

Optimalization of Instagram Features in Developing Digital Marketing Strategies: A Case Study of Bersama Outdoor Rent

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Abstract

This study examines the optimization of Instagram features as a digital marketing strategy for Bersama Outdoor Rent, an SME operating in the outdoor equipment rental and adventure service sector. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation of the Instagram account, and analysis of supporting documentation. The findings reveal that Instagram features are utilized unevenly; Feed posts and Direct Messages are optimized effectively for visual branding and transactional communication, while other features such as Stories, Highlights, hashtags, and especially Reels remain underutilized. The lack of structured content planning, irregular updates, and limited analytics-based evaluation hinder the business from achieving broader reach and higher engagement. These results highlight that effective digital marketing on Instagram requires strategic planning, systematic feature integration, and consistent performance monitoring. The study provides practical insights for SMEs seeking to maximize Instagram's potential as a primary digital marketing platform.

Keywords: *Instagram, Digital Marketing Strategy, Feature Optimization, SMEs, Social Media.*

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has reshaped how businesses communicate, compete, and engage with consumers across global markets. The rapid expansion of internet connectivity and mobile technologies has accelerated the shift from traditional marketing models to digitally mediated

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IJEVSS, Volume 04 Issue 04, 2025



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interactions, prompting firms of all sizes to adopt social media as a strategic marketing tool. Recent global statistics show that more than 5 billion people actively use social media, making it one of the most influential channels for brand communication and consumer engagement (Kemp, 2024). This structural shift underscores the need for businesses particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to leverage digital platforms to maintain competitiveness in dynamic and saturated markets.

Among the wide range of social media platforms, Instagram has emerged as one of the most impactful due to its visual-centric design and interactive features. Prior research emphasizes that visually appealing content significantly enhances consumer engagement and strengthens brand perception, especially for industries relying on aesthetic value and experiential attributes (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Instagram's features, such as Feed posts, Stories, Highlights, Reels, hashtags, and Direct Messages, together form an integrated ecosystem that enables businesses to promote products, communicate brand identity, and build sustained relationships with target audiences. The platform's algorithmic advantages especially for short-form videos and interactive content further amplify its strategic relevance in digital marketing.

Despite the platform's potential, many SMEs still struggle to implement Instagram-based marketing systematically. Studies show that SMEs often adopt social media in an ad-hoc manner, lacking structured planning, content strategies, and analytics-based decision-making (Almeida et al., 2020). These limitations reduce the effectiveness of digital campaigns and restrict market reach, particularly when businesses operate diverse product lines or service categories within a single online identity. Such challenges are evident in the case of Bersama Outdoor Rent, a business that simultaneously manages product sales, equipment rental services, and trip-organizing activities under one Instagram account. Managing diversified offerings within the same platform creates information clutter, reduces message clarity, and complicates audience targeting issues that have been highlighted in social media marketing literature but remain understudied in local SME contexts.

Given these gaps, optimizing Instagram features becomes essential not only for expanding market visibility but also for improving consumer interaction, strengthening brand positioning, and increasing conversion potential. Feature-specific strategies such as feed curation, hashtag optimization, Story Highlight integration, rapid DM communication, and the use of Reels for algorithmic amplification have been shown to significantly influence online engagement and purchase intention (Alalwan, 2018). However, empirical evidence on how SMEs in Indonesia select, interpret, and operationalize these features particularly within niche markets such as



outdoor equipment and adventure services remains limited.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how Bersama Outdoor Rent optimizes Instagram features as part of its digital marketing strategy. Through a qualitative case study approach based on interviews, observations, and documentation, this research provides an in-depth understanding of the managerial decisions, challenges, and practical outcomes associated with feature optimization. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by offering insights that can guide SMEs in adopting more structured, evidence-based Instagram marketing strategies.

Digital Marketing in the SME Context

Digital marketing has become a dominant strategic approach for SMEs as it enables businesses to reach wider audiences with lower operational costs compared to traditional marketing. Several studies highlight that social media platforms significantly enhance SMEs' brand visibility, customer engagement, and competitive advantage (Almeida et al., 2020; Felix et al., 2017). Through digital platforms, SMEs can streamline communication, personalize promotional messages, and foster stronger customer relationships. However, despite its potential, many SMEs still face barriers such as limited digital literacy, lack of structured content planning, and inadequate evaluation of digital performance (Adeola & Evans, 2020). These challenges contribute to inconsistent outcomes in digital marketing implementation and underscore the importance of platform-specific strategies.

INSTAGRAM AS A STRATEGIC MARKETING PLATFORM

Instagram has emerged as one of the most influential social media platforms due to its emphasis on visual storytelling and interactive features. Research indicates that visual content significantly enhances consumer engagement by stimulating emotional responses and improving message recall (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Instagram's algorithm prioritizes visually appealing, interactive, and frequently updated content, making it suitable for businesses seeking to build brand identity and maintain audience interest (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). For SMEs, Instagram offers strategic advantages by combining aesthetic presentation, two-way communication, and community-building functions that collectively support digital branding and customer acquisition.

INSTAGRAM FEATURES AND THEIR MARKETING POTENTIAL

Each Instagram feature plays a distinct role in shaping consumer interaction and brand



performance. Feed posts serve as long-term visual representations of brand identity and product offerings, while Stories allow real-time engagement and humanized communication. Reels, introduced to compete with short-form video platforms, have been shown to generate high organic reach due to algorithmic preference for video-based, entertaining content (Montag et al., 2021). Hashtags function as classification tools that enhance discoverability by linking content with topical or niche communities. Meanwhile, Direct Messages (DMs) support personalized communication and strengthen customer trust through rapid responses. Collectively, these features form an ecosystem that, when optimized, can substantially enhance marketing effectiveness.

FEATURE OPTIMIZATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Research on social media optimization emphasizes the importance of strategic planning, consistency, and analytics-based evaluation. Businesses that tailor their content to platform-specific attributes tend to generate higher engagement and conversion rates (Alalwan, 2018). Optimal use of features requires understanding audience behaviour, identifying peak interaction times, and leveraging interactive tools such as Q&A, polls, and short-form videos. Studies also suggest that collaboration with influencers or complementary brands further amplifies content reach by tapping into established follower networks (Ki et al., 2020). Despite these insights, empirical evidence specific to SMEs in emerging markets—particularly regarding feature-level optimization on Instagram—remains limited, highlighting the need for contextual and exploratory research.

RESEARCH GAP

Although Instagram has been extensively studied as a digital marketing tool, prior literature has primarily focused on its general effectiveness rather than the in-depth analysis of feature-specific optimization. Most existing studies examine Instagram marketing in large or international brands, leaving a gap in understanding how SMEs with diverse business lines manage Instagram's multifunctional features within a single brand identity. Furthermore, limited studies explore the operational challenges SMEs face in content planning, algorithms, and maintaining consistent engagement. This research addresses these gaps by conducting a qualitative case study of Bersama Outdoor Rent, providing detailed insights into the practical implementation and optimization of Instagram features in an SME context.



RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how Instagram features are optimized as a digital marketing strategy by the SME Bersama Outdoor Rent. A qualitative approach was selected because the research objective focuses on understanding managerial interpretation, decision-making processes, and experiential perspectives that cannot be accurately captured using quantitative methods. The case study design allows for an in-depth, context-rich investigation within real-life boundaries, enabling the researcher to analyze how multiple Instagram features are used simultaneously within a single business identity.

Research Setting and Case Selection

The research was conducted on the Instagram account of Bersama Outdoor Rent, a Makassar-based business operating in multiple service lines including outdoor equipment rental, product sales, and trip organization. This case was chosen using purposive sampling, based on the criteria that the business:

1. actively uses Instagram as its primary marketing platform,
2. manages diverse product and service categories under one account, and experiences marketing challenges relevant to digital feature optimization.
3. This makes the case theoretically aligned with the study's goal of understanding feature-level optimization within SMEs.

Participants

A total of five informants were selected purposively, consisting of:

- the business owner,
- the marketing manager,
- two social media administrators, and
- one field operations staff member who frequently interacts with customers via Instagram.

These individuals were selected because they possess direct experience and knowledge regarding Instagram content planning, customer engagement, and operational workflows.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three triangulated techniques:

1. In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted to explore informants' experiences, strategies, challenges, and rationales for using specific Instagram features. The semi-structured format enabled flexibility while maintaining consistency across interviews.



2. Direct Observations

The researcher observed the active Instagram account over a defined period, focusing on:

- content frequency,
- feature usage (Feed, Stories, Highlights, Reels, Hashtags, DM),
- engagement levels, and
- customer interaction patterns.

Screenshots, engagement metrics, and visual documentation were collected as supporting evidence.

3. Document Analysis

Additional data such as previous promotional materials, content archives, Insights analytics (reach, impressions, demographics), and internal communication records were examined to support interview and observation findings.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Interactive Model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of:

- (1) Data Condensation – selecting, simplifying, and organizing interview transcripts, observations, and documents;
- (2) Data Display – structuring findings into matrices, thematic charts, and narrative summaries;
- (3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification – interpreting themes and validating them through iterative comparison with raw data and informant feedback.

Thematic coding was used to identify patterns related to content strategy, feature usage, audience engagement, and managerial decision-making.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure methodological rigor, this study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness:

- **Credibility:** Achieved through *source triangulation* (owner, admin, manager), *method triangulation* (interview, observation, document analysis), and *member checking*.
- **Transferability:** Ensured by providing rich contextual descriptions of the business setting and Instagram usage patterns.
- **Dependability:** Maintained through systematic documentation of decisions and coding processes.



- **Confirmability:** Established by maintaining an audit trail and separating researcher interpretation from direct participant statements.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained through anonymization of personal identifiers. Access to the Instagram account and internal documents was granted by the business owner solely for research purposes.

RESULTS

The results of this study are presented based on the thematic analysis of interviews, direct observations of the Instagram account, and supporting documentation. Four major themes emerged: (1) visual identity construction through Feed posts, (2) real-time engagement via Stories and Highlights, (3) audience reach and discoverability through hashtags, and (4) transactional communication through Direct Messages. Together, these findings describe how Bersama Outdoor Rent strategically and in some cases intuitively optimizes Instagram features to support digital marketing objectives.

1.Feed as the Primary Visual Marketing Tool

The analysis indicates that the **Feed** functions as the central feature for branding and product showcasing. Observations revealed consistent use of high-quality visuals portraying outdoor equipment, rental gear, and group trip activities. These visuals create a cohesive brand identity that aligns with the adventure-oriented nature of the business. Informants explained that the Feed is intentionally curated to act as a “digital catalog,” enabling customers to visually scan available products and services. However, uploading consistency varied across weeks, and no formal content schedule was implemented. This irregularity affected engagement stability and limited content visibility during certain periods.

2. Stories and Highlights for Real-Time Engagement and Information Structuring

The **Insta Story** feature was widely used to share time-sensitive content such as last-minute promotions, behind-the-scenes activities, equipment availability updates, and ongoing trip documentation. Stories were also used as a space for informal interaction through polls, question boxes, and quick announcements. Despite being frequently used, Story updates fluctuated and depended on staff availability.

The **Highlights** feature supported long-term content organization, with categories such as “Price List,” “Rental Info,” “Trip,” and “Testimonials.” While this structure helped new customers



access essential information quickly, observations found that several highlights were outdated. Informants acknowledged that updating Highlights was often overlooked due to operational workload, causing mismatches between displayed information and actual availability.

3. Limited Strategic Use of Hashtags and Discoverability Tools

The study found that the use of **hashtags** was present but not systematic. The business commonly used general hashtags such as #outdoor, #pendakian, and #camping, but lacked a structured hashtag strategy involving niche, locality-based, or brand-specific tags. As a result, content discoverability remained modest, with hashtag reach estimated to contribute only a small portion of overall impressions. Informants stated that hashtag selection was typically based on habit rather than analytical review, and no monitoring tools were used to assess hashtag performance.

4. Direct Message as the Core Customer Conversion Channel

Direct Message (DM) was identified as the most crucial feature for initiating transactions, clarifying rental or sales details, giving price quotations, and finalizing bookings. Interviewed informants reported that the majority of customers prefer DM communication due to the personalized and immediate nature of the interaction. The responsiveness of the admin—typically replying within minutes during active hours—was mentioned by customers as a key factor influencing trust and willingness to proceed with transactions. However, the business did not maintain a formal tracking system for DM interactions, making it difficult to assess enquiry patterns, conversion rates, or customer behavior trends.

5. Underutilization of Reels and Collaborative Features

One of the most notable findings is the **minimal use of Reels** and absence of **collaborative posts**, despite their high algorithmic advantage. During the observation period, Reels were rarely uploaded, and none of the posts made use of the Instagram “Collab” feature. Informants attributed this to limited technical skills in video editing and uncertainty about content ideas suitable for short-form videos. This underutilization presents a significant missed opportunity, particularly considering that outdoor-related content tends to perform strongly in video formats due to its dynamic and experiential nature.



Table 1. Summary of Instagram Feature Optimization at Bersama Outdoor Rent

Instagram Feature	Current Usage Pattern	Strengths Identified	Weaknesses / Limitations	Overall Optimization Level
Feed	Used as main visual catalog (products, rental items, trip documentation)	Strong visual identity; high-quality photos; clear product information	Irregular posting schedule; no structured content calendar	High
Stories	Used for real-time updates, quick promotions, and engagement	Humanizes brand; supports instant interaction	Inconsistent frequency; limited use of interactive features	Moderate
Highlights	Categorized archives (Price List, Rental Info, Trip, Testimonials)	Helps new customers access key information	Many categories outdated; not routinely updated	Low
Hashtags	General hashtags used (e.g., outdoor, camping, hiking)	Slight visibility improvement	Not strategic; no niche/location hashtags; no performance monitoring	Low
Direct Message (DM)	Main channel for inquiries, negotiation, and booking	High trust-building; fast response; strong conversion tool	No tracking system; no data analysis on DM patterns	High
Reels	Rarely used; no dynamic video content posted	—	No video-editing skills; missed algorithm advantage	Very Low
Collaboration Posts	Not used at all	—	No influencer/partner collaborations;	Very Low



			missed community reach	
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6. Overall Feature Optimization Pattern

Synthesis of the findings shows a **pattern of partial optimization**:

- Feed and DM are **highly optimized**,
- Stories are **moderately optimized**,
- Highlights and Hashtags are **poorly updated**,
- Reels/Collabs are **minimally used**.

This pattern suggests that while the business understands Instagram's basic functions, it has not fully leveraged its strategic potential. Feature usage appears to be influenced largely by operational convenience rather than data-driven decision-making or structured digital marketing planning.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the optimization of Instagram features by Bersama Outdoor Rent is uneven, with certain features particularly Feed posts and Direct Messages—displaying strong implementation, while others such as Reels, Highlights, and hashtags remain underutilized. This pattern reflects the broader challenges faced by many SMEs in transitioning from traditional promotional practices to fully integrated digital marketing strategies. Prior research confirms that SMEs often adopt digital tools intuitively rather than strategically, resulting in inconsistent performance across different platform features (Almeida et al., 2020; Adeola & Evans, 2020). The dominant reliance on Feed and DM suggests that the business prioritizes visual cataloging and direct customer communication, two practices commonly observed in early stages of digital marketing adoption.

The strong emphasis on Feed as the primary branding tool aligns with existing literature demonstrating that high-quality visual content enhances consumer engagement and strengthens brand perception. Lou and Yuan (2019) emphasized that visually appealing content fosters emotional connection and increases trust, particularly for product categories with experiential attributes. Similarly, Sheldon and Bryant (2016) noted that Instagram's visual architecture is fundamental to shaping user attitudes toward brands. Bersama Outdoor Rent's curated Feed, therefore, provides a solid foundation for brand visibility. However, the inconsistency in posting frequency reduces algorithmic advantage and limits engagement sustainability, a challenge also



highlighted by Felix et al. (2017), who argue that content scheduling is essential for maintaining audience attention in competitive digital environments.

The moderate and inconsistent use of Stories and Highlights presents another area for reflection. Stories offer opportunities for real-time interaction, enabling businesses to humanize their branding and engage audiences more informally. Umbara (2021) explains that Story-based interactions such as polls, Q&A, and behind-the-scenes content significantly increase follower engagement by fostering immediacy and authenticity. Highlights, on the other hand, function as structured information archives that assist new audiences in navigating essential content. The lack of regular updates to Highlights in this study indicates a missed opportunity to streamline customer information flow, supporting research by Hutahayan (2019), who asserts that updated digital catalogues are critical for reducing customer uncertainty and accelerating purchase decisions.

The limited strategic use of hashtags also reflects a gap in the business's discoverability strategy. Hashtags are essential navigation tools within Instagram's search ecosystem and play a significant role in expanding organic reach (Riki et al., 2023). Helianthusontri (2020) notes that effective hashtag strategies must integrate brand-specific, niche-specific, and location-based tags to optimize exposure. Bersama Outdoor Rent's reliance on generic hashtags limits its ability to penetrate targeted communities, particularly niche outdoor segments that often engage heavily in hashtag-driven searches. This finding reinforces prior research suggesting that SMEs underutilize analytic tools for monitoring hashtag performance and understanding audience behavior (Almeida et al., 2020).

A notable gap emerged in the minimal use of Reels and collaborative features, despite their known algorithmic advantages. Reels, in particular, are prioritized by Instagram's recommendation system due to their entertainment value and high engagement potential, especially among younger audiences (Montag et al., 2021). Ki et al. (2020) also highlight that collaborative content such as influencer partnerships or co-created posts significantly extends audience reach and enhances brand credibility through social proof. In the context of outdoor equipment and adventure services, where dynamic visual storytelling can deeply influence consumer interest, the absence of Reels and collaborations represents a substantial missed opportunity for market expansion.

Overall, the findings indicate that Instagram feature optimization at Bersama Outdoor Rent is shaped more by operational convenience than by strategic, data-driven decision-making. This mirrors the conclusion of Adeola and Evans (2020), who found that SMEs often lack digital



planning frameworks, leading to partial adoption of platform capabilities. The imbalance in feature usage demonstrates the need for structured content planning, analytic evaluation, and algorithm-aware strategies to maximize marketing outcomes. However, the study also highlights strong potential, given the effective use of Feed visuals and DM-based customer communication. These strengths can serve as foundational pillars for future digital strategy improvements.

In summary, while Bersama Outdoor Rent has leveraged Instagram to establish digital presence and generate customer interaction, significant room for improvement remains in adopting a holistic and fully optimized approach. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of how SMEs in emerging markets utilize social media features and emphasize the importance of platform-specific strategies to enhance competitiveness, engagement, and brand differentiation.

CONCLUDES

This study concludes that Instagram serves as a strategically significant yet unevenly optimized marketing platform for Bersama Outdoor Rent. The findings indicate that while the business has successfully utilized certain features particularly Feed posts and Direct Messages to build brand visibility and facilitate customer transactions, several other high-potential features such as Reels, Highlights, and hashtags remain underutilized. This imbalance reflects a broader pattern commonly observed among SMEs, where digital marketing adoption is driven more by operational convenience than structured planning or analytics-based decision-making.

The strong performance of Feed and DM demonstrates that the business has established a solid foundation for visual branding and personalized customer interaction. However, the inconsistent use of Stories, lack of systematic hashtag strategy, and minimal engagement with algorithm-driven features such as Reels highlight the need for more comprehensive and data-informed optimization efforts. These gaps limit the reach, engagement, and competitiveness of the business in an increasingly dynamic social media landscape.

Overall, the study contributes to expanding the understanding of how SMEs in emerging markets operationalize Instagram features within a multifunctional business context. The results emphasize that effective digital marketing requires not only aesthetic presentation and responsive communication but also a deliberate integration of content planning, performance analytics, and platform-specific optimization strategies. Strengthening these areas will enable Bersama Outdoor Rent and similar SMEs to leverage Instagram more effectively, enhance digital competitiveness, and achieve more sustainable marketing outcomes.



MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study yield several managerial implications that can support SMEs particularly those operating in multi-service outdoor and rental industries in optimizing their digital marketing strategies through Instagram. First, the results highlight the need for managers to adopt a structured and analytics-driven content strategy. While Bersama Outdoor Rent has demonstrated strong use of Feed visuals and Direct Messages, the inconsistent posting schedule limits engagement and reduces algorithmic visibility. Managers should therefore implement a content calendar that outlines posting frequency, content categories, and campaign timelines to ensure sustained visibility and improve audience retention. Leveraging Instagram Insights can further support decision-making by providing data on audience behavior, active hours, and content performance trends.

Second, the study underscores the importance of maximizing high-impact features such as Reels and interactive Stories. Reels, in particular, receive algorithmic priority and can significantly amplify organic reach when used effectively. Managers should invest in basic video-editing tools or training to produce short, dynamic content showcasing rental equipment, trip experiences, or customer testimonials. Similarly, interactive Story tools—such as polls, Q&A, and countdowns—should be used regularly to deepen engagement, humanize the brand, and encourage customer participation.

Third, managers should treat Highlights as a permanent information gateway that simplifies customer navigation. Updating Highlights with accurate price lists, rental procedures, trip schedules, and testimonials can reduce customer uncertainty and minimize repetitive inquiries. This also facilitates quicker purchase decisions by presenting essential information in a clear, structured format.

Fourth, the use of targeted and strategic hashtags should be optimized to enhance discoverability. Managers must avoid generic hashtags and instead integrate niche, location-based, and brand-specific tags that align with the outdoor community. Regular analysis of hashtag performance can help identify tags that generate higher impressions and engagement, enabling more effective content targeting.

Finally, the study highlights the need for managers to enhance internal coordination and documentation regarding Instagram communication processes. Establishing a simple tracking system for Direct Messages—such as recording customer inquiries, conversion rates, and common questions—can help refine communication strategies and identify patterns in customer preferences. Structured coordination among internal teams will also ensure consistency in tone,



response time, and customer service quality.

Collectively, these managerial implications suggest that Instagram can serve as a high-value marketing tool when supported by systematic planning, data-driven evaluation, and consistent content execution. By adopting these recommendations, Bersama Outdoor Rent and similar SMEs can improve their digital presence, strengthen customer relationships, and achieve greater competitiveness in the social-media-driven marketplace.

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