INSTAGRAM VS TIKTOK: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CONTENT STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND AWARENESS OF TOMORO COFFEE IN MEDAN

Muhammad Arief Rachman[1], Martha Tri Lestari[2]

[1,2] Department of Communication and Social Sciences, Telkom University, Bandung

Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This study compares the effectiveness of Instagram and TikTok content strategies in enhancing engagement and brand awareness for Tomoro Coffee in Medan, Indonesia. A qualitative case study approach was used, employing the Circular Model of SoMe (Share, Optimize, Manage, Engage) as the analytical framework. Data were gathered through content analysis, interviews with brand representatives, and observations at 10+ outlets. Findings show that Instagram builds consistent brand identity through curated storytelling, while TikTok drives user engagement via viral content. However, centralized content production and lack of local customization reduce emotional resonance in regional markets. The study concludes that Instagram supports long-term branding, while TikTok aids rapid visibility. Recommendations include decentralizing content creation, involving local teams, and aligning strategies with local culture.
Keywords:	
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Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Arief Rachman
Department of Communication and Social Sciences
Telkom University
Email: mhdariefrachman@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital technology has transformed the way brands communicate with consumers, making social media a crucial platform for building engagement and brand awareness. In Indonesia, social media penetration is notably high, with platforms like Instagram and TikTok playing key roles in shaping consumer behavior. Instagram is known for its curated visual storytelling, which emphasizes aesthetically pleasing and polished content, ideal for building long-term brand identity. On the other hand, TikTok excels in driving engagement through viral, trend-driven content that encourages real-time participation and fosters rapid visibility. These platforms offer unique strategies for digital marketing, but their effectiveness can vary based on cultural and regional contexts, as consumer preferences and behaviors may differ significantly from one area to another. For brands like Tomoro Coffee, which is expanding rapidly across Indonesia, understanding these nuances is vital. While Instagram's polished content aligns well with more urban, cosmopolitan areas, TikTok's trend-driven, interactive format may resonate better with younger, more dynamic audiences. However, the challenge arises when content strategies are not tailored to local cultural contexts, potentially undermining their effectiveness in diverse regions.

Figure 1. Number of Social Media Users in Indonesia (Source: We Are Social, 2025)

The data from TheGlobalStatistics.com (2025) reinforces this phenomenon, with 84.80% of Indonesian internet users using Instagram (173.6 million) and 63.10% using TikTok (129 million), making them the dominant platforms in Indonesia's social media landscape. Instagram is favored for its curated and polished content, utilizing features such as Feed, Stories, and Reels, while TikTok focuses on dynamic and algorithm-driven short videos with high virality potential.

In the coffee industry, visual and narrative representation of lifestyle has become a competitive advantage. Tomoro Coffee, established in 2022, is one of the fastest-growing coffee retail brands in Indonesia. It utilizes social media extensively to build a strong digital presence. According to GoodStats (2024), Tomoro ranked among the top five most favored coffee shops in Indonesia, capturing 7% of the national preference.
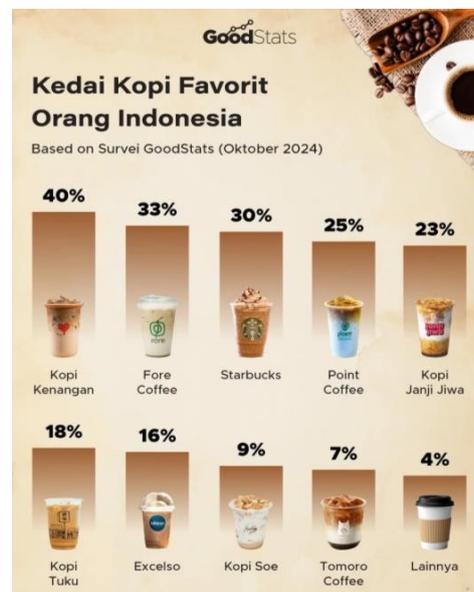

Figure 2. Survey Results: Favorite Coffee Shop Brands in Indonesia (Source: GoodStats, 2024)

Interestingly, Tomoro Coffee's performance across social platforms varies. On TikTok, the brand has accumulated 283,400 followers, surpassing more established competitors like Fore Coffee and Janji Jiwa. Conversely, on Instagram, Tomoro lags behind brands like Kopi Kenangan and Point Coffee. This contrast in follower counts underscores the need to analyze each platform's unique characteristics and the brand's adaptation strategies.

Table 1. Social Media Followers of Coffee Retail Brands (Source: Processed by Researcher, 2025)

Retail Brand Accounts	Followers	
	TikTok	Instagram
Tomoro Coffee	283.400	230.595
Kopi Kenangan	141.600	597.000
Fore Coffee	30.200	297.000
Kopi Janji Jiwa	80.900	592.000
Point Coffee	323.800	684.000

However, when applied to regional markets like Medan (a major metropolitan area outside Java) challenges emerge. Interviews with local managers and baristas reveal that Tomoro's content often lacks local cultural relevance, with most strategies centralized from Jakarta. This mismatch leads to lower emotional connection with the local audience and a less engaged community despite having over 10 outlets in Medan.

To examine these issues, this study uses the Circular Model of SoMe (Luttrell, 2015), which consists of four interrelated components: Share, Optimize, Manage, and Engage. This model emphasizes two-way communication and provides a framework to assess the strategic effectiveness of content creation and interaction.

Several previous studies have explored platform effectiveness separately. Ashari (2024) emphasized Instagram's strength in storytelling and UGC-based engagement, while Zhou (2024) found TikTok's algorithm highly effective for virality but prone to echo chambers. Yet, comparative studies that examine both platforms simultaneously, particularly in the context of a fast-growing local brand like Tomoro Coffee, remain limited.

Therefore, this research seeks to fill that gap by addressing the following: "... While previous research highlights the power of Instagram in long-term brand image building and TikTok in reaching new users through trends and participatory culture, there is limited understanding on how local brand communication performs differently across platforms in regional markets such as Medan. This research intends to analyze Tomoro Coffee's content strategy on Instagram and TikTok using the Circular Model of SoMe. The purpose is to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing brand engagement and awareness in Medan's dynamic and culturally diverse coffee market".

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of Tomoro Coffee's Instagram and TikTok content strategies in building engagement and brand awareness, particularly in the city of Medan. The case study method was chosen because it provides flexibility to explore the social and cultural contexts that influence the company's digital communication strategies.

The subjects of this research are Tomoro Coffee's official Instagram and TikTok accounts, analyzed based on content published from March 2025 to May 2025. The objects of the study include the brand's content strategies and their impact on local audience engagement and brand awareness. Medan was selected as the research location because it represents a rapidly growing urban market outside Java Island and is known for its strong coffee consumption culture.

Data were collected using three main techniques: content analysis, direct observation, and in-depth interviews. Observations were conducted at various Tomoro Coffee branches in Medan to capture the atmosphere, customer segmentation, and real-world content representation. In-depth interviews were conducted with Key Informants, namely the Sumatra Area Manager, and several baristas and supervisors as Supporting Informants.

This study also utilizes secondary quantitative data through content analysis from SocialInsider.io, a social media analytics platform, to obtain objective metrics on engagement rate, reach, and user interaction trends on Tomoro Coffee's Instagram and TikTok accounts during the research period. These data support the qualitative analysis by reinforcing empirical findings and providing a numerical overview of the content strategy effectiveness on each platform.

Thematic data analysis was conducted based on the Circular Model of SoMe (Luttrell, 2015), which consists of four elements: Share (the types of content shared), Optimize (consistency and efficiency of cross-platform content strategies), Manage (management of feedback and interactions), and Engage (the level of involvement and responsiveness). Each element was analyzed to examine the alignment between central strategies and local market needs.

Figure 3. Circular Model of SoMe Theory
(Source: Regina Luttrell Social Media (How to Engage, Share, and Connect), 2015)

Data validity was ensured through methodological triangulation, combining the results of interviews, observations, and content analysis, as well as confirming findings with relevant informants. This process strengthens the validity of the research results and reduces the potential for interpretative bias.

This methodological approach was chosen for its ability to portray the dynamics of strategic communication in a holistic and contextual manner, as well as to answer the research question regarding how platform differences and local contexts influence the effectiveness of brand content strategies in enhancing engagement and brand awareness.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This study found that Tomoro Coffee's content strategies on Instagram and TikTok in Medan demonstrated varying levels of effectiveness in building engagement and brand awareness. Based on the analysis conducted through SocialInsider, the Top Posts on Tomoro Coffee's Instagram account were characterized by visually appealing content that consistently featured storytelling narratives centered around a modern lifestyle.
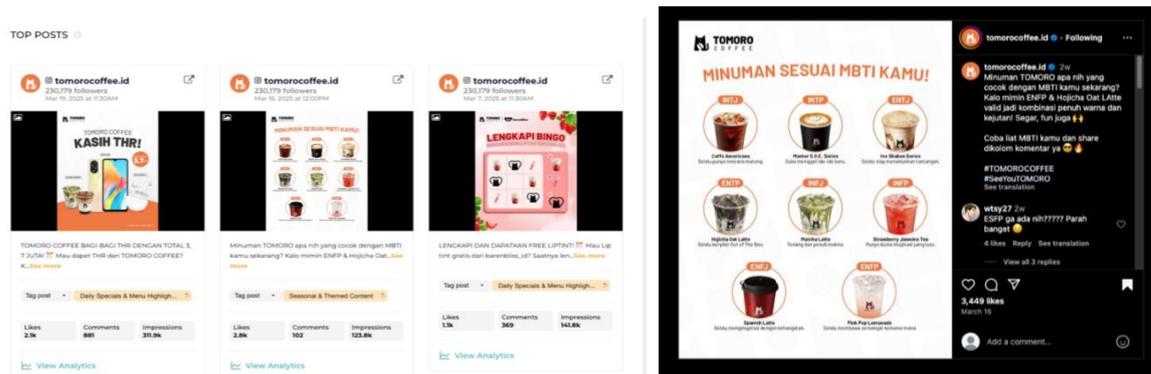

Figure 4. Analysis Results of Tomoro Coffee's Instagram
(Source: Processed by Researcher, 2025)

This strategy contributed to the formation of a premium brand image, but it also created an impression of exclusivity, causing some audiences in Medan to feel hesitant about visiting the store in person. This finding is supported by an interview with Key Informant 1, who noted that the Instagram content rarely uses local language or contextual themes that resonate with the daily lives of Medan's residents.

In contrast, the TikTok content strategy demonstrated higher engagement performance. Short-form videos featuring trends, discount promotions, and interactive challenges successfully captured the attention of younger audiences particularly university students and young professionals who are accustomed to using TikTok as a source of entertainment.
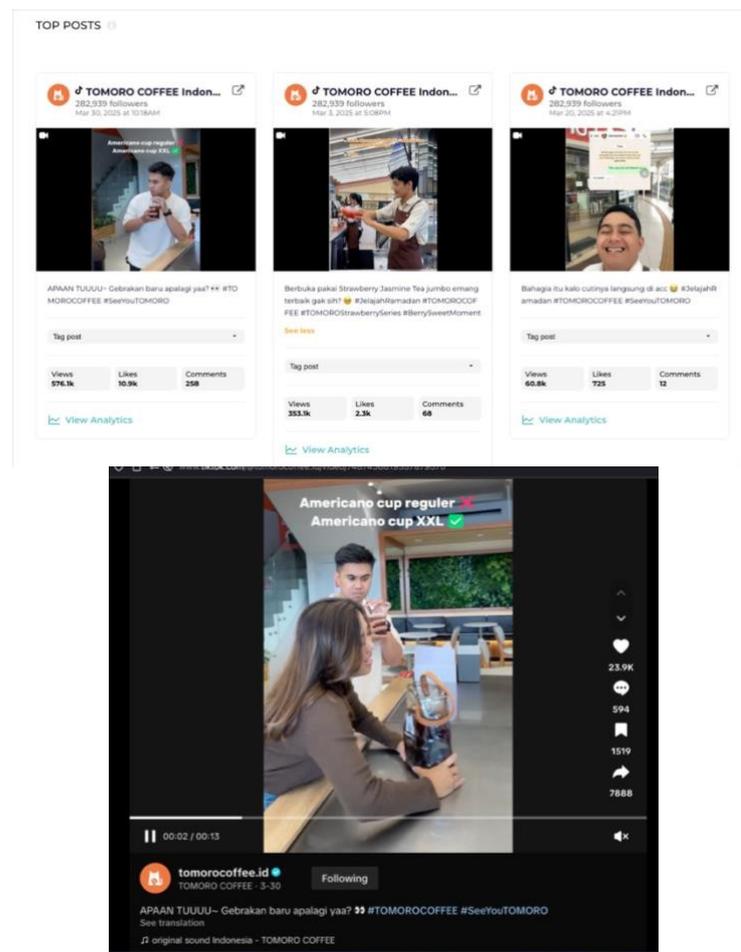
Figure 5. Analysis Results of Tomoro Coffee's TikTok
(Source: Processed by Researcher, 2025)

Tomoro Coffee's TikTok account, with 283,400 followers, has a larger following compared to its other platforms. However, in terms of brand awareness, it still lags behind competitors such as Kopi Kenangan and Point Coffee, which have a broader reach. This finding is supported by an interview with a barista at Tomoro Coffee Syailendra Medan (Supporting Informant 1), who explained that interactions on TikTok tend to occur around content emphasizing direct benefits, such as low-price promotions and a casual, approachable vibe.

"What I know, bro, in Medan, if there's a promo, people really love it. Sometimes they even buy more than one. And you can see what kind of people come in, most of them are neatly dressed, often university students working on assignments. People here usually look for what's cheap, bro". (Supporting Informant 1, 2025).

The Circular Model of SoMe indicates that the Share and Engage phases are more optimized on TikTok compared to Instagram. On TikTok, content sharing (Share) capitalizes on viral trends, while engagement is fostered more responsively through comments and features like Duet or Stitch. In contrast, Instagram demonstrates greater strength in the Manage and Optimize phases due to its consistent visual identity and structured content scheduling. However, the lack of message adaptation to the local audience remains a challenge that has not been fully addressed. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing that the success of social media strategies relies not only on the quality of visual content but also on contextual relevance and the ability to create two-way conversations that resonate with the target audience.

The findings of this study highlight that a multichannel strategy that accounts for platform differentiation is essential. TikTok proves effective in driving emotional engagement and short-term virality, while Instagram remains important for building long-term, consistent brand identity. A combination of both platforms must be balanced with local cultural adaptation to ensure stronger relevance in areas like Medan, which features a heterogeneous consumer profile

Discussion

This study concludes that the social media content strategies implemented by Tomoro Coffee on Instagram and TikTok show differing levels of effectiveness in enhancing engagement and brand awareness in the city of Medan.

Firstly, TikTok has proven to be more effective in generating high levels of interaction with younger audiences through spontaneous short-form videos, discount promotions, and the use of viral trends. This is reflected in the higher number of followers on TikTok compared to Instagram, as well as the strong audience engagement with promotional content that offers practical value and resonates with the everyday experiences of consumers. The approach that emphasizes entertainment, emotional engagement, and active audience participation has been shown to be effective in boosting brand visibility within a relatively short period of time.

Table 2. TikTok Analysis Data of Tomoro Coffee (March – May 2025)
(Source: Processed by Researcher, 2025)

Month	Engagement Rate (Engagement)	Followers Growth (Brand Awareness)	Best Content (Top Posts)
March 2025	7,65%	+3.142	Funny video from staff
April 2025	7.39%	+4.108	Unique April Fools-themed video
May 2025	7,41%	+5.001	Collaboration with vlogger

Secondly, Instagram holds strength in building a consistent premium brand image through storytelling narratives, a well-curated aesthetic feed, and more structured content management. However, this approach still faces challenges in reaching the local audience in Medan, particularly due to the use of language, communication style, and content themes that are not fully contextualized with the local culture. The perception of exclusivity created by Instagram's visual communication style also contributes to the platform's relatively limited engagement reach compared to TikTok.

Table 3. Instagram Analysis Data of Tomoro Coffee (March – May 2025)
(Source: Processed by Researcher, 2025)

Month	Engagement Rate (Engagement)	Followers Growth (Brand Awareness)	Best Content (Top Posts)
March 2025	7,6%	+1.246	Educational carousel
April 2025	0.84%	+1.778	Promotional video
May 2025	0,89%	+2.003	Challenge & behind-the-scenes video

Thirdly, the application of the Circular Model of SoMe across both platforms reveals that the Share and Engage phases are more optimized on TikTok, while the Manage and Optimize phases are more prominent on Instagram. This indicates that the effectiveness of content strategy is not solely determined by visual quality, but also by the brand's ability to leverage the specific algorithmic characteristics and user behaviors of each platform.

The findings of this study offer practical insights for managing digital communication strategies in the retail coffee industry. Brands need to implement differentiated content strategies tailored to the characteristics of their audience and the strengths of each platform. TikTok can be maximized for short-term engagement through viral and interactive content, while Instagram can be utilized to build a consistent, long-term brand image. This combination should be complemented with local content adaptation and community collaboration to enhance relevance, trust, and consumer loyalty in regional markets such as Medan.

This study also highlights that a deep understanding of local audience preferences, effective use of dynamic content trends, and the integration of multichannel strategies are key factors in successful digital marketing communication. These findings are expected to serve as a foundation for future research on optimizing social media content strategies based on local culture, and can be used by marketing practitioners to design more inclusive and impactful communication approaches.

4. CONCLUSION

This study compares the effectiveness of Instagram and TikTok content strategies in enhancing engagement and brand awareness for Tomoro Coffee in Medan, Indonesia. The research shows that both platforms play complementary roles: Instagram builds long-term brand identity through curated visual storytelling, while TikTok drives immediate engagement through viral, trend-driven content. Instagram excels in creating a premium brand image but has relatively passive engagement, mainly through likes and comments, due to centralized content that lacks local cultural relevance. On the other hand, TikTok captures the attention of younger audiences in Medan, fostering rapid visibility and emotional connections, though it does not contribute as much to long-term brand identity. The findings highlight the need for localizing content. Decentralizing content creation and involving local teams will help Tomoro Coffee better connect with the Medan audience, improving engagement and brand resonance. In conclusion, combining Instagram's brand-building strengths with TikTok's engagement potential, while adapting to local culture, will optimize Tomoro Coffee's digital marketing strategy and increase its market success.

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