



Awareness and Engagement Gap in Instagram Content Strategy:
Analysis of Social Media Interactivity in Book and Lifestyle Retail

Muhammad Aidil ^{1*}, Reni Ayu Puspitasari², Ridha Aisyah³, M. Khozin Ahyar⁴,
Umi Zunaidah⁵

¹²³⁴⁵ Politeknik Negeri Samarinda, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: m.aidil12@gmail.com

Article History	Abstract
Received: 20 April 2026	<i>The transformation from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has fundamentally shifted organizational communication from a one-way model to an interactive ecosystem that enables dialogue, collaboration, and user engagement. In the context of book and lifestyle retail, Instagram functions as a strategic platform for building visual identity, emotional connections, and social capital with audiences. This study aims to analyze how book retailers utilize Instagram as a two-way communication tool and evaluate the effectiveness of content in converting awareness into engagement. This research applies a quantitative descriptive content analysis of 308 Instagram posts from the @gramediabigmall_samarinda account November-December 2025 (30-day observation period). The analysis includes performance metrics such as impressions (181,800), total interactions (959), follower growth (192), and content characteristics in terms of theme and format. The findings reveal that promotional content dominates the overall posting strategy, primarily through photos and discount announcements, while educational video content contributes significantly to reach. Despite the high posting intensity, the engagement rate is only 0.52%, far below the general benchmark of 2–5%. This indicates a substantial gap between awareness and engagement, driven by the limited use of interactive features and a tendency toward unidirectional communication. The study concludes that social media effectiveness is not determined solely by content reach or frequency, but by the ability to stimulate active audience participation. Low interactivity reflects missed strategic opportunities to strengthen engagement and build long-term social capital.</i>
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1. Introduction

The development of social media has shifted organizational communication from predominantly one-way dissemination toward environments in which users can react,

contribute, and interact with brand content. Recent research emphasizes that social media effectiveness depends not simply on presence or posting volume, but on how content characteristics and platform affordances stimulate different forms of engagement (Cao et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Lim & Rasul, 2022). For retailers, this makes Instagram strategically relevant because visual content can combine information, entertainment, interaction, and brand expression within a single customer-facing environment (Liu et al., 2021; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).

Instagram therefore offers more than a digital noticeboard: it can function as a relational and participatory channel. Empirical evidence shows that interactivity, information experiences, visual characteristics, and content format can influence audience engagement, although the effects vary according to the content context and type of audience response (Park & Ha, 2021; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). This distinction is particularly important for retail accounts whose communication objectives include not only exposure but also sustained audience participation.

A persistent managerial problem is the tendency to treat reach and posting frequency as proxies for communication effectiveness. Research indicates that engagement volume may produce diminishing returns when brands focus on increasing interaction quantity without encouraging a wider variety of engagement behaviors (Schaefer et al., 2021). At the same time, content strategy must be matched to the platform and communication objective because consumers exhibit different consumption, contribution, and creation behaviors across social media contexts (Cao et al., 2021; Unnava & Aravindakshan, 2021). For commercial retailers, the strategic question is therefore not simply how often to post, but what type of content is capable of converting exposure into meaningful interaction.

Previous studies provide strong evidence that content format and message characteristics matter. Shahbaznezhad et al., (2021) found that the effects of social media content on engagement depend on both format and context, while Philp et al., (2022) demonstrated that visual characteristics of Instagram content can be associated with higher engagement. (Bazi et al., 2023) further showed that aesthetic quality and entertainment can contribute to customer engagement and downstream brand outcomes. In Indonesia, studies of Instagram-based marketing similarly report positive relationships between social media marketing, customer engagement, brand awareness, and brand loyalty (Pertiwi et al., 2023; Rachmadhaniyati & Sanaji, 2021; Rini & Hasbi, 2024). Message framing can also shape engagement when the framing is congruent with audience and cultural context (Agnihotri et al., 2022).

Despite this growing evidence, a specific gap remains in understanding the awareness–engagement relationship within book and lifestyle retail. Existing studies frequently examine fashion, food and beverage, banking, tourism, or general brand accounts, whereas book and lifestyle retailers combine commercial information with educational, hobby, and lifestyle-oriented content. Recent research on Instagram shows that visual and interactive content can generate different levels of engagement (Macca et al., 2024; Widiarto et al., 2024), but evidence from local book-retail accounts remains limited. Evidence from Indonesia also reports that social media engagement, content quality, and influencer-related strategies are associated with brand engagement and loyalty among younger users (Riza Hadikusuma & Riskon Ginting, 2024).

The gap is also strategic rather than merely descriptive. A retailer may obtain substantial exposure while failing to create dialogue, and this distinction has consequences for resource allocation and relationship development. Studies of social media engagement indicate that interactional content and richer engagement mechanisms can strengthen consumer responses (Liu et al., 2021; Naeem et al., 2025; Waltenrath et al., 2022), while Indonesian studies similarly

emphasize the importance of interaction, informativeness, and engagement in developing stronger consumer–brand relationships (Nurhidayat et al., 2024). Consequently, identifying an awareness–engagement gap can provide a more useful managerial diagnosis than evaluating Instagram performance through reach alone.

To address this gap, this study analyzes the Instagram content strategy of @gramediabigmall_samarinda as a local book and lifestyle retail case. The study examines posting intensity, content format and theme, impressions, interactions, follower growth, engagement rate, and the degree of interactivity reflected in the content. The objective is to determine whether high audience exposure is accompanied by active engagement and to identify the strategic implications of content patterns for two-way communication. The study therefore contributes a localized content-performance perspective to the literature on social media engagement and provides practical evidence for retailers operating under resource and channel-management constraints.

2. Literature Review

This literature review discusses the evolution of organizational communication in the digital era, the crucial role of social media in building engagement, and analyzes content usage patterns by both commercial and non-profit organizations, which serve as a theoretical basis for the analysis of awareness and engagement gaps.

2.1 The Concept of Web 2.0 and the Need for Engagement

Web 2.0 transformed social media from static information distribution into participatory environments in which users can consume, contribute to, and create content. Contemporary research treats social media as an important organizational and marketing infrastructure, but emphasizes that its value depends on how firms use platform characteristics to stimulate interaction and engagement (Lim & Rasul, 2022). For this reason, an Instagram account should be assessed not only by the quantity of information disseminated but also by the opportunities it creates for audience response. Recent Indonesian studies also show that interaction, entertainment, informativeness, and electronic word-of-mouth can contribute to stronger brand-related responses on social media (Andika et al., 2024; Christiarini et al., 2025).

Customer engagement on social media can be observed through behavioral responses such as liking, commenting, sharing, saving, and other forms of participation. The literature distinguishes different engagement behaviors and shows that content characteristics influence whether users remain passive consumers or become active contributors (Cao et al., 2021; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021) further demonstrate that engagement can have carryover and cross-platform effects, highlighting why engagement quality can be strategically more meaningful than isolated exposure.

2.2 Organizational Social Media Content Analysis and Uni-Directional Patterns

Quantitative content analysis is widely used to examine how organizations communicate through social media because it enables researchers to classify content and relate content characteristics to observed audience responses. Recent studies have analyzed thousands of posts or large-scale social media datasets to identify how format, visual properties, interaction cues, and message characteristics relate to engagement (Philp et al., 2022). This approach is appropriate for the present study because the research objective is to compare the volume and characteristics of published Instagram content with measurable audience responses. Evidence from branded content research also demonstrates that message type and communication purpose can produce different levels of audience response (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2022).

The dominance of promotional content can create a communication imbalance when organizational messages are designed primarily to inform or sell rather than invite participation. Comparable findings from Indonesian research indicate that social media marketing and interaction are associated with customer engagement and brand-related outcomes, suggesting that firms need to move beyond purely promotional communication (Rachmadhaniyati & Sanaji, 2021; Rini & Hasbi, 2024). Thus, promotional intensity should be considered together with the extent to which content enables dialogue. Research on Instagram-based brand marketing in Indonesia further reports positive roles for social media marketing and engagement in building brand-related outcomes (Novia & Loisa, 2024).

2.3 Social Media Performance Metrics: Awareness vs. Engagement

Awareness and engagement represent related but distinct dimensions of social media performance. Impressions, reach, and views primarily capture exposure, whereas likes, comments, shares, saves, and other responses provide evidence of active participation. The literature cautions against interpreting high engagement volume alone as evidence of stronger performance because the marginal value of engagement can decline and different engagement behaviors carry different strategic meanings (Schaefer et al., 2021). Accordingly, the present study interprets high impressions combined with low interaction as an awareness–engagement gap rather than as a successful social media strategy. Evidence from Indonesian Instagram research also shows that content quality and frequency can contribute to downstream brand awareness and consumer responses, reinforcing the need to distinguish exposure from interaction (Lathifah et al., 2023).

Instagram is particularly relevant to this distinction because its visual architecture supports multiple content formats, including photographs, carousels, short-form video, stories, and interactive elements. Research demonstrates that content format and visual characteristics influence engagement on Instagram and other social platforms (Philp et al., 2022). Recent studies also show that aesthetic quality, entertainment, information experiences, and interactive cues can shape consumer responses (Park & Ha, 2021). Interactive and sponsored content can also increase response when it incorporates engaging storytelling or suitable endorsement strategies (Gross et al., 2023) (Gross & Von Wangenheim, 2022).

The conceptual direction of this study therefore links three elements: content strategy, audience exposure, and audience participation. Content strategy is represented by posting frequency, format, theme, and promotional or informational orientation; awareness is represented by impressions and follower growth; and engagement is represented by interactions and engagement rate. The analytical logic is that a high level of exposure without proportional participation signals an efficiency problem in social media communication, particularly when the content mix is dominated by hard-selling messages. This perspective is consistent with evidence that interactive and varied content can produce stronger engagement than repetitive promotional communication (Gross et al., 2023; Waltenrath et al., 2022). Indonesian case studies further indicate that active Instagram strategies, including interaction and content optimization, can improve brand engagement (Sulaiman, 2025).

3. Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative descriptive case study approach to examine the awareness and engagement gap in Instagram content strategy within the book and lifestyle retail sector. The case focused on the Instagram account @gramediabigmall_samarinda, representing a book and lifestyle retailer in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. A case study design was selected because it

allows an in-depth analysis of social media content performance, posting patterns, audience reach, interaction levels, and the extent to which Instagram communication functions as a two-way engagement channel. The account was considered suitable for this study because it showed high posting intensity and broad content exposure, yet relatively low audience interaction, indicating a potential gap between awareness and engagement.

The study used secondary data derived from Instagram content and performance records during a 30-day observation period from November to December 2025. The dataset consisted of 308 Instagram posts uploaded by the account. The data included content characteristics, posting format, content theme, impressions, total interactions, follower growth, and engagement indicators. The main performance metrics analyzed were total impressions of 181,800, total interactions of 959, follower growth of 192, and the calculated engagement rate of 0.52%. These data were used to assess whether the content strategy successfully converted audience exposure into active participation.

The data were analyzed in three stages using quantitative descriptive content analysis. First, all Instagram posts were identified and classified according to content format and thematic category, including short video or Reels, educational content, photo or carousel promotion, and discount announcement content. Second, each category was examined based on its contribution to awareness and engagement, using impressions as the awareness indicator and interactions such as likes, comments, shares, and saves as engagement indicators. Third, the relationship between content intensity, reach, and interaction was interpreted to identify whether the account's communication pattern reflected interactive Web 2.0 communication or remained dominated by one-way promotional communication.

To support the performance interpretation, the study used the engagement rate formula:

The resulting engagement rate was compared with the general Instagram benchmark of 2–5%. A lower engagement rate was interpreted as evidence of weak conversion from awareness to engagement. High impressions were considered an indicator of successful audience exposure, while low interaction levels indicated limited audience participation. Therefore, content strategy effectiveness was not evaluated solely from posting frequency or reach, but from the account's ability to stimulate meaningful user engagement.

The main indicators of social media communication performance in this study were content frequency, impressions, total interactions, follower growth, engagement rate, and the degree of interactivity in the posted content. A high level of reach accompanied by low engagement was interpreted as an awareness–engagement gap. Meanwhile, the dominance of promotional and hard-selling content with limited dialogic features was interpreted as evidence of unidirectional communication and underutilization of Instagram's interactive potential.

4. Result And Discussion

4.1.1 Posting Activity and Content Reach

During the 30-day research period, the @gramediabigmall_samarinda account showed a very high level of activity with a total of 308 posts. This activity generated total impressions of 181,800. The high number of impressions indicates that the Instagram algorithm pushed most of the content, especially short video formats, to a wide audience. Generally, the account successfully achieved a strong level of awareness during the observation period.

4.1.2 Engagement Performance and Content Effectiveness

Despite the high exposure, total interactions were only 959, producing an engagement rate (ER) of 0.52 percent. The contrast between 181,800 impressions and limited interaction provides

direct evidence of an awareness–engagement gap within the observation period. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing that reach should not be treated as equivalent to active engagement and that the quality and variety of engagement matter for brand outcomes (Lim & Rasul, 2022). This pattern is also consistent with evidence that visual and interactive features can affect user responses on Instagram (Naeem et al., 2025).

The result also suggests that communication effectiveness cannot be inferred from visibility alone. Research on social media engagement shows that content characteristics and contextual cues influence whether audiences merely consume content or contribute through visible interaction (Chao et al., 2021; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Therefore, the account's strong exposure should be interpreted as successful awareness generation, while its comparatively weak interaction indicates limited conversion of exposure into participation.

4.1.3 Composition and Dominance of Content Types

Content categorization analysis shows two main patterns:

- a. Short Video & Educational Content: This content uses the Reels format with a light and informative approach. This format proved to be the main contributor to impressions and awareness.
- b. Photo & Discount Promos: This hard-selling style content dominates the volume of posts in the form of photos or carousels, but has a low contribution to user interactions.

The dominance of one-way promotional content weakens the potential for two-way dialogue. This finding is consistent with research showing that firms frequently rely on promotional communication even though interactive features can generate stronger engagement. Indonesian evidence similarly indicates that social media interaction and customer engagement are important components of brand-related outcomes (Pertwi et al., 2023; Rachmadhaniyati & Sanaji, 2021). The present case therefore illustrates a familiar strategic problem: the platform is interactive, but the communication logic can remain predominantly broadcast-oriented.

Table 4. Content Performance Comparison Table

Content Format		Primary Function	Awareness Contribution	Average Interaction Performance	Engagement Tendency
Short (Reels)	Video	Informative/Educational	High	Moderate-High	Relatively Strong
Photo/Carousel Promotion		Hard-selling/Promotional	Moderate	Low	Weak

The results indicate that Short Video (Reels) contributed strongly to impressions and generated relatively better interaction, while Photo/Carousel promotional content, despite dominating posting volume, generated weaker engagement. This pattern is compatible with empirical research showing that content format and visual characteristics influence engagement behavior (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021) (Philp et al., 2022). Bazi et al., (2023) similarly demonstrate that aesthetic quality and entertainment can strengthen customer engagement, while (Widiarto et al., 2024) report that interactive Instagram content can outperform static visual content in generating user responses. Studies of Instagram content further suggest that visual storytelling and format selection can shape engagement outcomes (Sulaiman, 2025; Widiarto et al., 2024).

The findings also support the argument that promotional dominance can limit the dialogic potential of social media. In the Indonesian context, studies of Instagram marketing also emphasize interaction and customer engagement as important elements of social media effectiveness (Nurhidayat et al., 2024; Rini & Hasbi, 2024). Related Indonesian evidence from Instagram-based retail and brand contexts also points to the importance of interaction in strengthening engagement (Pratiwi & Masnita, 2023).

Thus, the low ER appears more closely associated with the composition and interactional quality of content than with posting activity alone. This interpretation is important because increasing posting frequency without changing content design may increase exposure while producing limited additional engagement. Schaefer et al., (2021) show that engagement volume can exhibit diminishing marginal utility, whereas varied forms of engagement can produce stronger brand-related outcomes.

4.2 Follower Growth

During the research period, the account gained 192 new followers from a baseline of 2,703. This growth indicates that the account was capable of attracting additional audience exposure, but the increase did not correspond to a comparable improvement in interaction. The finding reinforces the distinction between audience acquisition and audience engagement: growing an audience does not necessarily mean that the relationship with that audience is becoming deeper or more interactive (Lim & Rasul, 2022; Unnava & Aravindakshan, 2021).

4.3 Indication of Uni-Directional Communication Patterns

Overall, the findings indicate a communication pattern still dominated by organizational promotion, with insufficient use of Instagram's interactive potential. The combination of high impressions, follower growth, and low interaction is consistent with an awareness–engagement gap. This interpretation is supported by studies showing that interactive cues, richer content, and varied engagement mechanisms can stimulate stronger behavioral responses than communication designed primarily for exposure (Park & Ha, 2021; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021)

4.4 Strategic Implications

The research results indicate that high content volume and reach should not be treated as sufficient evidence of successful social media communication. For a book and lifestyle retailer, content should combine commercial information with educational, entertaining, and participatory elements so that exposure can develop into interaction and relationship value. This recommendation is consistent with Indonesian evidence linking social media interaction and customer engagement with brand-related outcomes (Christiarini et al., 2025; Pertiwi et al., 2023) and with international evidence emphasizing interactive and aesthetically engaging content (Bazi et al., 2023; Macca et al., 2024). The same managerial logic is reflected in research on customer engagement and brand loyalty in Indonesian social media settings (Andika et al., 2024). Similar evidence from Indonesian brand research also supports the strategic relevance of social media marketing for brand outcomes (Yose & Purnama Sari, 2024).

5. Conclusion

This study finds that Instagram provides substantial opportunities for two-way communication, but the observed account did not fully convert audience exposure into active engagement. During the 30-day observation period, 308 posts generated 181,800 impressions and 192 additional followers, while total interactions reached only 959 and the engagement rate was 0.52 percent. The results therefore indicate a clear awareness–engagement gap.

The content mix was dominated by promotional photographs and discount announcements, whereas short-form educational or informative video content generated

stronger exposure and relatively better interaction. This pattern is consistent with recent evidence that content format, visual quality, information value, and interactivity influence social media engagement. The study consequently supports a shift from posting-volume orientation toward a more balanced strategy that combines promotional, informational, entertaining, and interactive content. Research on Instagram advertising also indicates that storytelling and interactive formats can improve audience response.

Overall, social media effectiveness should be assessed through the relationship between exposure and active participation rather than through posting frequency or reach alone. For book and lifestyle retail, the strategic implication is to design content that creates reasons for audiences to respond, discuss, share, save, or otherwise participate. Future research should examine longer observation periods, compare multiple retail accounts, and incorporate qualitative analysis of captions, comments, and interactive features to explain why particular content formats generate stronger engagement. These implications are consistent with evidence that customer engagement is an important mechanism connecting social media activity with broader brand outcomes.

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