional content. This supports Zulli and Zulli's (2020) argument that content framed with intimacy and humor is more likely to go viral. It also resonates with Tafesse and Wood (2021) and Yang et al. (2021), who demonstrate that personalization and interactivity significantly influence consumer engagement on Instagram.

Interestingly, @maksudas_id does not rely on influencer partnerships or paid ads but instead builds community-driven branding. While influencer credibility and follower numbers have been found to shape consumer trust (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019), @maksudas_id highlights an alternative approach rooted in authenticity and local cultural representation. This echoes the findings of Theresia and Antonio (2023), who showed that local snack brands gain authenticity and preference through cultural narratives rather than external endorsements.

Finally, this case demonstrates that successful digital branding extends beyond algorithmic reach or financial investment. Instead, it reflects the integration of visual storytelling, local culture, and active audience participation, aligning with Felix et al. (2017) and Godey et al. (2016), who describe social media branding as a holistic interplay between content, culture, and consumer behavior.

5. Conclusions

This research shows that the Instagram account @maksudas_id implemented an effective digital branding strategy by relying on the power of local-based visual narratives. Through a consistent aesthetic approach, authentic storytelling, and the use of Instagram's interactive features, the account successfully built strong audience engagement and reinforced its image as a representation of the urban lifestyle in Pekanbaru. The analysis indicates that the success of digital branding in this context is not determined solely by paid promotions or commercial approaches, but rather by the ability to create emotional connections between visual content and the cultural identity of the audience. Relevant narratives, curated visuals, and a communication style that resonates with the local language have been proven to foster digital loyalty and expand message reach. These findings confirm that a visual communication strategy rooted in local social and cultural contexts can serve as a solid foundation for building a memorable brand in the digital marketing era.

Future studies could extend this research in several directions. First, comparative research across different local creative accounts in Indonesia could provide broader insights into how locality influences digital branding outcomes. Second, a mixed-methods approach—combining qualitative observation with quantitative engagement metrics—could strengthen the measurement of branding effectiveness. Third, exploring cross-platform strategies (e.g., TikTok, YouTube Shorts) may uncover how short-form video and visual narratives interact to influence consumer perception. Lastly, examining audience perspectives more deeply, through surveys or focus groups, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how local cultural narratives shape digital brand loyalty.

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