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Hijab Fantasy on Instagram: Community Fantasy Theme for Vanilla Hijab Brand

Amelia Ramadhani[1*], Prahastiwi Utari[1], Sri Hastjarjo[1]

[1]Department of Communication Science, Universitas Sebelas Maret
Jln. Ir. Sutami No. 36A Kentingan, Jebres, Surakarta 57126 - Indonesia
Corresponding author: ameliara@student.uns.ac.id

Abstract - In the contemporary era, the hijab is no longer exclusively associated with a specific demographic. Its meaning has evolved and is now widely accepted within the community. While the hijab is a mandatory practice for Muslim women, it has also become a fashion statement. The growing acceptance of hijab has led to the emergence of local hijab brands. This article examines the use of social media, particularly Instagram, to examine communication between groups of hijab users, focusing on customers of a particular brand of hijab, namely Vanilla Hijab. Observing this group behavior used fantasy, emphasizing how individuals achieve a shared reality through communication. Individuals in the group conducted shared reality-seeing behavior among individuals guided by stories that reflect how reality is confirmed. The reinforcement of shared reality is repeated through personal, group, or community achievements and takes the form of stories or tales. In examining the theme of hijab customer group fantasy, the researcher employed a qualitative case study research method by conducting interviews with female Vanila Hijab customers. Producers use Instagram social media not only to inform the public about Vanilla Hijab's activities and introduce its products but also to build community involvement and receive input from a segmented audience. The findings indicate that group members added numerous fantasy themes to maintain group communication and foster group culture.
Keywords: Social Media, Group Communication, Community, Fantasy Theme, Group Culture.

Introduction

The internet has become a fundamental necessity for the global community. Its rapid growth and accessibility have made it an integral part of modern life. It is used extensively for communication and media support. According to the We Are Social report, Indonesia's active social media users will reach 185 million by January 2024. Social media has transformed the media landscape. Companies that utilize social media can communicate directly with their target audiences and form communities as a further channel to promote their products and services (Alassani and Ghairetz, 2019).

A recent report by WeAreSocial indicates that among internet users in Indonesia aged 16-64, the majority (90.9%) use Instagram, ranking second after WhatsApp (85.3%) as the most popular social media platform. The researcher collected data in January 2024. The data from the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center (RISSC) in 2023 indicates that the Muslim population in Indonesia is estimated to reach 237.56 million people, or 86.7% of the country's population. Vanilla Hijab's primary means of developing its business is utilizing the digital world and the Muslim population. This condition represents an opportunity for Vanilla Hijab, a local hijab brand based in Jakarta, to compete with other local hijab brands. Founded in 2013, Vanilla Hijab focuses on Muslim fashion by marketing through its Instagram account @VanillaHijab. All sales promotion and marketing forms are carried out online, without the need for an offline store or outlet. In addition to its promotional activities on Instagram, Vanilla Hijab engages with potential customers through posts and comments on products, uses,

materials, and other topics (Vanilla Hijab Owner, 2022). As of January 2024, the number of Vanilla Hijab followers has reached 2.5 million, with an additional 1.5 million Instagram users accessing product catalogs and engaging with the brand on a customer or community level. The business is promising because as the consumer economy develops, the idea of consumer choice begins to permeate hijab practices, making hijab a sign of individual transformation enabled by consumerism (Beta, 2014, 2016; Bucar, 2016; Jones, 2010, 2017; Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018).

This article examines the efficacy of Instagram as a marketing tool for Vanilla Hijab. It specifically considers the brand's communication strategy on the social media platform, focusing on its use for promotion and sales. The present study examines the efficacy of Instagram as a platform for attracting potential customers. In particular, it analyses the communication strategy employed by Vanilla Hijab on this social media platform. Vanilla Hijab enables customers to engage with the brand by commenting on its Instagram posts, and the company responds to these comments.

Furthermore, Vanilla Hijab used social media to foster relationships with potential and current customers. Social media updates the company's products, sales, and activities. Furthermore, social media allows potential and current customers to engage in informal interactions, including greeting each other, getting to know each other, and communicating without the necessity of in-person contact.

Theoretical Framework

Group communication is the study of communication between a communicator and a group of people connected by a common goal (De Vito, 1997). There were two categories of communication: small and large group communication. Small group communication occurs in groups that allow each member to have interpersonal communication with feedback, such as in discussion groups, study groups, seminars, and others. The members of these groups have also agreed on norms. In contrast, significant group communication occurs when the number of members makes it difficult to conduct interpersonal communication. Many people gathered, which made this difficult, for example, during Tabligh Akbar and political campaigns. In these activities, communication is more linear, where only the communicator conveys the message to the communicator without feedback. In addition, significant group communication occurs when the number of members makes it difficult to conduct interpersonal communication. For example, the number of people gathered during Tabligh Akbar and political campaigns makes this problematic. In these activities, communication is more linear, where only the communicator conveys the message to the communicator without feedback.

The advent of mass media has transformed the nature of group communication. Mass media's contemporary, fast, and efficient nature has a profound impact on the formation, involvement, and purpose of groups. Small groups, which may lack personal closeness due to their diverse backgrounds, can be united in social networks. Even large groups can utilize social networks on social media to facilitate interpersonal communication between their members.

Symbolic Convergence

Ernest Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory (1972), also known as fantasy theme analysis, is a theory that discusses how individuals in groups achieve a shared reality through communication. Individuals' images of reality depicted stories that reflect how things happened. These retold stories often relate to personal, group, or community achievements and take the form of stories (Littlejohn, 2017). In this theory, the term "fantasy" is not used in the sense of fictional stories or erotic desires. Bormann also describes this theory as an interactive process in which humans come together by recounting individual fantasies, dreams, hopes, or fears within a shared symbol system and offers a rigid analytical framework. This framework captures the dynamic development of group meaning-making (Gymimothy, 2013). Dramatizing a message involves members introducing brief examples of humor, puns, figures of speech, or more detailed analogies, fables, or narratives (Zanin, Hoelscher, & Kramer, 2016).

Fantasies are narratives or humor that evoke emotional responses. They encompass events from the past or future of group members. They do not include communication that focuses on the immediate situation within the group. Fantasy chains can occur repeatedly, which then leads to fantasy themes. These themes create a shared understanding of past and future actions. Some fantasy themes can become references to similar problems, resulting in a fantasy type. The emergence of a group's rhetorical vision

is concurrent with the developing of a kind of fantasy. Rhetorical visions give rise to diverse texts, affording group members a more comprehensive perspective.

The rhetorical vision has five main elements. The first is the dramatic character, who becomes an actor or player in a story. The second is the storyline, which outlines the context of the group's discussion or the situation. Third, the scene provides descriptive details. The fourth element is the sanctioning agent, defined as an individual or entity with authority, such as an agreed-upon moral understanding. The fifth and final central analogy is core values and cultural structures (Zanin, Hoelscher, & Kramer, 2016). Suryadi concurs with four of the five elements. The four critical elements of this theory are the characters involved, the plot, the setting, and the actors who determine the narrative's veracity (the sanctioning agent) (Suryadi, 2014). The research conducted by the author focuses on groups of consumers (buyers) on social media who express interest in products and engage with news delivered by Vanilla Hijab through digital media.

Mass Communication

This study draws on theories from the field of mass communication. Mass communication studies examine three elements: media (as institutions and content), audience, and socio-cultural system (Littlejohn, 2002). Bittner (1980:10) defines mass communication as communication characterized by messages communicated through mass media to many people. In contrast, Gerbner (1967) defines mass communication as producing and distributing messages based on technology and institutions, which are continuous and widely accessible to industrialized societies. Mass communication has specific objectives that differ from other forms of communication, such as network communication, media relations, and others. Mass communication is disseminated to a dispersed, heterogeneous, and anonymous audience through print or electronic media to receive the same message simultaneously and instantaneously (Rakhmat, 1994).

Vanilla Hijab and Customer Communication Patterns

Since its establishment, Vanilla Hijab has primarily relied on the internet and social media. Social media, that is, Instagram, has facilitated the introduction and marketing of products to diverse regions and audiences. During the early stages of production, fabric and clothing samples are photographed and shared on Instagram. Hashtags on posts can assist in incorporating specific algorithms and receiving responses from other users. Using appropriate hashtags can also assist users in determining which audience will view their content, thereby conferring a beneficial outcome for online marketers in reaching the intended customers (Agung & Darma, 2019). Vanilla Hijab establishes communication channels with potential and existing customers through social media by creating posts featuring images or videos of its products. These posts subsequently elicit feedback in the form of comments from potential customers. This approach represents one of Vanilla Hijab's strategies for business growth, product promotion, and customer relationship management.

Fantasy Themes of Community

A community is a group of people who share a common goal and interact to achieve it, know each other, and see themselves as part of the group (Mulyana, 2005). A group of people who form a community because they have common interests and hobbies, such as religion, work, ethnicity, race, or based on sexual orientation (Crow and Allan, 2002).

A group of women described Vanilla Hijab's customer base. Initially, these customers were interested in Vanilla Hijab on Instagram and engaged with the brand on the platform's comments section. They then proceeded to purchase the brand's products. Due to the similarity of the brand's products to those of other fashion brands, these customers joined the Sister Vanilla community on Instagram, which has 120 thousand followers as of January 2024. Membership in the group is not contingent upon any specific administrative requirements. However, given that the community originated from a fashion brand, at least some members are likely to own products from Vanilla Hijab. The Vanilla Hijab team mediated the community and provided information about product marketing and other aspects that can build engagement with its members. These include culinary information, religion, parenting tips, and giveaways.

The Vanilla Hijab customer community employs a qualitative approach to social media engagement, allowing for a deeper understanding of their collective identity. The Vanilla Hijab

community, comprising individuals from diverse age groups and social and economic backgrounds, unconsciously forms communication patterns by exchanging imaginary references. In creating social media posts, selecting images, colors, editing, themes, and words is carefully crafted to arouse audience interest. The continuity of the message conveyed by the Vanilla Hijab community members results in a response akin to being immersed in the imagination of the theme presented. Consequently, the following research questions are :

RQ1: How do customers utilize social media to access Vanilla Hijab?
RQ2: What are the motivations for joining the Vanilla Hijab customer community?
RQ3: What type of fantasy theme does the Vanilla Hijab community form?

Material and Methodology

The methodology employed in this research is a descriptive qualitative method with a case study. This method involves the systematic, factual, and accurate description of the characteristics and facts of a particular population or object. To fulfill the criteria mentioned above, the unit of analysis in this research is female Vanila Hijab customers. The researcher collected through in-depth interviews with ten customers who are members of the Vanilla community in Jakarta. The number of sources reached ten individuals based on the depth of information collected from interviews. The interviewer considered it sufficient once the source provided the required information.

The data was analyzed by categorizing the interview transcripts and field data to answer the research questions. The interviewer conducted triangulation data to ensure the interviewees' answers were valid for the data. Once patterns emerged from the data, the researcher made the most prominent points about the propositions of the main findings. Somebody conducted the discussion to review the data analysis with theoretical studies to ascertain the data's suitability with the theorization used. The researcher made conclusions independently based on the findings.

Result and Discussion

The participants were female, aged 20-40, and resided in greater Jakarta. Most participants indicated through Instagram that they were familiar with Vanilla Hijab products. They were also active social media users with personal accounts on Instagram.

“I first learned about Vanilla Hijab from Instagram when looking for recommendations for Eid clothes in 2015.” (MR - 37 years old, Jakarta).

“I know Vanilla Hijab from my Instagram timeline. I saw the color, and it was good, so I followed it. My friend there also followed it.” (MH - 39 years old, Jakarta).

For those who are aware of the brand through the recommendations of their acquaintances, the researcher still conducted a subsequent investigation of the Vanilla Hijab Instagram account.

*“*My office mate told me about Vanilla Hijab, and she was wearing it too, so I was interested. After that, I looked it up on Instagram, and now I'm interested in Vanilla Hijab.” (ADP - 22 years old Jakarta).

“First I have a product from a gift, then I search for the official IG, just follow it.” (AR - 37 years old, Jakarta).

Once the researcher finds an identified account, the subsequent step is to follow it. By following this account, one can access all posts on Vanilla Hijab's Instagram account. Each product post contains information about upcoming products, including material type, size, pattern, price, and release date. Prospective and existing customers can also interact with the Vanilla Hijab administrative team to request product details. The Vanilla Hijab team utilizes this interaction to obtain feedback on the product and as evaluation data for future product development. The Vanilla Hijab admin team frequently holds competitions on various Instagram posts to attract potential and existing customers.

"Vanilla Hijab tells us in the new product post what color hijab we want. We just have to comment first. There is usually a giveaway. If we are lucky, we can get it. I got it at that time." (SYW-35 years old, Jakarta).

"Vanilla Hijab doesn't have a store, so if you want to buy its products, you must watch its IG. They are notified when it is available, then we just have to wait and see if it is available in e-commerce." (AR - 37 years old, Jakarta).

Appeal, Price, and Quality

The digital era has given rise to many fashion products, particularly those originating from Indonesia, which are diverse in quality and ready to compete. Vanilla Hijab is a prime example of this phenomenon, offering ready-to-wear Muslim clothing at affordable prices. Participants also elucidated the rationale behind their inclination to follow social media and purchase Vanilla Hijab products, citing the simplicity of the material, the excellence of the colors, and the affordability of the prices.

"The price of Vanilla Hijab is still reasonable, so I can buy clothes for the office without draining my pocket." (SA - 36 years old, Jakarta).

"I have been using Vanilla Hijab for a long time, and it is very suitable because the price matches the product. I usually buy one series at a time, so I save on shipping too." (AZ - 40 years old, Tangerang).

Side Effect

This study conducted interviews separately between participants, although they were acquainted with one another through the Vanilla Hijab social media community. Based on their shared experiences, they expressed a desire to join fellow customers to make new friends or relationships.

"After I followed Vanilla Hijab's IG, I also followed the community IG. Other community members also followed my account. It was also fun to make new friends". (RI - 36 years old, Depok).

"It's fun. We often chat, and then someone has the same hobby. We met for a while, took OOTD photos together, and we're still friends". (HO - 39 years old, Jakarta).

The Existence of a Fantasy Theme

The Vanilla Hijab community symbolically represents the profile of Muslim women customers of various ages and professional backgrounds. It is a virtual community that is joined its members through an Instagram social media forum and a WhatsApp group, which is accessible to those who live in the greater Jakarta area. This community is not only a place for Vanilla Hijab to develop its fashion brand business but also a place for some of its members to exist. Members of the community engage in voluntary communication patterns that are characteristic of social media.

These patterns include a fantasy theme, which the communicator initially conveys through Instagram posts. Community members then provide feedback through comments, emojis, and replies to posts. It appears that the fantasy of the community carries away members. An illustrative example of this fantasy theme is the communicator's discussion of the historical selection of motifs, materials, and colors of a Paris-themed product before its launch. To attract the audience's attention and influence the algorithm, the communicator invites customers to engage with the theme of what it would be like to be in Paris and use the product by including a hashtag. Community members are subtly encouraged to engage in fantasy-themed communication to maintain their social acceptance and compete for the attention of brand manufacturers to ensure their continued existence.

"Just purchase the product, because there are OOTDs, so just take the best photo, post it, you might get a prize, who knows". (PE – 32 years old Jakarta)

"Basically, follow the admin rules, like, comment, and mention your dream place when wearing the hijab, then also post your OOTD, it's a bit of an effort but it's really fun". (SA – 36 years old, Jakarta)

"The seller could extend an invitation to a fashion show, and many groups will likely be eager to participate, which is undoubtedly an exciting prospect. The hijab branding hoped this individual would successfully join the fashion show. I have already purchased this product". (RI - 36 years old, Depok)

Conclusions

In light of the article's objective, the researcher determined that utilizing social media is pivotal for Vanilla Hijab's business growth and communication with prospective and existing customers. The producer of Vanilla Hijab formed their customer communication patterns through mass media with an active target audience that can select and customize the information provided. Individuals engage in new communication with members of other community groups who share similar goals based on certain commonalities.

The presence of this community also results in a constant flow of fantasy-themed communication between its members. Each community member knows and follows the ongoing themes to remain relevant. From observing how individuals use stories, rituals, symbols, and other activities to produce and reproduce a set of understandings that create group culture (Littlejohn, 2017), we can conclude that the group culture of the Vanilla Hijab Society gives rise to consumerism and competitiveness among its members, as each attempts to maintain its existence in society. The competition among customers answered the research question about communication patterns and fantasy themes created by the group. Although all participants were social media users and members of the Vanilla Hijab community, future research can utilize this study and explore different perspectives, which may provide solutions for various parties such as industry, companies, or academics.

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