

ANALYSIS OF VISUAL STORYTELLING UTILIZATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENHANCE THE BRAND IMAGE OF MSMEs IN JAMBI CITY

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Abstract

This study investigates the strategic utilization of visual storytelling on social media platforms to enhance the brand image of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Jambi City, Indonesia. Utilizing the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework as the underlying theoretical foundation, this research examines whether social media engagement (SME) acts as a critical mediating mechanism between visual storytelling and brand image development. A quantitative causal research design was implemented, surveying 100 active social media users in Jambi City who follow and interact with local MSME brands. Data were gathered through a structured online questionnaire and analyzed via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS4. The empirical results reveal that visual storytelling has a positive and significant direct effect on both brand image and social media engagement. Furthermore, social media engagement exerts a highly significant positive effect on brand image and successfully mediates the relationship between visual storytelling and brand image, exhibiting a partial mediation pattern. Descriptive analysis indicates a critical gap, while Jambi MSMEs suffer from low visual differentiation, they successfully cultivate high brand commitment through relational engagement. These findings suggest that Jambi MSMEs must transition from transactional, hard-selling catalog posts to relational, narrative-driven content to foster active audience interaction and build sustainable brand equity.

Keywords: Brand Image, Micro Enterprises, Social Media Engagement, Stimulus-Organism-Response, Visual Storytelling

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed modern marketing paradigms, shifting brand consumer communication from unidirectional transactional messages to multidirectional interactive experiences. Social media platforms have emerged as essential commercial channels, enabling businesses to disseminate highly interactive, visually rich, and readily accessible digital content to cultivate consumer relationships. In this hyper-competitive digital marketplace, a robust brand image serves as a cornerstone of enterprise survival, encapsulating the consumer's cognitive perceptions, experiences, and associations. A strong brand image not only drives consumer trust and long-term loyalty but also enhances an enterprise's competitive differentiation.

However, translating these digital opportunities into concrete brand equity remains a persistent challenge for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in developing regional economies like Jambi City, Indonesia. MSMEs represent the backbone of the Jambi economy, with census data from the Badan Pusat Statistik of Jambi Province indicating a total of 50,747 registered units in Jambi City. The structural composition of this sector is heavily dominated by micro-scale enterprises, which account for 90.60% of the total population, while small and medium enterprises constitute 8.57% and 0.83% respectively, as described in Table 1. This overwhelming concentration of micro-scale businesses highlights a systemic vulnerability, most local operators suffer from severe constraints in financial resources, creative talent, and digital marketing literacy. Consequently, while many Jambi MSMEs utilize social media, their marketing efforts remain highly transactional, relying on simple, non-emotional product listings that fail to engage the audience.

Table 1. Population and Category Distribution of MSMEs in Jambi City

No	Category	Units	Persentase (%)
1.	Usaha Mikro (UMi)	45.980	90.60%
2.	Usaha Kecil (UK)	4.350	8.57%
3.	Unit usaha menengah (UM)	417	0.83%
Total (N)		50.747	100%

This digital execution deficit is characterized by extremely low levels of social media engagement, with consumer interactions rarely extending beyond passive viewing. To address this challenge, digital marketing scholars have proposed visual storytelling the integration of compelling narrative structures with visual elements as a strategic mechanism to capture attention, build emotional resonance, and drive active consumer engagement. Despite growing interest, the direct impact of visual storytelling on brand image remains theoretically inconsistent, with some studies suggesting that visual narratives directly shape brand

perceptions, while others argue that the relationship is contingent upon intervening psychological and behavioral processes, such as social media engagement.

To resolve these theoretical inconsistencies and address the regional research gap concerning Indonesian MSMEs, this study utilizes Mehrabian and Russell's Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. Under this framework, visual storytelling is positioned as an environmental marketing stimulus that acts upon the consumer's internal cognitive and emotional state, conceptualized as social media engagement, which subsequently drives the behavioral response of brand image evaluation. By analyzing this mediated pathway, this study aims to provide empirical evidence and strategic guidelines for local MSMEs to optimize their digital presence and build resilient brand equity in Jambi City.

Literature Review

This study is theoretically grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, which explains how environmental stimuli influence human emotional and cognitive states, ultimately leading to specific behavioral outcomes. In digital marketing, environmental stimuli are represented by the content features presented on social media platforms. Visual storytelling serves as the primary marketing stimulus, defined as a communication strategy that merges narrative arcs with visual assets to deliver meaningful, memorable, and emotionally resonant brand messages. This construct is operationalized through four core dimensions: narrative quality, emotional appeal, authenticity, and telepresence. Narrative quality measures the clarity and coherence of the story flow, emotional appeal assesses the content's capacity to evoke feelings such as joy, curiosity, or inspiration, authenticity gauges the perceived honesty and credibility of the message, and telepresence evaluates the media's ability to make users feel physically and emotionally present within the narrative environment.

The organism element in the SOR model represents the internal processing stage of the consumer, conceptualized here as social media engagement. Social media engagement is defined as the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral connection that a consumer forms with a brand's social media content. It is measured through three primary dimensions, involvement, which captures the cognitive focus and attention directed toward the content; participation, which reflects explicit behavioral interactions such as liking, commenting, and sharing, and commitment, which represents the psychological attachment and loyalty toward the brand's social media account. Finally, the response element represents the final cognitive or behavioral outcome. In this model, the response is conceptualized as brand image, which refers to the overall mental representation and network of associations that consumers store in their memory regarding a specific brand. Brand image is operationalized through brand associations, perceived quality, and brand differentiation.

The theoretical relationships between these three variables form the basis of the hypothesized model. Applying the SOR framework, visual storytelling as a stimulus is expected to directly enhance the consumer's cognitive perception of the brand. When MSMEs utilize authentic, emotionally rich visual stories, they simplify the communication of their core values, making it easier for consumers to form positive brand associations, perceive high product quality, and recognize brand distinctiveness. Previous empirical research confirms that structured brand narratives are highly effective at humanizing corporate brands and building immediate trust. Therefore, it is hypothesized that visual storytelling exerts a positive and significant direct influence on the brand image of Jambi MSMEs.

Beyond direct brand image formation, visual storytelling is a powerful driver of audience interaction. Content that is visually immersive and narratively structured is more effective at capturing cognitive attention and retaining viewers than traditional promotional material. By creating a sense of telepresence and evoking emotional responses, visual stories encourage users to actively engage with the content, thereby increasing cognitive involvement, driving interactive participation, and fostering long-term commitment. Thus, it is hypothesized that visual storytelling has a positive and significant direct effect on social media engagement.

In turn, social media engagement is expected to act as a major antecedent of brand image. When consumers move from passive viewers to active participants by leaving comments, sharing posts, and regularly checking for updates they engage in a process of psychological co-creation. This active interaction strengthens their relationship with the brand, reinforcing brand recall and elevating their perception of its reliability and quality. High consumer engagement on social media is also linked to increased brand trust and superior brand equity. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that social media engagement has a positive and significant direct effect on brand image.

Finally, the SOR model suggests that the direct influence of a marketing stimulus on behavioral outcomes is often mediated by the internal state of the organism. While visual storytelling can directly influence consumer perceptions, its capacity to build a lasting brand image is fully realized when it activates the consumer's psychological involvement and active participation. By prompting consumers to interact with and discuss the brand narrative, social media engagement translates temporary visual attention into deep-seated brand commitment and positive brand evaluations. Thus, it is hypothesized that social media engagement significantly mediates the relationship between visual storytelling and brand image.

Methods

This study adopted a quantitative, causal research design to systematically test the hypothesized relationships between visual storytelling, social media engagement, and brand image. The target population was defined at two levels, the corporate level, comprising active MSMEs in Jambi City utilizing social media channels, and the individual level, consisting of active social media users residing in Jambi City who follow and interact with Jambi based MSME accounts. To ensure data quality, a two-stage non-probability sampling technique was implemented. First, purposive sampling was utilized to identify local MSME social media accounts that consistently employ visual storytelling elements (such as behind the scenes footage, origin stories, and customer experience narratives) on Instagram and TikTok. Second, convenience sampling was used to select individual respondents from the active followers of these accounts who met specific screening criteria, including active social media usage, direct exposure to the target MSME's visual stories, and interactive behavior (likes, comments, shares) within the preceding three to five months.

A sample size of 100 valid respondents was established, satisfying the widely accepted statistical heuristic for PLS-SEM, which recommends a sample size of at least ten times the maximum number of indicators measuring a single construct in the structural model. Primary data were collected via a structured online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The survey instrument consisted of three sections, respondent screening, demographic profiling, and construct measurement items. All construct items were adapted from validated scales in the digital marketing literature, with visual storytelling measured using 10 items, social media engagement measured using 8 items, and brand image measured using 7 items. Respondents rated their agreement on a five point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

To interpret the descriptive findings, mean scores were categorized into five intervals, very low (1.00–1.80), low (1.81–2.60), medium (2.61–3.40), high (3.41–4.20), and very high (4.21–5.00). Hypotheses and path relationships were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS4 software. This approach is highly suited for predictive causal research and complex, multi-indicator mediating models. The analysis proceeded through a two-step evaluation, the outer measurement model, to establish convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability, followed by the inner structural model, to evaluate predictive power (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), effect sizes (f^2), and the significance of the direct and indirect path coefficients.

Results and Discussion

The demographic profile of the 100 respondents represents a highly active, digitally literate consumer segment in Jambi City. Gender distribution was balanced, with females accounting for 54.00% and males representing 46.00% of the sample. The age profile was dominated by younger generations, with 43.00% of respondents aged 17–25 and 39.00% aged 26–35, while 15.00% were older than 35 and 3.00% were under 17. Social media usage intensity was high, 51.00% of respondents reported spending 3–5 hours daily on social media, 27.00% spent more than 5 hours, and 20.00% spent 1–3 hours. Crucially, 92.00% of respondents confirmed explicit, active interactions (likes, comments, shares, or complete video views) with Jambi MSME content, validating their suitability for the study.

Descriptive analysis of the measurement items revealed important patterns in how consumers perceive Jambi MSME marketing efforts. Within the visual storytelling construct, all items fell into the "medium" category, with an overall mean of 2.92. Notably, the item "I can easily understand the message without extra explanation" scored the highest (mean 3.08), indicating that MSMEs convey basic product information clearly. However, the item "The content has a clear story flow and is not just a promotion" received the lowest score (mean 2.69), showing that Jambi MSMEs still struggle to produce genuine narrative content and often lapse into direct product pitches.

For social media engagement, the overall mean was 3.10 (medium). The commitment item "I feel a special interest toward this social media account" achieved a "high" rating (mean 3.53), suggesting strong relational potential. Conversely, active participation items like "I have commented on or responded to their content" scored lower (mean 2.91), pointing to a gap between passive interest and active engagement.

Most notably, the brand image construct yielded an overall mean of 2.80 (medium), but exhibited extreme polarization. The item "The brand has its own unique characteristics" scored high (mean 3.24), yet the differentiation item "The way they deliver content makes them stand out" fell into the "low" category with a mean of 2.30. This highlights a critical operational issue: while consumers recognize the latent uniqueness of Jambi MSMEs, the repetitive, uninspired presentation of social media content fails to highlight this distinctiveness, causing brands to blend into a homogeneous digital catalog.

The evaluation of the outer measurement model confirmed the validity and reliability of the constructs. Visual Storytelling (X) demonstrated solid internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.928, Composite Reliability (ρ_c) of 0.939, and an AVE of 0.607. Social Media Engagement (M) registered Cronbach's Alpha of 0.885, Composite Reliability (ρ_c) of 0.909, and an AVE of 0.555. Brand Image (Y) exhibited strong reliability metrics, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.921, Composite Reliability (ρ_c) of 0.936, and an AVE of 0.678. All indicator loadings exceeded the 0.70 threshold, with the sole exception of M1 (0.634) which was retained because its inclusion did not compromise overall construct validity. Discriminant validity

was fully established using cross-loadings, demonstrating that each indicator loaded highest on its respective latent construct.

The evaluation of the inner structural model examined the model's predictive power, predictive relevance, and path relationships. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for social media engagement was 0.130, indicating that visual storytelling explains 13.00% of the variance in engagement. The R^2 for brand image was 0.281, showing that visual storytelling and social media engagement together account for 28.10% of the variance in brand image. According to academic standards, these values indicate weak to moderate explanatory power. Predictive relevance was confirmed using the Q^2 metric via PLSpredict, which yielded positive values for both social media engagement ($Q^2 = 0.078$) and brand image ($Q^2 = 0.186$), demonstrating satisfactory out of sample predictive capacity. Cohen's f^2 effect sizes revealed that visual storytelling has a medium effect on social media engagement ($f^2 = 0.149$) and a small effect on brand image ($f^2 = 0.071$), while social media engagement has a medium effect on brand image ($f^2 = 0.187$).

Hypotheses testing was performed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples to calculate path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	Standard Deviation	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
H1	Visual Storytelling > Brand Image	0.242	0.101	2.399	0.016	Supported
H2	Visual Storytelling > Social Media Engagement	0.360	0.082	4.409	<0.001	Supported
H3	Social Media Engagement > Brand Image	0.393	0.083	4.755	<0.001	Supported
H4	Visual Storytelling > SME > Brand Image	0.142	0.048	2.939	0.003	Supported

The structural analysis supported all four hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 was validated, confirming that visual storytelling has a positive and significant direct effect on brand image (0.242, $t = 2.399$, $p = 0.016$). This direct relationship aligns with the SOR framework and supports previous findings showing that narrative-driven content helps convey brand values and build positive associations. However, the relatively low direct effect size ($f^2 = 0.071$) highlights a challenge for Jambi MSMEs: simply posting visual stories is not enough to build a strong brand image if the content lacks creative differentiation and fails to stand out (consistent with the low differentiation score of 2.30).

Hypothesis 2 was supported, showing that visual storytelling has a strong positive and significant effect on social media engagement (0.360, $t = 4.409$, $p < 0.001$). This demonstrates that integrating narratives with visuals is a key driver of audience attention and interaction on social media. When MSMEs move away from dry promotional posts and share authentic, behind-the-scenes stories, they encourage users to spend more time with their content and interact with the brand.

Hypothesis 3 was also supported, revealing that social media engagement has a positive and highly significant effect on brand image (0.393, $t = 4.755$, $p < 0.001$). Notably, this is the strongest direct path in the model, indicating that active audience interaction is the most critical driver of brand perception for MSMEs in Jambi City. This finding points to a relational "value co-creation" mechanism: in a local market, consumers place high value on direct interaction, prompt replies, and community connection. This active engagement helps compensate for visual content limitations, successfully building brand commitment and trust even when the content's production value is modest.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 was validated, confirming that social media engagement significantly mediates the relationship between visual storytelling and brand image (0.142, $t = 2.939$, $p = 0.003$). Because the direct path from visual storytelling to brand image remained significant, the model exhibits partial mediation. This partial mediation underscores that while authentic visual stories can directly improve brand perceptions, their impact is significantly enhanced when they stimulate active consumer interaction. Social media engagement serves as the psychological bridge that turns fleeting visual interest into a strong, lasting brand image, making it an essential component of digital marketing strategies for local MSMEs.

This empirical evidence reveals a nuanced operating reality in Jambi City. The direct path (0.242) indicates that high quality visual stimuli can shape brand image independently, but the mediated path (0.142) represents a vital mechanism for regional businesses. Because Jambi consumers are characterized by high brand commitment (mean 3.53) once engaged, but demonstrate low initial interest in generic posts (mean 2.69), visual storytelling serves as a critical icebreaker. This is a significant point of difference when compared to findings in larger, corporate environments. For instance, research by Kimberly Nathaneil (2025) argued that the effect of digital storytelling is fully mediated by engagement, meaning that content has zero

impact on brand image unless active interaction occurs. In Jambi's MSME landscape, however, the partial mediation suggests a dual-action benefit: authentic, culturally resonant visual stories directly elevate brand quality perceptions among quiet observers, while simultaneously acting as a conversational prompt that draws active users into a co-creative dialogue, yielding a highly resilient brand image.

Conclusion

The empirical findings of this study offer clear insights into how digital marketing operates for regional enterprises in Jambi City. It is concluded that visual storytelling is not merely an aesthetic enhancement but a vital strategic tool that directly shapes consumer perceptions and drives audience engagement. While Jambi MSMEs operate with constrained resources, the utilization of authentic visual narratives offers a practical pathway to humanize their operations, convey brand values, and cultivate consumer trust. Crucially, the structural model demonstrates that social media engagement is the single most powerful driver of brand image, and its role as a partial mediator highlights that the full value of a marketing stimulus is realized only when it is transformed into active audience interaction. Jambi's consumers display a strong willingness to commit to local brands on social media, yet they are highly sensitive to generic, repetitive promotions. This indicates that the low differentiation observed in Jambi MSME content is not a failure of brand potential, but rather an execution gap characterized by a reliance on passive, catalog-style content.

Based on these conclusions, several actionable recommendations are proposed for MSME operators and local policy stakeholders in Jambi City. First, local entrepreneurs must systematically transition from a transactional, hard-selling posting model to a relational, narrative driven content strategy. MSMEs should de-emphasize dry product listings and instead construct sequential visual narratives that highlight their unique production processes, localized craftsmanship, and organic origin stories. This change in approach is essential for addressing the low content differentiation scores and helping local brands stand out on digital platforms. Second, MSMEs should design their social media accounts to function as conversational hubs. This can be achieved by utilizing interactive features such as polls, direct questions, and user-generated content prompts, and by maintaining a personal, responsive communication style when replying to comments and inquiries. This relational management is vital for turning passive viewers into active participants. Third, the Jambi City Cooperative and MSME Office should align their digital literacy programs with these findings, shifting their training focus from basic social media account setup to advanced curriculum topics like mobile visual production, storytelling techniques, and social media community management. Finally, future researchers should expand upon this model by examining the remaining 87.00% unexplained variance in social media engagement, exploring variables such as platform algorithm dynamics, localized influencer partnerships, and the moderating effects of platform-specific features like TikTok Reels versus Instagram Carousels.

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