

Building Social Media Engagement on Instagram by Using Visual Aesthetics and Message Orientation Strategy: A Content Analysis on Instagram Content of Indonesia Tourism Destinations

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the differences in consumer engagement to Instagram content of tourist destinations when the content uses different types of visual aesthetics and message orientation. A content analysis of 1158 Instagram content posted by official accounts of Indonesia priority tourist destinations was conducted. This study finds that when content with classical aesthetics gained stronger consumer engagement than the one with expressive aesthetics, however content using different types of message orientation does not result in different level of consumer engagement. Interaction effects suggest that content using a combination of classical aesthetics and interaction orientation gets better consumer engagement than any other combinations of aesthetics and orientation. Meanwhile, content using expressive aesthetics and self-orientation gains the least consumer engagement than any other combinations of aesthetics and orientation. These findings indicate that visual elements of an Instagram content tend to be more powerful to elicit consumer responses than verbal elements of the content. This is expected to offer important contributions to destination marketers and social media administrators to pay more attention to visual elements than to verbal aspects of the content when designing social media information.

Keywords: Consumer Engagement, Content Analysis, Instagram, Message Orientation, Visual Aesthetics

JEL Classification: M30 M31 Z32

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered as one of the most contributing industries to the achievement of the Indonesia national long-term development plan. The advancement of the Indonesia tourism industry was acknowledged by the *World Travel & Tourism Council* on 2019 stating that Indonesia is acknowledged by the *World Travel & Tourism Council* in 2019 as the country with the most rapid growth tourism industry in South East Asia (ranked 1st), in Asia (ranked 3rd), and in the world (ranked 9th). One of the most reputable media in the UK also named Indonesia as “*The Top 20 Fastest Growing Travel Destinations*” (ranked 20th) with a growth value of 15,5% (Telegraph, 2017). These facts validate the strategic importance and significance of Indonesia tourism industry in the national development plan.

On the other hand, the government; through the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy; realized that although the performance of the Indonesia tourism industry has always been impressive in the last few years, that achievement has been dominantly contributed by Bali. It is urgent for Indonesia to develop some other areas to be the next major tourism destinations in Indonesia, so that this country has more to offer to the international tourists, which eventually leads them to spend more days and more money in multiple destinations in Indonesia. For that reason, the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy listed the top 10 Indonesia priority tourism destinations. The list consists of 10 destinations considered as having great potential in attracting tourists, but still receives low interests from the tourists due to low level of destination awareness; namely Bangka Belitung, Borobudur, Bromo, Labuan Bajo, Lake Toba, Likupang, Mandalika, Morotai, Raja Ampat, and Wakatobi. Introducing new tourism destinations is important to encourage the tourist spending more days and more money in this country because they have more options on how to spend them. Some campaigns have been started to initiate the awareness building among the international public. In order to introduce those top priority (but less known) tourism destinations, social media platform Instagram has been chosen as the primary marketing communication vehicle, because the platform fits with the target market profile of the destinations (the millennials). Most of the 10 priority tourism destinations are located at the area with limited infrastructure, an area that is physically challenging to go to, and hence, they are most likely to attract more younger than elder tourists.

Although Indonesia is known as the social media capital of the world (Vaswani, 2012), and many destination marketers in Indonesia are familiar with Instagram, not many of them understand what factors to consider in creating Instagram content to generate high level of consumer engagement. This is due to the fact that Instagram usage in marketing communication activities is relatively new practices, and the empirical finding about these new practices is very limited (Kusumasondjaja, 2019). As a result, the destination marketers and its social media administrators design the Instagram content to introduce the destination by trial and errors approach, without any clear guidance. This study attempts to address this research gap and offer novel insights on how to create engaging Instagram content.

Based on Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), high level of consumer engagement indicates an effective persuasion. As on Instagram, consumer engagement is normally shown by liking or commenting on the content posted on the platform (Kusumasondjaja, 2018). When a message about an invitation to visit to a new tourism destination is liked or positively responded, the positive responses indicate the message is persuasive. On Instagram, there are two main elements in a content, namely visual element in the form of a static photo or a video, and a verbal element in the form of textual information accompanying the visuals, or commonly named as

caption. Referring to the ELM theory, the verbal element represents message cues, while the visual element represents peripheral cues. Kusumasondjaja (2018) found that visual aesthetics (peripheral cues) and message orientation (message cues) play significant roles in developing consumer engagement on Instagram context. However, existing literature was conducted in fashion and retail contexts, while tourism context is still left understudied. For that reason, this study aims to confirm whether consumer engagement on Instagram is affected by the way the visual aesthetics and message orientation of the content are designed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Literature Review

2.1. Consumer Engagement

Brodie et al. (2011) define consumer engagement as behavioral, cognitive, and affective states of consumer involvement with a particular object. In this study, consumer engagement refers to consumer responsive behavior toward the information posted on Instagram as indicated by liking and commenting to the information packaged in a social media content (Li & Li, 2014; Mosteller & Poddar, 2017). The basic concept of consumer engagement is similar to the marketing concept focuses on consumers and fulfilling their needs (Brodie et al., 2011).

Consumer engagement involves consumers to create corporate value by understanding their needs, involving them in product creation and delivery, responding and providing advices related to the product. Some studies have identified three dimensions of consumer engagement; namely cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek, 2011). Cognitive dimension is a consumer perception about the role of the message or content, affective dimension is about whether or not consumers are attracted to the message posted in a media, and behavioral dimension reflects behaviors performed by consumers after getting the message from the media.

For marketers, social media engagement is an important indicator that measure the effectiveness of the message delivered through the social media. It does not only indicate that the message (crafted in the social media content) has been received by the targeted audience, but also it indicates consumer positive attitude towards the message implying effective persuasion (Schee, Peltier, and Dahl, 2020).

2.2. Visual Aesthetics

Visual aesthetic is described as an attractiveness and pleasantness of a visual object (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004). Neufeldt dan Guralnik (1998) consider visual aesthetic as non-instrumental indicator of quality of a visual object. Visual aesthetic manages balances, proportion, and harmony among visual design elements; such as colors, shapes, forms, textures, textures, or tones (Cai & Xu, 201; Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004; Moshagen & Thielsch, 2010). Prior studies suggested that visual aesthetics encourages consumers to cognitively understand the visual objects (Kumar et al., 2018; Pengnate & Sarathy, 2017).

Existing literature have identified two types of visual aesthetics; named classical and expressive aesthetics (Bhandari et al., 2019; Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004). When an object is visually presented in a systematic, symmetric, clear, neat, and less colors, it can be said that the object is presented using classical aesthetics. While, when the object is visually presented in a complex, unsymmetric, cluttery, and more colorful, it can be said that the object is visually presented using expressive aesthetics (Kusumasondjaja, 2019).

In a hotel setting, Lin (2016) found that visual aesthetics influence consumer attitudes, involvement, and behavioral intentions. Cho dan Workman (2015) suggested the same thing about the impact of visual aesthetics on consumer attitudes, involvement, dan behavioral intentions on fashion stores. Meanwhile, Kim, Choi and Lee (2015) established similar findings on luxury brand situation. An interesting visual composition in food plating is also found to impact food tastiness, hedonic preferences, as well as willingness to pay more for the food (Michel et al., 2015; Rowley & Spence, 2018). Expressive aesthetics is more powerful than classical aesthetics in inducing consumer favorable responses toward social media content when the situation is related to hedonic consumption situation (Cai & Xu, 2011; Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015).

Kusumasondjaja (2019) found that the involvement of Instagram users is more stimulated when the content they saw more complex, more colorful, and more unsymmetrical than when they are exposed to simpler, less colorful, and more unsymmetrical visual content. A social media content is more likely to elicit consumer pleasure, especially when the consumers is aiming to look for sensation or entertainment (Lin, 2016; Alfakhri et al., 2018). This is especially important for this study, as destination is highly related to entertainment-seeking activity (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982), content with visual expressive aesthetic is suspected to be able to attract more consumers with classical aesthetics. (Kim, Spiller, & Hettche, 2015). Therefore, based on the explanation presented above, this study proposes this hypothesis:

H1: Instagram content using expressive visual aesthetics gains higher consumer engagement than the one using classical aesthetics.

2.3. Message Orientation

Borrowing from the literature of salesperson's interpersonal communication, message orientation is defined as the orientation of verbal communication is created, whether it is driven by the main task of the salesperson to sell the product, or by the intention to showcase the internal situation of the company, or by the intention to attract consumers to interact with the salesperson (Williams & Spiro, 1985). Before the social media era was begun, some literature acknowledged the importance of choosing appropriate communication orientation on salesperson performance (Evans, 1963; McFarland et al., 2006). The message orientation sent by the marketers in a communication process should be adjusted to the consumer situation and characteristics in order to enhance its effectiveness (Miles et al., 1990).

Sheth (1976) categorized message orientation into three types; namely **task orientation**, a communication style which is oriented to the attainment of the main task of the marketers, which is to sell the product (i.e. content about product information, promotional deals, etc.) **self-orientation**, a communication style which is oriented to the effort of telling stories about the internal situation of the marketers or their companies (i.e. corporate gathering, content about employee activities, etc.), meanwhile, **interaction orientation** is a communication style emphasizing on the effort to initiate interactions, conversations, or other kinds of consumer intimacy (Miles et al., 1990).

Kusumasondjaja (2018) found that interactive orientation stimulating social media users' interaction stimulates stronger consumer engagement than task orientation focusing on selling the product, or self-orientation focusing on showing off the internal activity of the company. This is because interactive-orientated message encourages and stimulates consumers to respond to the message (Li & Li, 2014; Mosteller & Poddar, 2017). For that reason, this study predicts that the Instagram content of tourism destination using interaction-oriented message generates higher consumer engagement than content using self-oriented or task-oriented messages. Hence, this study proposes:

H2: Instagram content using interactive message orientation gains higher consumer engagement than the one using task- or self-orientation.

2.3. Interaction Effects between Visual Aesthetics and Message Orientation on Consumer Engagement

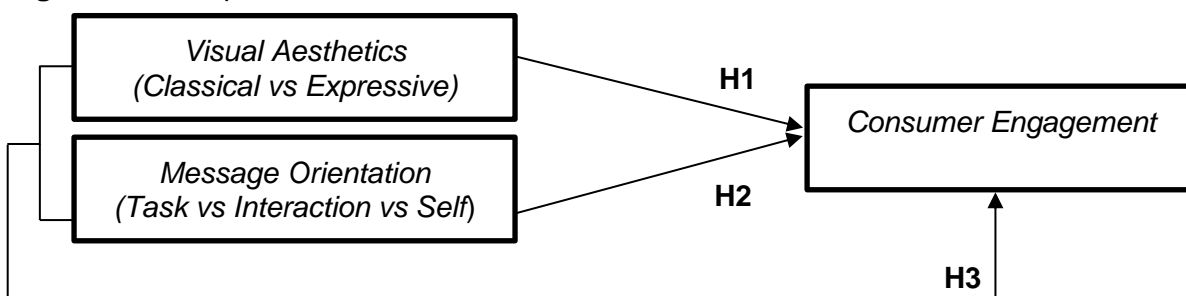
Blanco, Sarasa, and Sanclemente (2010) suggested that when visual objects are presented with a verbal or textual product information, consumers will remember the information better. The adoption of visual-textual elements in a message also generates positive outcome to consumer engagement to the message, as well as consumer attitudes towards the message (McQuarrie, 1989), and it also expedites consumers in cognitively processing the information, in order to make purchase decision (Chau *et al.*, 2000; Schlosser, 2003a).

Instagram content using expressive aesthetics is more likely to elicit higher consumer engagement than the one using classical aesthetics (Kusumasondjaja, 2019). Meanwhile, Instagram content using interaction message orientation is more likely to gain higher consumer engagement than the one using task orientation or self-orientation (Kusumasondjaja, 2018). Based on the explanation above, Instagram content adopting a combination of expressive aesthetics and interaction message orientation is predicted to gain higher consumer engagement than the one adopting any other combinations of visual aesthetics and message orientation. Therefore, this following hypothesis is postulated:

H3: Instagram content using a combination of expressive visual aesthetics and interaction message orientation gains higher consumer engagement than the one with any other combinations of visual aesthetics and message orientation.

Based on the literature review and hypotheses proposed above, the conceptual framework of this study is proposed as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

A content analysis was performed on 1158 posts published on the official accounts of Indonesia top 10 tourism destinations from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020. There are 6 Instagram accounts of Indonesia top tourism destinations investigated in this study; which are the official account of Borobudur, Morotai, Wakatobi National Park, Bromo, Labuan Bajo, and the Lake Toba. The other 4 destinations were not investigated because of one of these following reasons: (1) the Instagram accounts were not actively used to promote the destination during the study period, or (2) the destination does not have an official Instagram account. In total, there are 1158 content posted on 6 Instagram accounts were investigated in this study.

Referring to the content analysis process suggested by Krippendorff (2019), all 1158 Instagram content investigated for this study were captured. Then, every content was coded for their visual aesthetics and message orientation, and recorded for the number

of likes and comments the content gained. There were 2 coders involved in the coding process to ensure the reliability of the coding results. The reliability of the coding process was measured using intercoder reliability; which scored 91.5% (indicating high level of reliability).

For the independent variables (visual aesthetics and message orientation), the data was collected using a coding proses, where for visual aesthetics, code 0 was used for classical aesthetics and code 1 was used for expressive aesthetics, while for message orientation, code 1 was used for self-orientation, code 2 was used for task orientation, and code 3 was used for interaction orientation. Meanwhile, for the independent variable (consumer engagement), the number of likes and comments received by all content investigated in this study were converted into a z score, ranged from 1 to 5 (1=very low, 5=very high), to solve the issue of data normality. ANOVA was then used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

There were 1158 Instagram content eligible for further analysis. Among them, there were significantly more Instagram content of Indonesia tourism destination using expressive aesthetics (65.46%) than those using classical aesthetics (34.54%) (χ^2 (df = 1, n = 1,158) = 327.902, $p < 0.001$). However, Instagram content using classical visual aesthetics gained significantly higher consumer engagement ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.012$) than those using expressive aesthetics ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.012$) (χ^2 (df = 1, n = 1,158) = 124.333, $p < 0.015$). Moreover, there were significantly more Instagram content of Indonesia tourism destination using task orientation (74.46%) than those using self-orientation (24.78%) or interaction-orientation (1.64%) (χ^2 (df = 1, n = 1,158) = 134.814, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, Instagram content using task-oriented caption generated higher consumer engagement ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.012$) than self-oriented caption ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.012$) and interacted-oriented message ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.012$). However, the differences of consumer engagement were not statistically significant between the message orientation (χ^2 (df = 1, n = 1,158) = 124.814, $p = 0.435$). These findings suggested that the mostly used visual aesthetics and message orientation were not the ones getting the highest consumer engagement. In addition, these results rejected the Hypothesis 1 and the Hypotheses 2. Results of the main effect are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Main Effects of Visual Aesthetics and Message Orientation on Consumer Engagement

Independent Variables		Consumer Engagement	
		Mean	Sig.
Visual Aesthetics	Classical aesthetics	4.37	0,015
	Expressive aesthetics	4.26	
Message Orientation	Task orientation	4.54	0,435
	Interaction orientation	.4.61	
	Self-orientation	4.53	

Result of the interaction effect tests show that Instagram content adopting a combination of classical aesthetics and interaction orientation obtained consumer engagement at 27.12%, higher than any other combinations of visual aesthetics and message orientation strategy ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 0.013$) ($F(1,176) = 172.891$, $p < 0.002$, $\eta^2 = 0.791$). Meanwhile, Instagram content using a combination of expressive aesthetics and self-oriented message orientation generated consumer engagement at 0.6%, lower than any

other combination of visual strategy and message orientation ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.013$) ($F(1,176) = 53.778$, $p < 0.002$, $\eta^2 = 0.791$). These findings also contradicted with Hypothesis 3, and therefore the hypothesis was rejected. Results of the interaction effect are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Interaction Effects of Visual Aesthetics & Message Orientation on Engagement

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables		Mean	Sig.
<i>Consumer Engagement</i>	<i>Task-Orientation</i>	<i>Classical Aesthetics</i>	4.50	0,002
		<i>Expressive Aesthetics</i>	4.33	
	<i>Interaction-Orientation</i>	<i>Classical Aesthetics</i>	4,75	
		<i>Expressive Aesthetics</i>	4,61	
	<i>Self-Orientation</i>	<i>Classical Aesthetics</i>	4,34	
		<i>Expressive Aesthetics</i>	4,14	

DISCUSSION

Results of the main effect of visual aesthetics shows that Instagram content with classical visual aesthetics is more likely to be more persuasive than the one using expressive visual aesthetics. This is the first primary finding of this study. Peripheral elements; like visual aesthetics in an Instagram environment, can be categorized as hygiene factors or motivating factors (Zhang and von Dran, 2000). Considering that information seeking about tourism destinations is entertaining activities satisfying hedonic needs (Whiting and Williams, 2013), classical aesthetics plays a role as the hygiene factor necessities Instagram users' attention (Cai and Xu, 2011) which leads to more favorable responses.

The result of the main effect of message orientation suggested that using different message orientation did not lead to different consumer engagement. This result indicates that visual element of an Instagram content is more powerful in eliciting consumer engagement than verbal element is. This result is actually relevant with the fact that Instagram is a visual-based social media platform. From Elaboration Likelihood Model perspective, this study validates that on Instagram context, peripheral cues are more powerful and persuasive than message cues.

The result of the interaction effect of visual aesthetics and message orientation suggesting that an Instagram content using a combination of classical visual aesthetics and interaction-oriented message resulted higher consumer engagement than any other combination of visual aesthetics and message orientation. Meanwhile, Instagram content using a combination of expressive visual aesthetics and self-oriented message gained lower consumer engagement than any other combination of visual aesthetics and message orientation. This finding is consistent with the feature integration theory (Treisman & Gelade, 1980), suggesting that consumers are more likely to respond positively to information that is presented differently or uniquely compared to other information they are exposed to. Most Instagram content investigated in this study used task orientation and expressive visual aesthetics, hence, content using interaction orientation or classical visual aesthetics stood out and was better responded.

CONCLUSION

This study found that (1) Instagram content of Indonesia tourism destinations designed with classical visual aesthetics obtained higher consumer engagement than the one with expressive visual aesthetics. Meanwhile, (2) Instagram content of Indonesia tourism destinations using different message orientation in their captions did not generate significantly different consumer engagement, and (3) Instagram content of Indonesia tourism destinations using a combination of classical visual aesthetics and interacted-orientation message obtained higher consumer engagement than content using any other combinations of visual aesthetics and message orientation; meanwhile, Instagram content of Indonesia tourism destinations using a combination of expressive visual aesthetics and self-orientation message obtained lower consumer engagement than content using any other combinations of visual aesthetics and message orientation. This particular finding extends the Elaboration Likelihood Model theory to the tourism and Instagram contexts which offered a theoretical contribution of this study that on Instagram context, peripheral cues are more persuasive than message cues.

Findings of this study are expected to enrich existing marketing literature, due to the fact that social media marketing adoption in tourism marketing context is still understudied. Moreover, findings of this study also contribute to provide some new insights for destination marketers to pay more attention to the visual aesthetic aspects when crafting Instagram content, and creating more interactive caption.

LIMITATION

Although content analysis enables researchers to observe and obtain actual behaviors, it is quite challenging to understand the meaning beyond the liking and commenting behavior. This might be the limitation of this study. Future research might address this limitation by doing in-depth interviews on the meaning of liking or commenting behavior, or to design an experimental study in order to be able to obtain clearer information about consumer behavior on social media.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

There is no conflicting interest while the researcher does the research.

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