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CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT ENHANCEMENT ON INSTAGRAM: STRATEGIES FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Empirical evidence has shown that customer engagement on social media (CESM) (e.g., likes and comments) can contribute to numerous business outcomes, such as intention to consume products (Alhabash *et al.*, 2015) and sales (Saboo *et al.*, 2016). Despite extensive efforts to uncover factors that can enhance CESM (e.g., see Tellis *et al.*, 2019; Wahid and Gunarto, 2021), several gaps still exist in content marketing literature. Notably, content marketing scholarship scarcely inspects the effect of visual aesthetics on CESM. In technology-mediated communication, visual aesthetics refers to the pleasing look of an image or object, categorized into classical and expressive (Lavie and Tractinsky, 2004). Images or videos have classical aesthetics when presented orderly and in clear designs. On the other hand, digital content is expressive when it shows creativity and originality (e.g., images placed at irregular angles and enriched with additional effects and animations). In addition, although CESM studies have analyzed textual information (e.g., call to action and questions embedded on social media posts, see Wahid and Gunarto, 2021), they have never considered the lengths of textual information (LTI). Lastly, previous studies have never explicitly discussed CESM enhancement strategies in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

This study aims to examine the effects of visual aesthetics (i.e., classical and expressive) and LTI on CESM (i.e., likes and comments) in the contexts of SMEs and Instagram. This research uses fashion SMEs (i.e., a high involvement product) as a sample. We hypothesize that: *H1a* Instagram posts presented in classical aesthetics generate higher likes than those presented in expressive aesthetics; *H1b* Instagram posts presented in classical aesthetics generate more likes than comments; *H2a* Instagram posts with short, medium, and long captions generate higher likes than very short captions; *H2b* Instagram posts with short, medium, and long captions generate more likes than comments; and *H3* there are interaction effects between visual aesthetics and LTI in influencing CESM of (a) likes and (b) comments.

METHODS

We used fashion SMEs (i.e., a high-involvement product) as a sample. This is because fashion brands

rely heavily on visual strategies to attract consumers on Instagram (Kusumasondjaja, 2019), hence in line with the objective of this study. Following the common practice in CESM literature (e.g., Wahid and Gunarto, 2021), we deployed content analysis for the data collection procedure. Two trained coders gathered Instagram posts of 10 fashion SMEs in Indonesia. Data comprised posts from 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020. In coding the visual aesthetics construct, coders recorded Instagram content as classical aesthetics (clear, symmetrical, and simple designs) or expressive aesthetics (asymmetrical and enriched with graphics, effects, and animations). Regarding LTI, coders input Instagram posts either having very short caption (one sentence or less), short caption (one paragraph), medium caption (two to three paragraphs), or long captions (more than three paragraphs). We also included time and hashtags as control variables. For reliability, the two coders first recorded 100 data. This resulted in 0.53 Cohen's kappa value. Due to this low value, the coders received additional training. After this, the coders coded 100 other data. The new Cohen's kappa was 0.917. As the reliability value was high, the coders continued to record the remaining Instagram content. After removing outliers, the final dataset included 1,147 posts, 758,462 likes, and 24,059 comments on Instagram. Given that the data were count data and overdispersed, following previous content marketing studies (e.g., Moran, Muzellec and Johnson, 2020; Wahid and Gunarto, 2021), we analyzed the data using negative binomial regression with maximum likelihood estimation.

RESULTS

In short, we reject *H1a*, *H1b*, and *H3b*; fully confirm *H2a* and *H2b*; and generally accept *H3a*. We corroborate that longer LTI can improve likes. Pertaining to visual aesthetics, while independently it has no effect on likes and comments, it negatively affects likes when combined with medium and long LTI. Table 1 exhibits the results of the negative binomial regressions.

Table 1. Negative Binomial Regression Results

Parameter	Model 1 - Likes		Model 2 - Comments	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
(Intercept)	6.483**	.0955	3.001**	.1295
Expressive aesthetics (baseline)				
Classical aesthetics	.266	.2497	-.295	.3366
Very short caption (baseline)				
Short Caption	.365*	.1476	.297	.1970
Medium Caption	.437**	.0931	.008	.1229
Long Caption	.359**	.0975	.142	.1286
Classical aesthetics x Short Caption	-.195	.3453	.452	.4610
Classical aesthetics x Medium Caption	-.536*	.2614	-.047	.3527
Classical aesthetics x Long Caption	-.720*	.2811	.180	.3777
Time	-.104*	.0506	.164*	.0678
Hashtags	-.550**	.0479	-.233**	.0648
(Negative binomial)	.545	.0211	.927	.0386

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We theoretically contribute to content marketing literature in three aspects. First, prior studies focused only on media formats such as photos and videos. They scarcely included the visual aesthetics discussion. We extend content marketing literature by showing how visual aesthetics can influence customer engagement on social media. Second, previous research only examined the types of textual information to embed on social media posts. We extend the literature by going deeper and exploring the length of the textual information or captions on social media posts. Third, we expand the context of the content marketing and customer engagement literature by using SMEs as the sample study. This last contribution is especially substantial given that customer engagement studies have never inspected SMEs, and SMEs need content marketing insights as they typically lack knowledge in developing effective content marketing strategies (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

This study also has a significant contribution to practice. Notably, for fashion SMEs, we advise them to write longer captions on Instagram to increase likes. People are highly involved when deciding to buy fashion products as fashion can show their personality and character. Therefore, fashion SMEs should provide a complete description of the products, such as the materials, sizes, and colours. Also, we suggest fashion SMEs avoid more than one paragraph of caption when sharing Instagram content with classical aesthetics look. Otherwise, likes will decrease.

Keywords: customer engagement, Instagram, content marketing, social media marketing, SMEs, visual aesthetics, textual information

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