Original Article

Digital Storytelling on Marketing Communication of a Tourism Product: A Trend or a Necessary for Indonesian Buyer?

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Abstract: The implementation of storytelling in current marketing communication has become a global trend, and the need for companies to create engagement with their consumers can be achieved through storytelling techniques. This research examines how Kito Scarf Bengkulu, a unique tourism product of Bengkulu, implements marketing communication techniques through storytelling on its Instagram account. The qualitative research method employed is a case study approach to examine the implementation of digital storytelling on Instagram of Kito Scarf Bengkulu to engage with customers. The findings indicate that in the case of Kito Scarf Bengkulu, the storytelling technique cannot be considered efficient in creating engagement with followers and customers of Kito Scarf. The utilization of Instagram's feed feature in the form of photos and storytelling captions by Kito Scarf does not align with the characteristics of its followers and customers. Several factors contribute to this condition, including the relatively low interest of customers in reading, as well as the content of the photos and captions not being able to capture the interest of the intended target audience. Further investigation into this matter is still necessary.

Keywords: Creative Economy Product, Digital Storytelling, Instagram, Integrated Marketing Communication, Tourism Product

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1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of foreign tourist arrivals in Indonesia in 2020 dramatically decreased compared to the previous year, with only about 4.052 million visitors, or approximately 25% of the number of foreign tourists in 2019. This led to a significant drop in hotel occupancy rates in Indonesia, and many sectors related to the creative economy of tourism struggled to survive, particularly in food and beverage products like restaurants. This also directly impacted various job opportunities within the tourism sector. According to data from Statistics Indonesia in 2020, around 409,000 workers in the tourism sector lost their jobs due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Shelly Christiani Saputri et al., 2022). Tourism and the creative economy are among Indonesia's key sectors. This sector contributed 7.8% to the national economy's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022 (Parlindungan et al., 2021). Three popular creative economy products are food, beverages, and crafts, including ethnic fashion products that depend on Indonesia's tourism sector. These creative economy products are the favorite items for tourists visiting a region in Indonesia. When tourism is thriving, the creative economy also has promising prospects.
As one of the creative economy commodities related to tourism activities, tourists often choose fashion as a souvenir due to its advantageous features: no expiration date, practical, and unique. For example, Batik Pekalongan (Sunarjo et al., 2019); Batik Lasem batik from Rembang region (Haryono & Fathoni, 2017); Kain Tenun Lombok from Lombok island (Anggraini et al., 2018); Batik Besurek from Bengkulu Province (Bafaqih & Darwoto, 2022), or the most popular one among the tourists is any products of fashion from Bali. Generally, these region-specific creative economy fashion products are ready-to-wear fashion items that present the uniqueness of many ethnicities and cultures in Indonesia. Religious things and the needs of consumers, such as fashion products for Muslims, inspire some producers. Considering Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, Muslim fashion products are growing significantly, and Indonesia is ranked third globally in terms of the highest consumption of Islamic fashion. This condition is relevant when the government is actively promoting halal tourism destinations. This is represented by Indonesia's achievement as the World's first halal tourism destination in 2019, according to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) (Hasan et al., 2021). This is a significant opportunity for Indonesia to dominate as the top tourist destination for Muslim travelers worldwide and for Muslim fashion producers. Kito Scarf captures the opportunity to provide a unique hijab for muslimah, representing Islam's values and the local pride of Bengkulu.

Kito Scarf is one of the creative Muslim fashion producers specializing in hijab or scarves. Their products are characterized by a unique motif of Bengkulu, particularly the Rafflesia flower motif, as Bengkulu is home to the rarest flower in the world, the Rafflesia Arnoldii. This unique flower has become an icon of the Bengkulu Province. Apart from the Rafflesia flower motif, Kito Scarf also supports another local pride motif, the Besurek motif. “Besurek” originates from the Melayu-Bengkulu language, meaning “inscribed” or “writing.” The motif of Besurek is Arabic calligraphy. This motif has been further developed into various patterns inspired by Arabic letters (Wisman & Hiasa, 2021). Kito Scarf’s design serves the brand identity and uniqueness of Bengkulu that are rarely found in other hijab products, especially in other local brands. Therefore, Kito Scarf has developed fast since its first product was released in 2018. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they survived and increased their sales turnover. Their products become more popular in the local market and among domestic visitors since nationally scaled exhibitions often invite them as the representative entrepreneurs of Bengkulu Province. It differs from offline sales; buyers outside Sumatera Island favor online sales even more. Its delivery has expanded to cover all regions across Indonesia.

As their popularity grows, they have also increased their sales turnover from less than 5 million rupiah in 2018 to hundreds of millions per month. Their largest sales come from online sales, as Kito Scarf emphasized online selling right from the start. They particularly leveraged the communication network through the instant messenger application WhatsApp and effective and consistent utilization of the social media platform Instagram. These efforts greatly assist in building brand awareness and boosting the sales of Kito Scarf’s products. The utilization of Instagram in marketing Kito Scarf products includes applying the storytelling method to engage with their stakeholders, such as followers, prospective customers, and loyal customers. Previous researchers have studied the impact of the storytelling method in connecting consumers with products, and it is often used especially in the tourism field (Bassano et al., 2019; Lintang Citra Christiani et al., 2022; Meng-Yu Chen et al., 2023; Parani & Juliana, 2023). Other researchers used it in the marketing communication field, such as the experiences of legendary brands (Indira, 2019), the effectiveness of donation collection (Herna et al., 2019), and the production process to establish consumer trust (Padilla & Aditia, 2022). However, in marketing communication research, there is still limited research investigating the minor drawbacks of storytelling, particularly with caption features, especially on Instagram. Hence, this study aims to review the trend of storytelling methods in the case of Kito Scarf’s product.

2. Materials and Methods

Research methodology is a scientific approach to obtaining data for specific purposes and objectives (Sugiyono, 2013). In line with the goals of this research, the research methodology employed is qualitative research using a case study approach. The case study approach aims to comprehend a specific issue or problem, focusing on a particular case or selected cases to better understand the problem, referred to as an instrumental case (Lewis, 2015). This research employs an intrinsic case study approach because it focuses on the digital storytelling case of the Kito Scarf Bengkulu tourism product, which stands out for its implementation of marketing communication methods through digital storytelling, especially in the Instagram feed containing photos and captions. The informants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique, consisting of the owners of Kito Scarf Bengkulu, Ve (37), and Nana (37). The data was collected using an in-depth interview with the owners of Kito Scarf Bengkulu, non-participant observation by observing the Instagram account @kitoscarf, and documentation such as screenshots of @kitoscarf Instagram account, photos, and voice recording.
3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Kito Scarf’s Overview

Kito Scarf is a creative economy product targeting adult muslimah (Muslim women) aged between 25 to 45 years. In its development, the business owners did not anticipate their product would also attract young muslimah consumers from various regions across Indonesia. This product was initially launched in 2018 by Ve (37) and Nana (37), two friends who have known each other since high school. Their monthly sales turnover was below 5 million Indonesian rupiahs when it was first launched. However, by 2023, their monthly sales turnover has reached hundreds of millions of rupiahs. The distinctive feature of Kito Scarf products lies in their unique designs that merge local wisdom, the Rafflesia flower motif, and the Besurek motif. In terms of design, they have conducted various experiments, starting from abstract patterns, pastel colors, and dark shades, until they finally found and established their local pride identity: the values of Bengkulu culture through their experiences and business development.

![Kito Scarf 2018](image1)

![Kito Scarf 2023](image2)

Figure 1. Kito’s Scarf Design Then and Now

According to Yuliati et al. (2017), in addition to the distinctive Rafflesia and Besurek designs, they often create thematic designs that align with various celebrations in Indonesia or Islamic celebrations days. For example, to commemorate Indonesia's Independence Day on August 17, they release a special edition featuring the red and white colors of the national flag. Similarly, they also release special products for Eid al-Adha for the occasion. The informants also mentioned that their service is something they take pride in for their sales. It includes friendly and patient assistance, informative responses, quick response times, and attentiveness to customer feedback. They treat customers as "friends," using familiar and sisterly greetings, which has become a characteristic of Kito Scarf when they respond to every direct message on their social media accounts. This warmth is also evident when interacting with customers face-to-face. An immediate sense of familiarity is often established when buyers visit their physical store or approach their booth during exhibitions. It is no wonder that repeat purchases are frequent among their customers, as they appreciate the scarf’s quality and feel treated as friends.

The informants also mentioned that excellent customer service is one of their strengths in sales. They prioritize friendliness and patience in addressing every customer’s query, providing informative and fast responses, and attentively listening to customer feedback. They treat customers as "friends," using Muslim sisterhood ambiance greetings, which have become a trademark of Kito Scarf when they respond to every direct message received via Instagram or WhatsApp. This warmth also applies in face-to-face interactions, often creating an immediate camaraderie when buyers visit their offline store or booth at exhibitions.
However, repeat purchases are common among their customers, as they appreciate the quality of the scarves and emerge a welcome feeling.

3.2. Kito Scarf’s Sales Media

In their sales efforts, Kito Scarf primarily utilizes the social media platform Instagram as their main sales channel, followed by Facebook, instant messaging via WhatsApp, and an offline store. According to the informants, the significant effectiveness in selling Kito Scarf products is mainly achieved through Instagram. Kito Scarf often employs Instagram ads with popular hashtags such as #oleholehbengkulu; #premiumscarfbengkulu; #batikbesurek; #visitbengkulu.” In their sales strategy, Kito Scarf primarily uses the social media platform Instagram as their main sales media, followed by Facebook, instant messaging through Whatsapp, and an offline store. They also provide other sales media such as Shopee and Tokopedia, two giant marketplaces in Indonesia. They also use TikTok to reach the younger Muslimah—these sales media links are in their Instagram bio. However, according to the informants, the significant effectiveness of Kito Scarf’s sales is largely attributed to Instagram. They frequently utilize Instagram ads with popular hashtags such as #oleholehbengkulu, #premiumscarfbengkulu, #batikbesurek, and #visitbengkulu. Initially, Kito Scarf chose to use Instagram as their primary sales platform due to the widespread use of social media in Indonesia, particularly Instagram, in 2018. Besides, Instagram is the most popular social media platform generally used by millennials and Generation Z in Indonesia as their market target. Meanwhile, WhatsApp is an alternative messaging platform that offers customers comfortable, fast responses and credible communication media.

3.3. Digital Storytelling via Caption Instagram

Kito Scarf itself has been “telling stories” Through its unique designs. It’s not just about narrating the uniqueness of Bengkulu’s identity with the Rafflesia and Besurek icons but also about sharing the story of Bengkulu itself. In some of its thematic designs, the informants expressed their idealism about their desire to introduce Rafflesia as Bengkulu’s prideful flower to the Indonesians and even to the world. Similarly, the Besurek motif, typically used for batik textiles, also conveys a narrative. Currently, people are more familiar with Java batik motifs like batik Pekalongan, batik Yogyakarta, batik Garut, or typically batik from other regions in Java. The informants, originally the natives of Bengkulu, wish to make people aware that a batik Besurek originates from Bengkulu and can also be applied to hijab products. Beyond Kito Scarf’s regular motifs of Rafflesia and Besurek, several editions of Kito Scarf also attempt to introduce unique aspects of Bengkulu. For instance, they feature motifs representing Bengkulu’s local cuisine and indigenous coastal animals, and they’ve even released hijab designs featuring lyrics from Bengkulu folk songs.
The Instagram feed above discusses the hijab design related to Bengkulu as a coastal area. Accompanied by informative explanations in the captions below the posts, according to Yuliati et al. (2017), she aims to educate Kito Scarf’s followers about Bengkulu’s unique marine animals from the Kaur region in Bengkulu Province. Even though Instagram feeds and captions regarding these typical marine animals were shared quite a while ago, the likes and comments on these feeds received minimal attention from followers. Similarly, the Instagram feed featuring lyrics from the Bengkulu folk song “Ikan Pais” also received limited engagement. According to the informant, this folk song is popular among Bengkulu’s society, but the Indonesian people do not widely recognize it. Ikan Pais folk songs are less known than other folk songs from other regions in Indonesia, such as those from Central Java or West Java. This inspired the informant to appreciate the creator of the Ikan Pais folk song from Bengkulu.
The lyrics of this Bengkulu folk song narrate the deliciousness of a local Bengkulu dish known as Ikan Pais or Pendap. This song often becomes a mandatory folk song for elementary school students in Bengkulu. Its melody and lyrics are quite simple and easy to remember, so for Bengkulu people, when living away from their hometown, hearing this song triggers memories of their native village. Kito Scarf hopes that the scarf with the lyrics of the song 'Ikan Pais' will remind its wearers of Bengkulu, just as the designers of Kito Scarf associate the song with a part of Bengkulu. The lyrics of this Bengkulu folk song narrate the deliciousness of a Bengkulu specialty dish named 'Ikan Pais', also known as 'Pendap.' This song often serves as a mandatory folk song for elementary school students in Bengkulu. Its melody and lyrics are quite simple and easy to remember. However, for Bengkulu people living away from home, hearing this song often triggers memories of their hometown. Kito Scarf hopes that the scarf featuring the lyrics of the 'Ikan Pais' song will remind its users about their hometown or Bengkulu, just as the designers of Kito Scarf associate this song as a part of Bengkulu.

3.4. Inefficacy Caption Storytelling of Kito Scarf: The Digital Storytelling Transformation of Kito Scarf from Captions to Instastory and Reels

The enthusiasm of Kito Scarf's Instagram followers towards storytelling through captions is not very positive—the low number of likes and comments on posts evidences this. Initially, Kito Scarf expected to provide its followers with additional information and insights about Bengkulu. According to the informants, besides the minimal likes and comments, their customers often overlook captions containing product information such as price, size, and material. Customers frequently inquire about basic information through direct comments, or WhatsApp messages. Not only do they not read story captions, but they also tend to skip reading about basic product information when they’re interested in the products. A reading emergency in Indonesian society has indeed occurred in this case. According to a survey conducted by UNESCO regarding the reading interests of Indonesians in 2016, Indonesia ranked 60th out of 61 countries (Harisanty et al., 2021). It seems that this not only refers to the lack of interest in reading books but also to informative matters when someone is interested in making online purchases. Often, existing information is skipped in favor of seeking immediate answers. As explained by the informants, storytelling conveyed through caption formats often doesn’t receive the expected response. Kito Scarf still desires to engage with its consumers through stories behind the products. After trying to change the format from captions to short video formats in Instastory and Reels features on Instagram, the informants confirmed that their followers pay more attention to these formats. Although responses in the form of comments on Instastory are still limited, this can be observed through the number of viewers who watch their Instastory videos, the views on Reels, and the enthusiasm of participants in giveaways when Kito Scarf posts them in Instastory.

Through Instastory and Reels, the informants noted that their followers and customers prefer audio-visual content for storytelling rather than written text, as reading captions requires more effort. When storytelling content is presented in audio-visual formats like Instastory and Reels, it becomes more appealing to viewers. Messages are conveyed through moving images accompanied by narration and music. This dynamic format is perceived as more captivating than static captions, leading to increased engagement. Kito Scarf's Instastory and Reels content also explores the
behind-the-scenes processes of Kito Scarf production, such as the design creation process, the quality of Kito Scarf materials, Kito Scarf's activities during exhibitions, interactions with customers in offline settings, and more.

4. Conclusions

Social media is utilized as a platform for storytelling about product uniqueness, product advantages, behind-the-scenes design, and production stories in the marketing communication of Kito Scarf Bengkulu's tourism products to create engagement with its customers. However, the strategy of storytelling techniques using caption features on Kito Scarf's Instagram does not seem to be ready for use with the characteristics of Kito Scarf's target consumers. Consequently, the efforts to create this connection cannot be considered successful. Several factors related to this condition seem to be caused by various factors, including society's general low reading habit and the content of photos and captions that have not been able to capture the target audience's interest. Therefore, Kito Scarf has transformed this storytelling technique by utilizing Instastory and Reels features of Instagram in audio-visual format. This transformation seems to be better received by Kito Scarf's followers and customers than to the photos and captions format. Thus, the storytelling trend can be applied in the case of Kito Scarf Bengkulu, along with the adjustments according to the characteristics of its target.

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