International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

Effectiveness of Using Instagram as A Promotional Media for Fashion MSMEs in Medan

Louis Umri [1], Keisha Ariestya Mahesan [2], Dede Ansyari Guci [3*], Nik Hazimi Mohammed Foziah [4]
[1-3] PUI Digital Business and SMEs, Universitas Prima Indonesia, Indonesia
[4] Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Suiltan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

* Corresponding Author: **Dede Ansyari Guci**

Article Info

Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Instagram as a promotional tool for fashion MSMEs in Medan by examining how content quality, user interaction, and follower count influence promotional outcomes. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured online survey administered to 100 active Instagram users familiar with local fashion MSMEs. The study conducted validity and reliability assessments, classical assumption testing, and multiple linear regression to examine the relationships among variables. The results indicate that content quality, user interaction, and follower count each have a significant and positive influence on promotional effectiveness. Among these variables, content quality emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that visual appeal and clarity play a central role in driving audience engagement and promotional impact. This study contributes to the digital marketing literature by providing empirical evidence on how Instagram's platform features shape promotional effectiveness in the context of fashion MSMEs in a developing-country setting. The model integrates visual content theory, engagement theory, and social influence mechanisms to explain promotional success. The findings offer practical insights for MSME owners and digital marketers, emphasizing the need to improve content aesthetics, enhance two-way interactions with consumers, and strategically build follower communities. Policymakers supporting MSME digitalization may use these insights to develop training programs focused on social media marketing optimization.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed how micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) engage with consumers and promote their products. Social media platforms have become one of the most accessible and cost- effective marketing channels, providing MSMEs the opportunity to reach broader audiences without requiring substantial financial investment. Among these platforms, Instagram has emerged as a preferred promotional medium due to its visual-centric format, interactive features, and high level of user engagement. Features such as photos, videos, Stories, Reels, hashtags, geotags, and direct messaging allow businesses to showcase their products more creatively and foster stronger connections with consumers (Ashley & Tuten, 2015) [3].

In the fashion industry—where visual presentation, aesthetics, and brand perception are crucial—Instagram plays a particularly strategic role. Fashion MSMEs rely heavily on visual appeal to attract potential buyers, making Instagram an ideal platform for creating product awareness and stimulating purchase interest. Previous studies indicate that visually appealing content can increase consumer engagement and influence purchasing decisions by enhancing the perceived value and credibility of a product (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016) [7]. However, despite Instagram's popularity among MSMEs, empirical research focusing specifically on its effectiveness for fashion MSMEs in Medan remains limited.

This gap highlights the urgency for studies that investigate how Instagram's content quality, user interaction, and follower base contribute to promotional success. Understanding these factors is essential, as social media-driven marketing activities have become increasingly competitive, requiring MSMEs to adopt more strategic approaches. Accordingly, this study aims to evaluate the extent to which content quality, interaction, and follower count influence the promotional effectiveness of fashion MSMEs operating in Medan.

2. Method
A quantitative research design was employed using a structured online survey administered to 100 active Instagram users familiar with local fashion MSMEs. The study conducted validity and reliability assessments, classical assumption testing, and multiple linear regression to examine the relationships among variables.

3. Literature Review
3.1. Instagram as a Digital Marketing Platform
Instagram has become one of the most dominant social media platforms in digital marketing due to its high visual orientation and interactive communication features. As a platform designed for visual storytelling, Instagram enables businesses to present product aesthetics, brand identity, and persuasive messages more effectively compared to text-based platforms (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021) [9]. Interactive features such as likes, comments, hashtags, geotags, Stories, and Reels enhance user engagement and facilitate communication between consumers and brands (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020) [2].
For MSMEs, especially those operating in the fashion industry, Instagram offers strategic advantages by allowing entrepreneurs to display design details, textures, color combinations, and lifestyle imagery—all of which strongly affect consumer perception and intention to purchase fashion-related products (Manzoor, Khan, & Hashim, 2020) [24]. The platform's algorithm also amplifies visibility for accounts that consistently produce engaging content, making it an affordable yet powerful promotional tool for small businesses.

3.2. Content Quality
Content quality refers to the degree to which visual and textual elements are clear, attractive, informative, and relevant to consumer needs. High-quality visual content can enhance product appeal, shape brand perceptions, and stimulate consumer engagement (Yang, Lin, Carlson, & Ross, 2022) [28]. In fashion marketing, content quality is particularly important because aesthetic presentation directly influences how consumers assess product value and attractiveness (Kim & Sullivan, 2019) [19].
Prior studies reveal that vivid imagery, consistent color themes, and professional layouts positively influence brand attitude and consumer trust (Alalwan, 2018; Lin, Swarna, & Brunning, 2023) [1, 22]. For MSMEs, improving content quality helps compensate for resource limitations by strengthening the perceived professionalism of the brand. High-quality Instagram content enhances perceived product value, influences brand evaluation, and increases promotional success (Yang et al., 2022; Kim & Sullivan, 2019) [28, 19]. Visual clarity and aesthetic appeal are particularly influential in fashion-related decisions.

3.3. User Interaction
User interaction refers to two-way communication between consumers and brands through likes, comments, direct messages, polls, and other interactive features. Engagement theory posits that interaction increases customer involvement, emotional connection, and behavioral intention (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2019) [4]. Social media interactions enhance brand loyalty and encourage customers to share content with others, amplifying promotional reach.
Empirical studies show that higher interaction levels lead to greater brand awareness and stronger purchase intentions (de Vries, Peluso, Romani, Leeflang, & Marcati, 2017) [8]. For MSMEs, interaction also substitutes traditional customer service by providing a platform for quick responses to inquiries, feedback, and product discussions. Interactive communication fosters consumer engagement, trust, and emotional connection, which contribute to better promotional outcomes (Brodie et al., 2019; de Vries et al., 2017) [4, 8].

3.4. Follower Count
Follower count reflects the potential audience reach of a business account. Social influence theory suggests that larger follower numbers enhance perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and brand reputation because users tend to rely on social proof when making digital decisions (Mishra, Kesharwani, & Das, 2023) [25]. Businesses with a higher follower base are generally perceived as more reliable and popular, leading to increased engagement and promotional outcomes.
Research indicates that follower count significantly affects user perception, brand legitimacy, and marketing effectiveness (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020) [5]. For MSMEs, follower count serves not only as a measure of audience size but also as a signal of digital presence and competitive strength.
Follower numbers signal popularity and credibility, shaping user perceptions and amplifying message reach (Casaló et al., 2020; Mishra et al., 2023) [5, 25].

3.5. Promotional Effectiveness
Promotional effectiveness refers to the extent to which promotional activities achieve desired outcomes, including increased awareness, engagement, and purchase intention. Effective digital promotion depends on message clarity, platform suitability, audience engagement, and content relevance (Grewal, Roggeveen, & Nordfält, 2017) [13]. For fashion MSMEs, promotional effectiveness is often indicated by consumer responses such as inquiries, social media engagement, and sales conversions.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1. Results
A total of 100 participants completed the online questionnaire. The characteristics of Respondents shown as the Table 1 below:

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Sub-category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	32	32%
	Female	68	68%
Age	< 20 years	6	6%
	20–30 years	74	74%
	31–40 years	15	15%
	> 40 years	5	5%
Instagram Usage	Multiple times/day	82	82%
	Once/day	11	11%
	Several times / weeks	7	7%
Following MSME Fashion Accounts	Yes	100	100%
Interaction with MSME Content	Frequently	69	69%

Table 2: Results of Validity

Variable	Item Code	Corrected Item–Total Correlation (r-count)	r-table (n = 100)	Conclusion
Content Quality (X1)	X1.1	0.612	0.195	Valid
	X1.2	0.658	0.195	Valid
	X1.3	0.701	0.195	Valid
	X1.4	0.644	0.195	Valid
User Interaction (X2)	X2.1	0.583	0.195	Valid
	X2.2	0.628	0.195	Valid
	X2.3	0.671	0.195	Valid
	X2.4	0.609	0.195	Valid
Follower Count (X3)	X3.1	0.556	0.195	Valid
	X3.2	0.602	0.195	Valid
	X3.3	0.641	0.195	Valid
Promotional Effectiveness (Y)	Y1	0.693	0.195	Valid
	Y2	0.721	0.195	Valid
	Y3	0.748	0.195	Valid
	Y4	0.665	0.195	Valid

Table 1 shows that the demographic profile indicates that the majority of respondents were female (68%), while male respondents accounted for 32%. Most participants were between 20–30 years old (74%), representing a demographic segment highly active on Instagram and frequently engaged in fashion-related digital content. In terms of Instagram usage intensity, 82% of respondents reported visiting the platform multiple times per day, showing strong familiarity with social media promotional activities.

This demographic composition validates the relevance of the sample because women and young adults tend to dominate the fashion consumption segment on Instagram. Thus, their responses effectively represent the perceptions of users interacting with fashion MSMEs in Medan.

In Table 2, All item-total correlation values exceeded the minimum threshold (r > 0.195), indicating that every questionnaire item successfully measured the intended construct. This confirms that the indicators used for content quality, user interaction, follower count, and promotional effectiveness are valid.

Table 3: Reliability

Variable	Alpha	Interpretation
Content Quality	0.89	Reliable
User Interaction	0.87	Reliable
Follower Count	0.85	Reliable
Promotional Effectiveness	0.91	Reliable

Table 3 shows, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all variables surpassed the recommended value of 0.70. These results confirm strong internal consistency across the measurement items.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Hypothesis	β (Beta)	Sig. Value	Interpretation
H1: Content Quality → Promotional Effectiveness	0.412	0.000	Significant
H2: User Interaction → Promotional Effectiveness	0.356	0.002	Significant
H3: Follower Count → Promotional Effectiveness	0.291	0.004	Significant

Table 4 shows that all three hypotheses (H1, H2, H3) are supported, indicating that each variable significantly impacts promotional effectiveness.

Table 5: Regression Coefficient for Simultaneous Effect

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t- value	Sig. (p- value)	Conclusion
Content Quality (X1)	0.412	0.078	0.452	5.282	0.000	Significant
User Interaction (X2)	0.356	0.092	0.371	3.852	0.002	Significant
Follower Count (X3)	0.291	0.089	0.315	3.276	0.004	Significant

The combined regression results show that:

1. Content Quality, User Interaction, and Follower Count jointly explain 85% of the variance in Promotional Effectiveness.
2. The F-test is highly significant (p = 0.000).
3. All three predictors have significant individual effects and contribute meaningfully to the overall model.

H4: Content quality, user interaction, and follower count collectively have a positive and significant effect on promotional effectiveness — Supported

4.2. Discussion

A. Content Quality and Promotional Effectiveness
The findings show that content quality has the highest influence on promotional effectiveness. This supports earlier studies demonstrating that visually appealing and informative posts enhance consumer engagement and purchase intention (Yang *et al.*, 2022) [28]. Fashion-related products rely heavily on visual aesthetics, which strengthens the relevance of high-quality content for MSMEs.

B. User Interaction and Promotional Effectiveness
User interaction significantly improves promotional outcomes. This aligns with Brodie *et al.* (2019) [4], who argue that engagement fosters emotional connections and strengthens brand loyalty. Interactive features such as replies, Story polls, and comments encourage users to feel involved with the brand, boosting promotional success.

C. Follower Count and Promotional Effectiveness
Follower count positively affects promotional effectiveness. This is consistent with findings by Casaló *et al.* (2020) [5], who found that higher follower numbers act as social proof and enhance perceived brand credibility. For MSMEs, a larger follower base signals legitimacy and increases message reach.

D. Comparison with Existing Literature
Overall, the study's results align with digital marketing theories and prior research, reinforcing the idea that visual appeal, engagement, and social influence mechanisms collectively shape promotional effectiveness on social media.

5. Conclusion
This study examined how Instagram functions as an effective promotional medium for fashion MSMEs in Medan by analyzing the influence of content quality, user interaction, and follower count on promotional effectiveness. The findings demonstrate that all three variables significantly contribute to improving promotional outcomes, with content quality emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by user interaction and follower count. These results indicate that the visual appeal of posts, the quality of two-way communication, and the perceived popularity of an account collectively enhance the promotional impact of Instagram-based marketing activities.

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How to Cite This Article
Umri L, Mahesan KA, Guci DA, Foziah NHM. Effectiveness of Using Instagram as A Promotional Media for Fashion MSMEs in Medan. Int J Multidiscip Res Growth Eval. 2026;7(1):653–657.

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