

Strategic Visual Storytelling on Instagram: How Red Communication Indonesia Engages Audiences During Ramadan

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Kronologi Naskah: diterima 18 April 2025; direvisi 11 Juni 2025; diputuskan 17 Juni 2025

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penggunaan strategis cerita visual (*visual storytelling*) oleh Red Communication Indonesia di Instagram, dengan fokus pada pembuatan konten untuk merek populer Indomie selama bulan Ramadan yang memiliki makna budaya yang penting. Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana platform Instagram yang berfokus pada visual dapat memfasilitasi koneksi emosional dan meningkatkan keterlibatan audiens melalui narasi yang relevan dengan budaya. Dengan menggabungkan simbol-simbol tertentu, konten yang telah dibuat dapat terhubung dengan konsumen Muslim Indonesia, membangun ikatan emosional. Metodologi yang digunakan melibatkan pendekatan kualitatif, termasuk wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan informan kunci dan dua informan lainnya, yang menyatakan mengenai fokus pada konten yang menarik secara visual dan strategi interaktif. Temuan penelitian menekankan pentingnya sensitivitas budaya, memastikan bahwa konten selaras dengan nilai-nilai Ramadan sekaligus mempertahankan keaslian. Pendekatan ini tidak hanya meningkatkan keterlibatan (*engagement*) tetapi juga menunjukkan kegunaan cerita visual (*visual storytelling*) di era digital.

Kata Kunci: audience engagement; instagram; konten media sosial; visual storytelling

Abstract

This research explores the strategic use of visual storytelling by Red Communication Indonesia on Instagram, focusing on their content creation for the popular brand Indomie during the culturally significant month of Ramadan. The research highlights how Instagram's visual-centric platform facilitates emotional connections and enhances audience engagement through culturally relevant narratives. By incorporating particular symbols, the content could resonate with Indonesian Muslim consumers, fostering emotional bonds. The methodology involves qualitative approaches, including semi-structured interviews with key informant and other two informants revealing a focus on visually appealing content and interactive strategies. The findings emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity, ensuring that the content aligns with Ramadan values while maintaining authenticity. This approach not only enhances engagement but also demonstrates the use of visual storytelling in the digital age.

Keywords: audience engagement; instagram; social media content; visual Storytelling.

Introduction

In today's digital era, social media has transformed how people communicate, with platforms like Instagram becoming key tools for audience engagement. Instagram's visual focus makes it ideal for brands, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. As Naumi et al. (2023) note, Instagram became a space for promoting halal lifestyles and sharing spiritual content during times of limited physical gatherings.

Visual storytelling has gained popularity as a strategic communication method because it helps deliver complex messages in simple, engaging ways (Bakhshi et al., 2016). It uses images, videos, and graphics to emotionally connect with audiences, strengthening engagement and brand loyalty (Hollis, 2018). Today's audiences want content that feels authentic and relatable, pushing brands to adapt accordingly (Baker & McKenzie, 2020). Instagram's algorithm also favors visually appealing content, boosting reach and interaction (Liu et al., 2020). This makes it a valuable platform for agencies like Red Communication Indonesia to use visual storytelling not just for marketing but to build emotional bonds with audiences. To do this effectively, brands must understand audience preferences and use design elements like hashtags and captions strategically (Pérez & de la Torre, 2021).

Ramadan, a month of fasting, reflection, and community, offers brands a chance to align their messages with values like family, faith, and generosity (Wilson & Grant, 2013). Young Muslims especially are active online during this time. As Nisa (2018) found, Indonesian Muslim youth use Instagram to express religiosity and identity through visual culture. E-commerce activity also rises during Ramadan, requiring brands to balance visual appeal with spiritual sensitivity. Kurniawati and Nugroho (2021) emphasize the importance of tailoring digital marketing to both spiritual values and the aesthetic preferences of millennials and Gen Z.

Using culturally meaningful visuals can strengthen audience connection. Symbols that reflect Ramadan traditions make content more relatable and engaging for Muslim audiences

(Alserhan, 2015). Localizing content to reflect specific cultural practices can improve relevance and engagement (Khan & Khan, 2020).

Although many studies discuss Instagram marketing, few focus on how Indonesian brands use visual storytelling during culturally important times like Ramadan. Mardhiyani and Budiastuti (2021), for example, showed how visual storytelling helped brand a tourism village, but did not go into detail on design strategies, symbol use, or religious themes. Kusuma and Sugandi (2018) looked at Instagram use for a donut brand, but did not examine storytelling during cultural or religious events. Arifah and Anggapuspa (2023) studied how visual elements influence engagement on a literary Instagram account, but didn't address religious or marketing contexts. To fill this gap, this study explores: How does Red Communication Indonesia strategically use visual storytelling on Instagram to enhance audience engagement during Ramadan? It aims to provide practical insights for brands on how to create Instagram content that emotionally connects with local audiences during culturally meaningful periods.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how Red Communication Indonesia utilizes Instagram for visual storytelling of Indomie contents and audience engagement during Ramadan period. Qualitative research is characterized by its focus on understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The qualitative approach is particularly suited for this research as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the strategies and practices employed by the agency in their content delivery.

Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured formats that facilitate in-depth discussions about participants' experiences and perceptions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In this research, data was collected through a semi-structured interview with key informant and informants at Red Communication Indonesia which are

senior account executive, creative team, and graphic designer. This method was chosen to facilitate open-ended discussions that could yield insights into the strategic use of Instagram for engaging content delivery. After conducting semi-structured interviews, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Following transcription, the data were subjected to initial coding, where key phrases, concepts, and ideas were highlighted. Coding serves as a method of organizing qualitative data into meaningful categories (Saldaña, 2021). The data analysis technique employed is thematic analysis. It provides a flexible approach to analyzing qualitative information, making it applicable across various research contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, triangulation was applied. Triangulation involves using multiple sources or methods to cross-check data and interpretations (Patton, 2015). Data triangulation was achieved by comparing the interview data with secondary data from Instagram content analysis and theoretical triangulation. The theoretical triangulation was applied using complementary theoretical perspectives: Visual Rhetoric, and Dual Coding Theory. This triangulation offers layered validation by cross-examining themes from cognitive, semiotic, and emotional perspectives.



Results and Discussion

This analysis will explore how Red Communication Indonesia employed visual storytelling on Instagram. It will examine the strategies used to create compelling visuals, deliver engaging content, and connect with the target audience within a specific cultural context. The strategy can be analyzed using the seven elements of visual storytelling proposed by Walter and Gioglio (2014), which contains design, personalization, usefulness, personality, storytelling, shareworthiness, and real-time amplification.

1. Visual Storytelling Strategies

Red Communication Indonesia strategically crafted visual content to capture audience attention and enhance brand messaging. This involved several key approaches:

a. Design: Tempting Product Visuals

Red Communication presented Indomie in appealing situations such as rainy days or late-night cravings, to trigger hunger and comfort. Visual images can evoke emotions and convey messages that are more immediate and powerful than words alone (Messaris, 2017). This underscores the need of using visuals to create emotional connections with consumers. This approach used visual metaphors, where a bowl of noodles on a rainy day symbolized warmth and emotional comfort. As Nadia, the senior account executive, said:

"...bagaimana caranya kita bisa membuat orang tergoda (tempting) untuk membeli Indomie, misalnya saat hujan, tiba-tiba melihat gambar Indomie di Instagram yang terlihat sangat enak."

("...how can we make people tempted to buy Indomie, for example, when it's raining and they suddenly see a picture of Indomie on Instagram that looks very delicious.")

These images served as emotional triggers, using warm lighting and vibrant colors to stimulate hunger. The use of vibrant colors and culturally meaningful symbols in visual branding creates a rich sensory experience that fosters emotional attachment and brand loyalty among local consumers (Purnamasari & Affandi, 2025). Walter and Gioglio (2014) emphasized that well-designed visuals, like close-ups and sensory-rich imagery, can tell stories without relying on words. The primary goal is to make the product visually irresistible, encouraging viewers to imagine the taste, texture, and warmth of the dish, shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Content to triggers sensory responses

Source: Indomie's official Instagram account

b. Personalization: Aligning with Ramadan Culture

To connect better with Muslim audiences, the team designed visuals with Ramadan elements like mosque domes, crescent moons, dates, and warm colors. These details helped the audience instantly recognize the content as Ramadan-related. As Afrizal, the graphic designer, said:

"Sesuaikan desain konten dengan elemen visual khas Ramadhan, seperti kubah masjid, kaligrafi, dan warna-warna relevan."

("Adjust content design with Ramadan-specific visual elements, such as mosque domes, calligraphy, and relevant colors.")

These elements didn't just make the content look festive, they added meaning and showed cultural awareness. For example, dates are symbolic because they are often eaten during Iftar. Gold and warm color tones created a cozy, spiritual feeling that matched the holy month. This is an example of personalization, as defined by Walter and Gioglio (2014), where content is adapted to reflect the values, visuals, and rituals of a specific audience. By doing so, the content resonates deeply with viewers' cultural experiences.



Figure 2. Contents with Ramadan Visual Elements

Source: Indomie's official Instagram account

In addition, cultural values deeply influence consumer behavior and preferences, and brands that align with these values can create stronger emotional connections with their audience (De Mooij, 2019). This aligns with the strategic integration of culturally significant elements in making engaging content to resonate with consumers during Ramadan.

c. Usefulness: Value Added Content

By representing familiar moments, the content became useful for audiences to relate to and emotionally engage with. For example, the content on Suhoor (sahur) reflected everyday life, which is consistent with the idea that useful content mirrors real-world experiences. Social listening can help companies be more useful and relevant by uncovering key themes and trends around which to craft visual content. (Walter & Gioglio, 2014). As Noni, the creative team, said:

"Pesannya harus dekat dengan insight masyarakat dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, mudah dimengerti, menggunakan cara yang mudah, tapi juga mengikuti update yg ada, menggunakan format image atau short video yang menarik di 3 detik awal."
("The message must resonate with everyday societal insights, easy to understand, use simple methods, but also stay updated, utilizing engaging image or short video formats within the first 3 seconds.")

Figure 3 features content showing a man who wakes up late for Suhoor but still manages

to eat in time thanks to Indomie’s quick and easy preparation, preparing instant noodles in the early morning provided a reassuring solution for a familiar problem. The visual narrative, supported by the caption “*Baru aja tidur, udah harus sahur. Bareng Indomie, ambil nikmatnya,*” taps into a common Ramadan experience for young adults, especially those balancing irregular sleep schedules.



Figure 3. Content that resonates with everyday life during Ramadan
 Source: Indomie’s official Instagram account

Aside from the message, the format of the content needs to be attention-grabbing. The use of bright color font, big text, short videos, and motion is to stand out in the first few seconds.

2. Audience Engagement Strategies
a. Personality: Relatable and Human

Red Communication used humor and culturally familiar situations to inject personality into their content. By tapping into familiar themes, traditions, and emotions associated with Ramadan, the brand enhances audience connection and increases engagement. As Nadia, the senior account executive, said:

“Sesuai dan relate dengan momen Ramadhan itu sendiri, dan juga tetap relate dengan target audience yang memang kita tuju.”
(“Content must align with the spirit of Ramadan while remaining relevant to the target audience.”)

Figure 4 illustrates small, meaningful moments that feel genuinely human and relatable. The visuals show experiences which reflect real social and cultural practices during

Ramadan. These gestures resonate with audiences because they portray values of generosity, friendship, and community. The content sparked high engagement, receiving 1,922 likes, 281 comments, and 270 shares, an indication that audiences see themselves reflected in these stories.

Table 1. Sequence of content that feels relatable and human

	<p>Sequence 1. Helping friends promote their small businesses.</p>
	<p>Sequence 2. Sharing Iftar snacks (takjil).</p>
	<p>Sequence 3. Waking up neighbors for Suhoor.</p>

Source: Indomie’s official Instagram account

This content aligns with the “personality” principle from Walter and Gioglio (2014), which encourages brands to act less like corporations and more like friends, which are warm, genuine, and emotionally in tune with their audiences.

b. Storytelling: Crafting Complete Moments

In today’s digital landscape, brand communication that utilizes storytelling elements tends to resonate more deeply with audiences. Rather than just promoting a product, successful visual storytelling embeds the brand into narratives that reflect everyday human experiences.

Table 2. Content with a clear story plot

	<p>Beginning (problem/emotion) The landlady (Ibu kos) was staring at the old photos on the wall, one of the roomers noticed it and asked; “Permisi bu, kangen pas di Timur Tengah ya?” and the landlady answered with; “Iya nih. Kapan ya bisa ke sana lagi...”</p>
	<p>Middle (action) The young tenants notice this and decide to surprise her with a dish that reminds her of that time: Indomie with Kebuli (Middle Eastern) flavor.</p>
	<p>End (resolution) The story ends with everyone laughing and enjoying the meal together.</p>

Source: Indomie’s official Instagram account

Table 1 presents one of Indomie’s most engaging Ramadan contents from 2024, with

over 31,800 likes, 772 comments, and 1,627 shares. The content follows a narrative structure that starts with an emotional trigger, an elderly landlady looking at nostalgic photos from her younger days in the Middle East. The young tenants notice this and decide to surprise her with a dish that reminds her of that time: Indomie with Kebuli (Middle Eastern) flavor. The story ends with everyone laughing and enjoying the meal together.

This content is a clear example of “storytelling” in visual marketing, where the brand isn’t just presenting a product, but embedding it into a meaningful and emotionally resonant moment. The post follows a complete arc, beginning (problem/emotion), middle (action), and end (resolution), which allows viewers to feel emotionally connected to the scene. This visual narrative reflects Walter and Gioglio’s (2014) emphasis on “complete storytelling,” where each content piece includes a beginning (emotion or conflict), a middle (action), and an end (resolution). It is not just the product that stands out here, but the emotions and values associated with it: empathy, kindness, nostalgia, and togetherness.

c. Shareworthiness: Audience Participation

The contents didn’t just share information. They also asked questions or gave prompts to encourage the audience to comment or share their thoughts. Interactive content, such as questions and prompts, can significantly enhance engagement by fostering a sense of community and encouraging user-generated content (De Vries et al, 2017). As Nadia, the senior account executive, said:

“...biasanya kita akan memberikan call to action berupa pertanyaan yang dapat memancing konsumen itu sendiri untuk menjawab.”

(“...we usually include a call to action in the form of a question to encourage consumers to respond.”)

Figure 4 illustrates Indomie’s strategic use of a call to action (CTA) to boost shareworthiness and participation during Ramadan. The content asks, “Kalau Lebaran #MakinTerasa versi kamu gimana? Komen di bawah ya!” (“How does Lebaran feel more special for you? Share in the comments below!”) By directly inviting

consumers to comment and share their personal Eid experiences, Indomie fosters a strong sense of community and inclusion. This participatory approach is reflected in the high engagement rates, as shown by the 1,875 likes, 704 comments, and 695 shares. Such interactivity not only increases brand visibility but also helps Indomie understand its audience better through real-time feedback and stories.



Figure 4. Content with a clear CTA
Source: Indomie's official Instagram account

3. Real-Time Amplification and Cultural Sensitivity

Red Communication actively monitored audience reactions and adapted in real-time. This shows how important two-way communication is. When the brand responds with personalized replies, jokes, or emojis, it builds a stronger relationship and shows that the audience is valued. Nadia, the senior account executive, said:

“Kan behavior pengguna sosial media itu, kalau merasa konten itu relate, pasti dia akan memberikan like atau mungkin juga share. Dan kalau ada komen, apa yang kita jawab yang utama memang harus relate dengan audience itu sendiri.”

(“Social media users tend to like or share content when they find it relatable. And if they leave comments, our responses must be relevant to them.”)

Figure 5 captures Indomie's real-time interactions with its audience in the comments section of an Instagram post. Audiences share personal and heartfelt experiences, and Indomie responds promptly and personally, asking about favorite flavors or reminding users to bring Indomie during Mudik (homecoming). This real-time responsiveness transforms what could

have been a one-way communication into an ongoing dialogue, sustaining momentum long after the post is published. Providing timely and personalized responses, highlighting the importance of responding to user interactions promptly and personally to maintain and boost engagement levels on platforms such as Instagram (Honora et al., 2024).



Figure 5. Screenshot of Indomie interacting with audience

Source: Indomie's official Instagram account

This reflects the real-time amplification element, where brands amplify engagement by responding quickly and appropriately. This type of interaction shows that the brand listens and values its community, enhancing trust and long-term loyalty (Walter & Gioglio, 2014).

Furthermore, Red Communication paid attention to cultural sensitivity, ensuring content was respectful and aligned with Ramadan values. Red Communication was very careful to stay respectful of Ramadan traditions. They followed both Indomie's brand guidelines and religious values. As Afrizal, the graphic designer, said:

“REDCOMM akan pastikan desain dan konten sesuai dengan brand guidelines Indomie dan relevan dengan tradisi serta nilai-nilai Ramadhan.”

(“REDCOMM will ensure that the design and content align with Indomie's brand guidelines and are relevant to the traditions and values of Ramadan.”)




This means avoiding anything that might seem disrespectful or too commercialized. Instead, they focused on making the content sincere, respectful, and in harmony with the emotions of the holy month. This approach

made the audience feel respected and connected to the brand on a deeper level.

Comparative Analysis: Ramadan 2024 vs. Ramadan 2025 Instagram Content

It is a comparative analysis between Indomie's Instagram content during Ramadan 2024 and 2025, explaining why Ramadan 2024 content generated significantly higher engagement.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis

Ramadan 2024	Ramadan 2025
 <p>Content with most engagement (31.8K likes, 772 comments, 1627 shares)</p>	 <p>Content with most likes (2597 likes)</p>
	 <p>Content with most comments and shares (43 comments and 32 shares)</p>
Used a compelling storytelling approach with complete arc.	Contents didn't show a complete story arc.
Used vibrant colors, and sensory-rich imagery that triggered viewers' senses.	Used slightly darker color and lighting, didn't quite capture audience's attention.

Used clear CTA in every content.	Lack of CTA.
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Source: Author's own work

Higher engagement in 2024 was driven by a stronger storytelling approach, vivid and sensory-rich visuals, and consistent use of clear CTA. In contrast, the 2025 content lacked a complete narrative arc, used dimmer color schemes, and showed minimal interactive prompts, resulting in significantly lower engagement. It highlights the importance of combining compelling stories, visual appeal, and audience involvement to maximize content engagement on social media platforms.

Furthermore, the theoretical triangulation using Visual Rhetoric and Dual Coding Theory (DCT) confirms these findings. Visual Rhetoric supports the use of symbols, stories, and emotional tone to build trust, cultural connection, and persuasive messages. Dual Coding Theory explains how combining meaningful visuals with simple, relatable text improves memory retention, emotional impact, and audience interaction.

Content Strategy / Key Finding	Visual Rhetoric	Dual Coding Theory
Design: Tempting Product Visuals	Supports: Imagery acts as persuasive pathos (emotional appeal); use of metaphor (noodles on rainy day = comfort).	Supports: Striking visuals quickly processed by the brain; imagery anchors memory of product.
Personalization: Ramadan Cultural Elements	Supports: Use of local symbols (mosque, crescent, dates) builds ethos and shared identity; aligns visual "language" with audience.	Supports: Familiar symbols paired with simple captions make content easier to encode and recall.
Usefulness: Value-Adding Content	Supports: Visual scenarios + function as arguments that "Indomie solves your sahur/iftar challenges."	Supports: Concrete visuals + captions about daily life reinforce message through dual encoding.
Personality: Human & Relatable Brand	Supports: Tone, humor, and familiar situations foster identification (ethos/pathos) and trust.	Supports: Character-driven visuals and light-hearted captions form memorable, easily understood stories.
Storytelling: Complete Narrative Arc	Supports: Narrative visuals create persuasive emotional journeys (pathos) and moral arguments (ethos).	Supports: Story images + supportive text/captions encode message more deeply, aiding recall and understanding.
Shareworthiness: Audience Interaction (CTA)	Supports: Calls-to-action turn passive viewers into rhetorical participants; builds community through dialogue.	Supports: Question in text + visual scenario makes prompt more memorable, increasing likelihood of response.
Real-Time Amplification	Supports: Responsive brand persona (friendly, attentive) strengthens ethos and trust in brand's message.	Supports: Visual replies (GIFs, emojis) + textual response reinforce brand presence in memory.
Cultural Sensitivity & Authenticity	Supports: Correct use of symbols and respectful tone enhances credibility and avoids misinterpretation.	Supports: Familiar imagery + clear language minimize cognitive load, making respectful messages easily processed.

Figure 6. Theoretical Triangulation

Source: Author's own work

Conclusions

This study has explored the strategic use of visual storytelling by Red Communication Indonesia in Indomie's Instagram account, particularly during Ramadan. It highlights the essential role of cultural sensitivity and visual storytelling in crafting engaging social media content, reinforces the theory that visual storytelling not only functions as a communication tool but also serves as a medium to build emotional connections between the brand and consumers, affirming the importance of visual elements as a central component in emotional marketing theory. Furthermore, this study shows that local culture strongly affects how audiences understand visual stories, enriching visual communication concept by incorporating cultural context as one of the key factors in the success of storytelling.

Key strategies include the incorporation of culturally significant symbols and motifs, such as mosque domes and crescent moons, and story arc that resonates cultural values enhance the authenticity and emotional appeal of the content. Moreover, the active engagement with audiences through calls to action and real-time interaction transforms passive content consumption into meaningful dialogue.

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