The Influence of Photo Quality on Purchase Decision Mediated by Social Media Engagement: A Case Study of Bali Café Visit Review Content on TikTok

Ida Ayu Gede Anindya Oka[1] and *Panji Nandiasa Ananda Mukadis[2]

[1, 2] Swiss German University, Alam Sutera, Tangerang, Indonesia

panji.mukadis@sgu.ac.id

Abstract. In the digital age, high quality images are able to convey the uniqueness as a part of the visual appeal of your café. This study examines how photo quality influences purchase decisions, with social media engagement serving as a mediator with a focus on cafe visit review content by using TikTok's photo carousel feature in Bali. A quantitative approach was conducted, analyzing photo quality—based on colorfulness, clarity, and perspective (point of view)—towards purchase decision mediated by social media engagement, which focuses on *like*, *comment*, *save*, and *share* on TikTok's photo carousel feature. The findings reveal that high quality photos are not only to attract TikTok's engagement but also to influence customers in deciding to visit cafés in Bali. By leveraging TikTok as a social media platform to provide café recommendations, the research highlights that driving online engagement on social media is helping people to make decisions.

Keywords: *Photo Quality, Social Media Engagement, Purchase Decisions, Visual Marketing, TikTok.*

1   Introduction

1.1   Background

The evolution of café culture in Indonesia is more than serving a cup of coffee. It is reflecting changes in social dynamics, technology, and lifestyle. Cafés in Indonesia have evolved beyond vendors of food and beverage. Most of them have developed social interaction where individuals come together to relax, engage, and collaborate from a variety of backgrounds. In addition, a café can be a place for a casual gathering of professionals to conduct business meetings, friends to catch up, and students who would like to complete their homework, and the trendiest work culture to work remotely.

People are able to find recommendations through word-of-mouth that still exist in digital marketing specifically on the trendiest social media, which is TikTok. The wider range of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM) referrals is able to increase new customer acquisition [13]. When existing customers share their experiences in visiting a café, they will create user generated content such as reviews, testimonials, or shared posts.

* Correspondence author

TikTok provides various recommendations through "For You Page" (FYP) regarding café visit content review such as café environment, food and beverage presentation, strategic location, comfortable ambience, and aesthetically pleasing shots from a variety of perspectives. Uniquely, TikTok has different ways to be personalized towards the audience. In September 2022, one of the newest features is TikTok's slideshow feature, also known as *photo carousel*. Unlike Instagram where users are allowed to upload up to 10 photos, TikTok is taking it to another level. Users are able to upload up to 35 photos [7]. When the first photo content is interesting for the audience, they are willing to slide more to see the next content. The trend is more with chaotic photo dumps than highly aesthetically vlog about "a day in the life."

1.2   Research Problem

Social media today is open for businesses in order to connect with the audience. However, the competition is more intense in terms of product, price, and place. The issue regarding business owners, especially café owners, is that they compete with each other to build a trademark. Many marketers or small business owners have an obstacle in creating quality visual content marketing. Moreover, marketers also state that they are facing a challenge in budgeting to create both appealing and interactive visual content, including limited access to professional videographers and designers. Challenges range from the need for creativity and originality to understanding the platform's algorithm and trends: either the purpose for organic content or paid advertisement.

Since TikTok recently became a reliable social media platform in digital marketing, they are more interactive in gaining an audience due to unique algorithms such as impressions and engagement for content creators and users who create high quality visual content to get potential customers.

1.3   Research Objectives

Discovering how TikTok's algorithm works towards the photo carousel feature on TikTok regarding café visit content review is also one of the objectives in this study. Through visual content, either paid advertisement or organic content, the main objective is not only about gaining popularity or virality (brand awareness) but also to study the potential customers to visit cafés (purchase decision) in Denpasar through TikTok content, which helps the brand of cafés to reach Return on Investment (ROI) in advertising. Moreover, TikTok applications are considered more shareable, understandable, user-friendly, incentive, accessible, and quite informative [9]. Once the business is able to achieve brand trust from customers, it will lead to positive and sustained engagement. A cognitive and emotive dedication towards brand and customer interactions using digital media to demonstrate brand value is known as online customer engagement.

1.4   Hypothesis

Hypothesis #1: High Quality Photo positively influence Purchase Decision with Social Media Engagement as mediation

Hypothesis #2: High Quality Photo has direct influence on Social Media Engagement

Hypothesis #3: High Quality Photo directly influences people to visit the cafés (Purchase Decision)

2   Literature Review

2.1   Visual Marketing

Content with visual appeal is able to increase user engagement more than without images [6]. Businesses and organizations from startup to multinational corporate scale implement visuals in their social media platforms communication to strengthen engagement with the public. In addition, it encourages users or content creators to put their 'arts' as a contribution to growing their businesses. As an outcome, businesses must be considered in creating their brand image and marketing campaigns in order to get customer perceived value. It is able to imply visually striking elements such as bold colors, intriguing imagery, or motion graphics. Photos and videos are the component in the world of marketing (An et al., 2020). Individuals are able to use the power of photography to show not only about aesthetics, but it allows users to show their expressions, personalities, interests, and experiences through social media metrics.

If businesses neglect the visual appeal of photos, it will affect the resonance of social media campaigns, especially the authentic content towards audiences, which are able to find the most niche target market for the business. Therefore, applying visual content as a part of marketing strategy in order to get an audience is more efficient than text. Photos have been a visual medium to simplify complex information. It is able to contribute significantly to brand awareness and gradually leads to brand loyalty. Moreover, it will lead to an impressive opportunity to gain a strong brand reputation through social media platforms. This type of content will affect the audience on how they see the perspectives and experiences of the businesses.

2.2   TikTok's Algorithm

Launched in September 2016, TikTok was released by the Chinese company known as ByteDance under the name "Douyin" (known as TikTok's version for the chinese market). Afterwards, it became huge after merging with its rival app called Musical.ly in 2018 [4]. In addition, the Beijing-based ByteDance also holds several social media platforms such as video platform Xigua and popular news app Toutiao [8]. More than 150 different markets, TikTok headquarters are located in Los Angeles and Singapore as well as offices in New York, Berlin, Dublin, Jakarta, London, Paris, Dubai, Seoul, and Tokyo [11]. TikTok has various features such as allowing users to create music and lip-sync videos from 15 seconds to 3 minutes. However, Duffy C [10] in CNN Business mentioned about TikTok increasing the time limit duration to ultimately 10 minutes. It also has a duet, where users are able to directly interact with others by using video, side by side. In addition, there is a feature called "stitch" where users can combine into one video.

TikTok has been a well-known social media app that is available in more than 150 markets and provides more than 50 languages [12]. Since this app grew significantly between 2021–2022, some social media platforms also added short-video features. For instance, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels as a part of their marketing strategy to users' retention by making vertical short-form videos along with music. Chu et al. [8] mentioned that viral behavioral intentions are considered to be a proxy offline behavior, such as product purchase and store patronage. Furthermore, it is common for social media consumers to share product and brand recommendations and reviews with followers. Due to the content being able to be shared with friends and followers, it is essential to consider how it affects ad recall, brand awareness and purchase intention. In this research, it is critical to discover what factors influence brands that use TikTok as a marketing strategy towards positive behavior [8].

In recent years, consumers use TikTok in various ways. It can be used as an entertainment, social interaction, and it has its own e-commerce platform. From viral trends and dance challenges to comedic skits, TikTok provides a diverse range of content. Users are able to make humor, hobbies, fitness, travel, music photography, dance, and more categories that await to gain enormous attention. TikTok prioritizes users who are fond of visuals, especially for Millennials and Generation Z. It can be seen that TikTok's audience (Generation Z) contains 41% of its community. The wide age range are 16–24 years old who experience the internet as a reality [1].

2.3 Customer Engagement on Social Media

Customer Engagement has been defined as the psychological process by which customers move toward being brand loyal. It goes beyond mere participation and involvement, as it encompasses an interactive relationship with an engagement object such as brand (Brodie R et al., 2011). Consumer's thoughts and feelings regarding a brand are captured through engagement, as is their interaction with it; exchanging images with businesses on social media is one example of engagement behavior (Brodie et al., 2013). There is research addressing business to consumer (B2C) relationships, "the terms 'engage' and/or 'engagement' are linked to customers and/or brand experience, emotion, creativity, collaboration, learning, and/or (brand) community interactions" [4]. In a simple way, customer engagement also can be defined as an element of relationship marketing that has been applied in one of the marketing strategies to attract, build, and maintain relationships with customers and potential customers. The strategies to approach particular customers towards particular businesses can be included are retention, cross-buying, sales and transaction metrics, word-of-mouth (WOM), customer recommendations and referrals, blogging and web postings, and other approaches that are able to improve their brand and company itself.

2.4 Purchase Decisions

Purchase decision can be defined as the process through which consumers decide which products or services to buy based on their needs, preferences, and

available resources. Consumer purchase decisions can be influenced by various factors. From personal preferences to cultural trends, purchasing decisions can impact consumers behavior, social influences, and economic considerations. Attitudes and perceptions also play a crucial role.

Since social media are able to be our primary source of information, social influences are significant in shaping purchasing decisions. Since the power of word-of-mouth in social media is getting stronger, peer pressure and social validation can drive trends, which lead to purchasing decisions, especially in the Millennials and Generation Z demographics (Solomon, 2021). These individuals are known as trendsetters that are able to make a content in order to drive followers, families, and friends to purchase decisions.

3   Research Methodology

The objective of this study is to understand how the quality of photos influences purchase decisions. In addition, social media engagement will also be included in this study in order to see the role of social media engagement itself, specifically on TikTok, as a mediation between photo quality and purchase decisions. In other words, this study also discovered empirical evidence of the role of visual marketing in shaping consumers' behavior in the context of social media marketing. To examine further regarding the impact of photo quality towards purchase decisions through social media engagement, a quantitative approach is also being conducted to examine this study. Quantitative involves numerical data that could be usefully quantified to answer the research questions [12]. The reason is to measure the variables (photo quality, social media engagement, and purchase decisions) using statistical methods.

3.1   Sampling Method

In this case study, sampling will be used non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method. According to Saunders et al. [13], non-probability sampling is a sampling procedure that will not bid a basis for any opinion of probability that elements in the universe will have a chance to be included in the universe will have a chance to be included in the study sample. Non-probability sampling or non-random sampling must be selected where not all people of the population have knowledge of being selected into the sample. This may not be possible or not appropriate to answering your research question [13].

3.2   Population

The target population for the study is TikTok users who actively engage with the content that is related to the food. This will include individuals who interact with social media in such ways as to *like*, *share*, *comment* and *save* content related to café visit review. Potential target markets for café visit review content on TikTok are Millennials and Generation Z.

In specific ways, the age ranges from 17 to above 50, who are still on the productive age stage. We also discover the behavior of customers who would like to spend their time with friends and family by visiting various unique cafés around Bali as a place to hang out. In addition, since the epidemic COVID-19 and a trend of working from café on TikTok, people are working at a distance, people are tending to spend hours in a café for working.
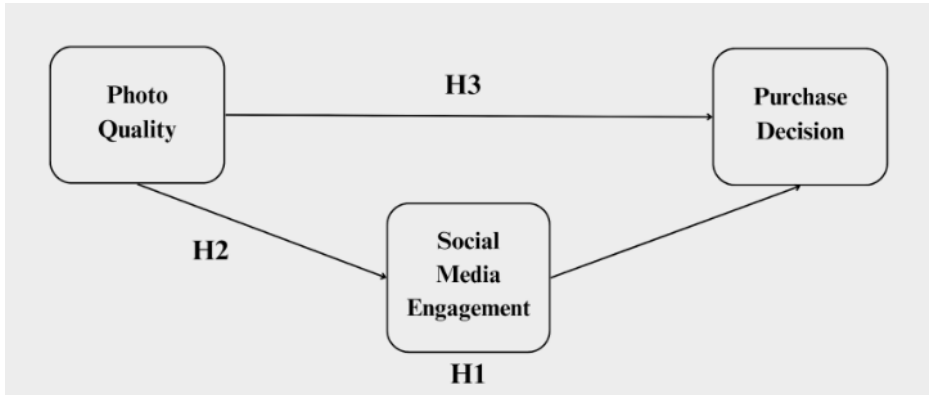
3.3   Modeling Framework

Fig. 1. Modeling Framework

4   Results and Discussion

After measuring the outer loading of the test regarding the influence of photo quality towards purchase decisions mediated by social media engagement using SmartPLS 4 software. To test the hypothesis using SmartPLS, the inner model by bootstrapping method is conducted. The aim is to enhance the robustness and reduce the impact of outliers and ambiguities in the research data set. As an outcome, hereby the findings regarding the hypothesis.

	Original Sample	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
PQ - PD	0.536	0.545	0.061	8.726	0.000
PQ - SME	0.665	0.672	0.036	18.625	0.000
SME - PD	0.363	0.358	0.061	5.915	0.000
PQ - SME - PD	0.242	0.241	0.043	5.671	0.000

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing Result

According to Hair et al. (2019), T-statistics value needs to be greater than 1.96 and the P-value should attain above 0.05. In this case study, Photo Quality (PQ) towards Purchase Decisions (PD) and Social Media Engagement (SME) showed the T-statistics

value of 8.726 and 18.625. These values are greater than 1.96 and accepted. In addition, P-value is also acceptable due to the value of Photo Quality (PQ) towards Social Media Engagement (SME) and Purchase Decisions (PD) is 0.000 and 0.000 respectively.

Both value for T-statistic value and P-value for the influence of Social Media Engagement towards purchase decisions are 5.915 and 0.000 respectively. Since this study has mediating variables or indirect variables, the relationship between Photo Quality and Purchase Decisions, mediated by Social Media Engagement has a T-statistic value of 5.671 and a P-value of 0.000. Given both values meet the criteria, it is concluded that this hypothesis is positively influenced.
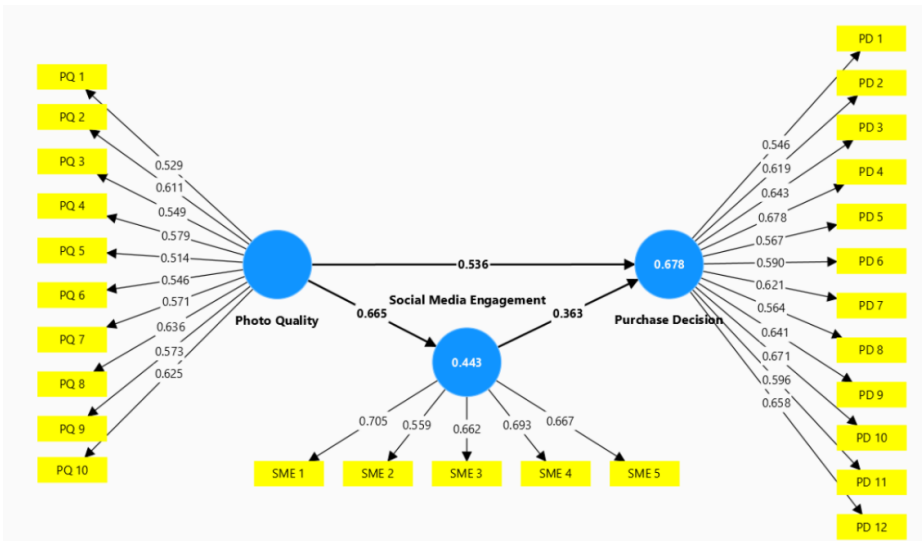
Fig 2. Hypothesis Testing Result

5   Conclusion and Recommendation

Since TikTok released the photo carousel feature in September 2022, this study is able to determine how photo quality can influence the inclination of people or users to visit cafés in Bali with the help of social media engagement, specifically on TikTok. This phenomenon is caused by many users being able to create content regarding café visit reviews in Bali by utilizing photo carousel features on TikTok. In addition, photos are the part of visual marketing that only take less than a second to attract customers compared with videos. After COVID-19 pandemic struck Bali previously in early of 2020, Bali is able to rise and develop not only the tourism sector but also in the food and beverages and hospitality industry.

By optimizing TikTok's photo carousel feature, TikToK users also can be one of the tools for marketers and business owners, specifically for café owners in leveraging user generated content due to their active engagement and creating good quality content. In addition, the simplest things users are able to do is create photos in order to capture certain moments. In this stage, users are able to express themselves through their

perspective. Moreover, color palette and clarity on the photos is crucial due to users' authenticity. Real users' experiences and honest feedback, backed by appealing visuals actually able to provide a better gauge of a café's atmosphere and offerings. Therefore, users are able to interact with other users on TikTok to seek high quality Bali café photos.

For future studies, broadening the indicators of photo quality in order to target user generated content (UGC) is able to provide more comprehensive insights. Some potential indicators include lighting quality, interior design, ambience, photogenic spots, and food and beverage presentation. Therefore, people are able to create photos easily during customers' visit.

In addition, this study is able to be implemented in various social media platforms as a comparison. For instance, instagram is still the most popular social media platform for photos. This could be a great future study in order to discover consumers' preference in looking for great quality content on social media in the context of café visit review content.

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