

## Digital Marketing Communication of Local SMEs Products: A Literature Review on Instagram Storytelling in Building Brand Image

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Accepted:  
23 February 2026

Accepted After Revision:  
15 April 2026

Published:  
23 April 2026

### Abstract

This study analyzes the rising trend of Instagram storytelling in digital marketing communication in creating brand images especially as competition rises in the digital world. With digital content becoming saturated, stories have become tools of connecting with people beyond promoting their brands through meaning and identities. This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design using the literature review method which involves reviewing journal articles, academic books, and other scholarly materials. Literature search was performed systematically and analysis conducted using qualitative descriptive methods such as categorizing and comparing of relevant data concerning digital marketing communication, storytelling, and brand image. It is found out that storytelling acts as a connecting link between promotional strategies and creation of brand images since those that are coherent, relatable, and associated with brand identity increase audience engagements, enhance memory recall and evoke emotions. It is also found out that brand images are created through an interpretive process where meanings are constructed through interaction with brand narratives. In summary, Instagram storytelling can thus be described as an integrating communication technique for creating brand images through constant meaning-making between brands and audiences.

**Keywords:** Instagram Storytelling, Brand Image, Digital Marketing Communication, Local MSMEs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In today's digital landscape, storytelling on Instagram has become more than just a marketing trend it is a meaningful way for local SMEs to connect with their audiences on a deeper, more emotional level. Rather than simply displaying products, brands are now telling stories that reflect who they are, what they value, and why they exist. These stories help audiences see beyond the product itself, offering a richer understanding of the brand's identity. Amid the fast-paced and crowded flow of digital content, storytelling stands out because it gives context and meaning, allowing audiences to relate to the brand in a more personal way [1]. In this sense, storytelling is not just about promotion, but about building relationships and shaping how a brand is perceived.

Many studies suggest that storytelling on social media plays an important role in bringing brands closer to their audiences. Through stories, brands can share

their journey, express their values, and communicate what makes them different. This creates space for interaction and encourages audiences to engage, not only as consumers but also as participants in the brand's narrative [2]. When these stories are told consistently and authentically, they add depth to the brand, making it feel more relatable and meaningful. As a result, audiences begin to see the brand not just as a product, but as something with purpose and identity.

From a psychological perspective, storytelling also touches the emotional side of consumers. People tend to respond more strongly to stories than to straightforward promotional messages because stories feel more personal and human. They invite audiences to imagine, to feel, and to connect. When done well, storytelling can build trust and emotional attachment, which are essential in shaping positive perceptions of a brand [3]. This shows that storytelling works not only by delivering information but also by shaping how audiences experience and interpret the brand.



However, even though storytelling is widely used by SMEs, there is still a need to better understand how it actually shapes brand image in a more systematic way. Previous studies have shown that storytelling can influence engagement and even purchasing decisions, but many of them stop at describing its impact without fully explaining how the process happens [4]. This leaves an important gap, especially in understanding how stories, audience interpretation, and brand image are connected.

For local SMEs, storytelling becomes especially important as they try to establish their identity in a competitive digital space. Through storytelling, brands can communicate their uniqueness, values, and character in a consistent way. This helps audiences form clearer and more meaningful perceptions of the brand. In other words, storytelling allows a brand not only to be recognized, but also to be understood. This aligns with the idea that effective digital marketing is not only about providing information, but also about creating a strong and meaningful brand presence in the minds of consumers [1].

Based on this background, this study uses a literature review approach to bring together and reflect on previous research related to Instagram storytelling and brand image in the context of local SMEs. By looking at various studies from a holistic perspective, this research seeks to better understand how storytelling works as a communication process in shaping brand image in the digital environment.

Ultimately, this study aims to offer a more integrated way of understanding storytelling not just as a marketing tool, but as an ongoing communication process that helps build meaning and shape brand image over time. By focusing on how audiences interpret and respond to brand narratives, this research highlights the importance of meaning-making as a bridge between storytelling and brand image. In doing so, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of storytelling within digital marketing communication, especially in relation to how brands are perceived and remembered by their audiences.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Digital Marketing Communication**

Digital marketing communication refers to the use of digital technologies as the main medium through which businesses interact with their audiences. Unlike conventional approaches that tend to be one-way, digital communication is inherently interactive, allowing audiences to respond, engage, and participate in real time. As a result, communication is no longer limited to delivering information, but also involves building relationships with audiences through messages that are relevant and consistently conveyed [5]. In this sense,

marketing communication shifts from merely promoting products to shaping perceptions and maintaining long-term connections with consumers.

Conceptually, this practice evolves from the idea of integrated marketing communication, which emphasizes consistency of messages across channels in order to strengthen brand image [6]. With the advancement of technology, communication has moved beyond the use of media as tools toward a more connected digital environment, where brands and consumers engage in two-way interactions [7]. Therefore, digital marketing communication can be understood as a strategic process that positions audiences not only as message recipients but also as active participants who interpret and give meaning to brand messages in digital spaces.

### **2.2 Local SMEs in the Context of Digital Marketing**

Local SMEs in digital marketing are not simply actors selling products; they represent brands that carry their own identity and character. Digital transformation has encouraged SMEs to adopt online marketing not only to expand their market reach but also to strengthen their contribution to the local economy. In this context, digital platforms become important spaces where brands can present themselves and enhance their competitiveness [8]. More than just making products visible, digital marketing allows SMEs to communicate meaning, helping consumers understand what the brand represents.

In practice, SME communication styles are often more simple, warm, and approachable compared to those of large corporations. Interestingly, this very characteristic makes their messages feel more relatable and authentic to audiences. The use of digital platforms, including e-commerce, shows that communication strategies aligned with consumer needs can significantly improve the competitiveness of local products while strengthening brand positioning [9]. This suggests that the success of SME digital marketing depends not only on product quality but also on how effectively brands communicate their message in a consistent and meaningful way.

### **2.3 Instagram as a Marketing Communication Medium**

Instagram has become one of the most prominent platforms in contemporary digital marketing communication. Its strength lies in its ability to deliver messages visually, briefly, and in an engaging way, allowing brands to present their identity and product character more effectively. In practice, Instagram supports marketing communication strategies by

enabling businesses not only to promote their products but also to build relationships with audiences through direct interaction on the platform [10]. In this sense, Instagram is not just a space for publishing content, but a communication environment where brands and audiences continuously interact.

This role is further supported by Instagram's features, such as feed posts, stories, and reels, which provide flexibility in how messages are delivered. Each feature allows brands to tailor their communication based on their objectives and the characteristics of their audience. These tools enable businesses to package their messages creatively while expanding their communication reach [11]. Moreover, Instagram has proven to be effective in increasing message visibility and strengthening information delivery, as it integrates visual elements, interaction, and content distribution within a single platform [12]. For this reason, Instagram can be seen as a strategic communication medium that not only introduces products but also shapes brand perception through ongoing visual experiences and interactions.

#### 2.4 Storytelling in Marketing Communication

Storytelling in marketing communication refers to the way brands convey messages through structured and meaningful narratives, so that information is not perceived as mere promotion, but as an experience that can be understood and felt. Through storytelling, narratives act as a bridge between brands and consumers, offering context, emotion, and reasons behind the existence of a product. In digital marketing practice, storytelling helps businesses deliver messages in a more engaging and accessible way, as narratives make information feel more alive and easier to connect with [13].

Within branding strategies, storytelling serves as a means of building closeness while clarifying brand identity. Through narratives, brands can express their values and highlight what makes them different from competitors, allowing audiences to better understand their character. This aligns with the idea that storytelling enhances communication effectiveness, as messages conveyed through stories tend to be easier to understand, remember, and accept [14]. When stories are delivered consistently, audiences begin to recognize patterns in the brand's communication, which gradually strengthens their perception of the brand.

Furthermore, storytelling also contributes to brand competitiveness, as narratives allow messages to resonate more closely with audience experiences. Compared to direct and purely factual communication, stories create space for emotional engagement, making communication feel more personal and memorable. Research shows that storytelling in digital advertising

can enhance the appeal of marketing communication for SMEs while strengthening their position in a competitive market [15]. Thus, storytelling can be understood as a communication strategy that not only attracts attention but also continuously builds brand meaning through messages that feel vivid and memorable.

#### 2.5 Storytelling and Brand Image

Storytelling and brand image are closely connected, as both relate to how a brand is understood by its audience. Storytelling can be seen as a process of delivering messages through meaningful narratives, where information is not simply presented as facts but as stories that provide context and understanding. On the other hand, brand image refers to the impressions and perceptions formed in the minds of consumers. In this relationship, storytelling operates at the level of message delivery, while brand image exists at the level of perception. The two are linked through an ongoing communication process [16].

This connection becomes visible in how stories help audiences interpret brand identity. Narratives allow brands to express their values, character, and uniqueness more clearly than direct informational messages. When these narratives are communicated consistently, audiences begin to recognize patterns and form a particular impression of the brand. Over time, this impression develops into a brand image. This perspective is supported by findings that storytelling marketing can influence brand identity and increase consumer engagement, as stories provide space for both cognitive and emotional connections with the brand message [17].

From a marketing communication perspective, storytelling can also be understood as a process of meaning construction that helps audiences interpret brands more holistically. Stories offer structure, emotion, and context, making messages easier to understand and remember. As a result, the brand image that emerges is not formed randomly, but develops in line with the direction of communication created by the brand. This is reinforced by studies showing that storytelling marketing influences brand image and consumer attitudes, as narratives strengthen associations and impressions attached to a brand [18]. Therefore, the relationship between storytelling and brand image can be seen as a connection between how brands communicate and how audiences interpret those messages the clearer and more consistent the narrative, the stronger the brand image that is formed.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODS

This study using a qualitative descriptive methods, using a literature review method to

conceptually explore storytelling in digital marketing communication, particularly in relation to building the brand image of local SMEs on Instagram. A qualitative approach is employed as the study focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and the meanings embedded within it, rather than relying on numerical measurement. At the same time, the descriptive orientation aims to present a systematic account of facts, concepts, and relationships between variables as they emerge from the data. Through this approach, the analysis is directed toward examining ideas, findings, and theoretical arguments drawn from various scholarly works related to digital marketing communication, storytelling, and brand image.

Data were collected through a review of relevant literature, including journal articles, academic books, and other scientific publications aligned with the focus of the study. A literature-based approach is considered appropriate, as the research relies on the analysis of existing scholarly sources to understand concepts and prior findings. As noted by Hisyam, literature studies play an important role in establishing a theoretical foundation, tracing the development of a field, and positioning a study within the broader academic landscape [1].

The data were then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive technique by organizing key findings, comparing concepts, and synthesizing ideas across sources. This process allows for a more structured understanding of how storytelling functions as part of digital marketing communication, particularly in shaping brand image on Instagram.

## **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Instagram Storytelling in Digital Marketing Communication for Local SMEs**

In digital marketing practice, Instagram has taken on an important role as a communication space where local SMEs can both reach wider audiences and gradually build their brand image. The platform is not merely a channel for posting content, but a dynamic environment where visuals, text, video, and audience responses come together in an ongoing flow of communication. Its use in marketing strategies allows businesses not only to deliver brand messages but also to engage directly with consumers [10]. For local SMEs, digital platforms like Instagram offer strategic opportunities to expand market reach while strengthening competitiveness, as they enable brands to present their identity in a more open and communicative way [8]. This suggests that Instagram functions not simply as a promotional tool, but as a space where brand identity is built progressively through consistent content.

The communication style of SMEs on Instagram is typically simple, direct, and oriented toward creating

a sense of closeness with the audience. This reflects how SMEs use digital platforms to strengthen the competitiveness of local products through communication that feels accessible and relatable [9]. At the same time, Instagram features such as feeds, stories, and reels provide flexibility, allowing businesses to present their messages in creative and varied ways that can be tailored to different audience segments [11]. The combination of visual elements, interaction, and content distribution within a single platform also enhances message visibility and strengthens how information is delivered to the public [12]. In this sense, SME marketing on Instagram can be understood as a participatory communication process, where brand perception emerges through repeated interactions between businesses and their audiences.

From a conceptual perspective, storytelling within digital marketing communication can be seen as a strategy that uses narrative structures to convey brand messages in a more meaningful way. Stories provide a framework that helps audiences understand the context, values, and character of a brand more holistically. In practice, storytelling enables businesses to communicate in ways that feel more engaging and easier to absorb, as narratives bring information to life and make it more relatable [13]. Unlike conventional promotional messages that focus directly on product information, storytelling offers a flow of meaning that makes messages easier to understand and remember [14]. In this sense, storytelling does more than decorate communication; it shapes how audiences interpret and experience the brand.

On Instagram, storytelling appears in various forms depending on how brands choose to present themselves. Product stories, for example, often highlight the origin, uniqueness, or philosophy behind an item. Some businesses share production processes to emphasize transparency and product quality. Others focus on the personal stories of the founders, allowing audiences to connect with the human side of the brand. Narratives rooted in local culture are also frequently used to strengthen product differentiation, especially for SMEs that emphasize regional identity. These variations show that storytelling on Instagram does not follow a single pattern, but evolves in line with the character of the brand and the message it seeks to convey.

The effectiveness of storytelling, however, depends greatly on how well the narrative is delivered. Consistency is key, as it allows audiences to recognize and understand the brand's identity over time. When stories align with the brand's character, they not only clarify identity but also encourage stronger engagement, as narratives open space for emotional connection [17]. Relevance to the audience's experience makes messages easier to accept and remember, while clear brand character strengthens positive associations in the minds

of consumers. This supports the view that storytelling plays an important role in shaping brand image, as narratives reinforce the impressions attached to a brand [16]. Ultimately, successful storytelling is not just about creativity, but about aligning message, identity, and audience expectations.

Across the literature, a consistent pattern emerges regarding the role of storytelling in digital marketing. Most studies position storytelling as a communication strategy that enhances audience engagement while clarifying brand identity. This recurring pattern highlights that storytelling is not simply a technique for delivering messages, but a mechanism through which meaning is constructed and interpreted. It often emphasizes narrative consistency, emotional connection, and alignment between story values and brand identity. These shared findings suggest that storytelling holds a stable and important position within digital marketing communication, particularly as an approach that connects message, meaning, and audience perception in an integrated way.

In this context, Instagram storytelling can be understood as a communication mechanism that bridges marketing practices with the construction of brand meaning. It is not merely a creative technique, but a strategic process that helps audiences interpret brand identity through narrative. Instagram, as a platform, supports this process by bringing together interaction, visual elements, and storytelling within a single integrated communication space. As such, storytelling on Instagram becomes more than a tool for delivering marketing messages it becomes a means of shaping how audiences understand and make sense of a brand.

#### **4.2 Instagram Storytelling in Building Brand Image of Local SMEs**

In digital marketing communication, storytelling on Instagram increasingly plays a significant role in shaping how consumers perceive and evaluate a brand. When SMEs share stories about their products, production processes, or business background, audiences are not simply receiving information they are forming emotional impressions about the brand. This process shows that consumer perception develops gradually through repeated communication experiences, rather than from a single message. Digital technology further supports this process by enabling direct interaction, allowing audiences to actively interpret brand messages rather than passively receive them [5]. In this way, storytelling becomes a pathway through which audiences move from simply recognizing a brand to understanding its deeper meaning and character.

Overall, the findings point to a clear conceptual link between storytelling and brand image. Storytelling acts as a narrative stimulus that shapes how audiences

interpret brand messages, while meaning serves as the mediating process that connects these narratives to the formation of brand perception. This suggests that the influence of storytelling on brand image is not immediate, but occurs through an interpretive process. The clearer, more consistent, and more relevant the narrative, the stronger the meaning that is formed and the more stable the resulting brand image becomes. In this sense, storytelling functions as a mechanism of meaning-making that bridges brand messages and audience perception.

Conceptually, this relationship unfolds through interconnected stages. Brand narratives act as interpretive stimuli that shape consumer perception, which then develops into a relatively stable brand image. Within the framework of integrated marketing communication, message consistency across channels plays an important role in strengthening brand identity and helping audiences recognize its character [6]. The rise of digital media further expands this process, as connectivity enables ongoing two-way interactions between brands and consumers that continuously shape brand meaning [7]. Thus, storytelling is not only a way of delivering messages, but also a structure through which audiences organize and understand brand-related information.

The role of storytelling becomes even clearer when examined through its key elements. The value embedded in a story forms its foundation, as meaningful narratives help audiences interpret the symbolic position of a brand. The presence of a clear brand character within the story makes it easier to recognize, while narrative consistency helps maintain stable audience perceptions over time. On Instagram, the integration of visuals, text, and context creates a unified message that strengthens brand representation. The platform's ability to combine visual communication and interaction enhances both message delivery and brand visibility [12]. This shows that the strength of storytelling lies in how well all communication elements work together to create a cohesive experience.

The literature also reveals a consistent pattern regarding the effects of storytelling on audience responses. Storytelling encourages engagement because it connects with audiences on a more personal level. Studies show that storytelling marketing is effective in increasing engagement and influencing consumer decisions, as narratives make messages more relevant and easier to understand [4]. It is also associated with brand loyalty, as stories foster emotional bonds between consumers and brands [3]. In addition, storytelling improves brand recall, since information delivered through stories tends to be more memorable than direct promotional messages [2]. Together, these findings suggest that storytelling generates cognitive, emotional,

and symbolic effects that interact in shaping brand image.

These insights also reflect the broader context of digital transformation among SMEs. Digitalization allows businesses to expand their reach and strengthen the competitiveness of local products in an increasingly open market [8]. The use of social media and other digital platforms shows that communication strategies aligned with consumer needs can enhance product positioning while clarifying brand representation [9]. In this context, storytelling serves as a bridge between promotional efforts and the formation of brand identity, shifting marketing activities beyond sales toward the construction of brand meaning.

In synthesis, the literature suggests that the influence of storytelling on brand image operates through a process of mediated meaning. Storytelling acts as the narrative stimulus, meaning functions as the mediator, and brand image emerges as the outcome of perception. The consistent pattern indicates that stronger storytelling leads to clearer brand meaning and, ultimately, to a more stable brand image. This reinforces the idea that the relationship between storytelling and brand image is not direct, but unfolds through the audience's interpretation of brand narratives.

From a more analytical perspective, these findings point to an understanding of Instagram storytelling as a mechanism for constructing brand meaning. Storytelling frames meaning by helping audiences interpret brand identity through symbols, narratives, and visual experiences. It enables businesses to communicate messages in ways that are more engaging and easier to understand [13]. While also making messages more accessible through structured narratives [14]. From a communication theory perspective, this process highlights that brand image is formed through ongoing interpretation shaped by repeated interactions between brand messages and audience responses.

In conclusion, the conceptual contribution of this study lies in emphasizing that Instagram storytelling can be understood as a communication strategy that shapes brand image through continuous meaning-making processes. Storytelling is not merely a creative content approach, but a strategic communication mechanism that connects marketing messages with the formation of brand perception. This perspective reinforces the position of storytelling within digital marketing communication as a strategy that integrates message, meaning, and audience experience in shaping the brand image of local SMEs.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion presented, it can be concluded that Instagram storytelling in the context of

digital marketing communication for local SMEs can be understood as a communication strategy that goes beyond delivering product information. It plays a role in gradually building brand meaning through a process of symbolic interaction between the brand and its audience. Instagram functions as an interactive visual communication space where narratives, visuals, and audience responses come together within a dynamic communication ecosystem. In this space, marketing communication is no longer one-way, but participatory, allowing brand perception to develop through repeated communication experiences.

The findings show that storytelling acts as a bridge between promotional messages and the formation of brand image. Narratives that are consistent, relatable to audience experiences, and aligned with brand identity can enhance engagement, strengthen brand recall, and foster emotional connections with consumers. This highlights that the effectiveness of storytelling does not rely solely on creativity, but on how well the message, brand character, and audience expectations are aligned.

From a conceptual perspective, the process of building brand image through storytelling unfolds in several stages, beginning with narrative stimuli, followed by audience interpretation, and eventually leading to more stable perceptions. Stories serve as a framework of meaning that helps consumers organize and make sense of brand-related information. Therefore, brand image should not be seen as the result of a single promotional message, but rather as the outcome of an ongoing process of meaning construction shaped by continuous interaction between brand narratives and audience experiences.

In the context of SME digital transformation, Instagram storytelling also carries strategic value as it connects promotional efforts with the formation of brand identity. This approach strengthens the position of local products in digital markets by creating symbolic differentiation that cannot be achieved through purely informational promotion. In this sense, storytelling can be positioned as an integrative digital marketing communication strategy that brings together message, meaning, emotion, and audience experience in shaping brand image.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study affirms that Instagram storytelling functions as a mechanism of brand meaning construction within digital marketing communication. Practically, the findings suggest that the success of SME marketing communication is determined not merely by the intensity of promotion, but by the brand's ability to craft narratives that are consistent, authentic, and relevant to its audience.

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