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Analysis of Digital Communication of the Instagram Account @Rucas.co from the Perspective of Active Followers

Rifaldy Rachman[1]*, Riefky Krisnayana[2], Ahmad Zakiyuddin[3]

[1] Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Langlangbuana, Bandung, Indonesia
[2] Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Langlangbuana, Bandung, Indonesia
[3] Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Langlangbuana, Bandung, Indonesia

[1] rifaldyrachman22@gmail.com
[2] riefkykrisnayana@gmail.com
[3] zakiunla77@gmail.com

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ABSTRACK

This study aimed to analyze the digital communication of the @rucas.co Instagram account from the perspective of its active followers. It employed Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory to examine how active followers interpreted the digital messages conveyed through Instagram content. This research used a qualitative approach based on Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory. Data were collected through digital observation of the @rucas.co Instagram account and semi-structured interviews with five informants selected using purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the digital communication delivered through feed posts, captions, Instagram Stories, and other interactive features was generally perceived positively by the informants. Based on the analysis using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory, two decoding positions were identified: the dominant-hegemonic position and the negotiated position, while the oppositional position was not found. Informants in the dominant-hegemonic position interpreted the messages in accordance with the intended meaning constructed by the brand, whereas those in the negotiated position accepted the messages but interpreted them based on their personal experiences and needs. This study concludes that the digital communication of @rucas.co has successfully generated predominantly positive interpretations among its active followers. Future research is recommended to involve a more diverse range of informants and examine other social media platforms to obtain a more comprehensive understanding.

Keywords: *Digital Communication, Instagram, Active Followers, Stuart Hall, Rucas.co*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology and the flow of information in the era of globalization has driven a continuous increase in internet use. According to *We Are Social* tahun 2025, the average daily internet usage of Indonesian people reaches 8 hours and 30 minutes, used not only for entertainment and information seeking but also for business activities. This condition has encouraged business actors

* *Rifaldy Rachman: rifaldyrachman22@gmail.com*

to use social media as a primary channel to promote and market their products widely and efficiently (Fadhil Rahmadani 2024).

Digital communication has become an essential element of business activity because it functions to inform, persuade, and remind consumers about the products offered, with the ultimate goal of building brand loyalty (Hastuti, Herawati, and Pramudia 2010). This loyalty is closely related to brand image, which is formed from consumers' perceptions of the information and experiences they receive (Pahlevi and Swarnawati 2024). In this context, social media plays an important role in shaping how audiences interpret a brand, since messages delivered in an engaging, consistent, and interactive manner can influence how audiences understand a company's digital communication (Arfan et al. 2025).

Among the various social media platforms used by Indonesian society, Instagram ranks third as the most popular social media platform (Tungka et al., 2020). As a visual-based platform, Instagram allows users to share photos, videos, and captions to convey messages creatively and communicatively (Hidayatullaj dan Ardiansyah 2022). Features such as feed, Story, Reels, and Instagram Shopping provide brands with high flexibility to build two-way relationships with their followers, so that optimal use of these features not only increases audience engagement but also helps companies understand how their digital communication is received (Nanda 2022).

Several prior studies are relevant to this topic. (Nugroho, Florina, and Edy 2024) showed that visual and narrative strategies on Instagram accounts play an important role in building brand identity. (Nursyamsi, Siregar, and Nurahlina 2022) found that the optimal use of Instagram features encourages increased customer engagement, which in turn fosters consumer trust. (Mangara and Cindoswari 2023) examined digital communication within an online community context, while (Yunnisa, Irianti, and Pradesti 2024) highlighted the role of influencer campaigns in building brand awareness for local fashion products. In addition, studies on audience reception using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory have been conducted in various media contexts, such as by (Asfahani 2022) on an Islamic-preaching Instagram account, (Wibisono and Haqqu 2024) on satirical TikTok content, and (Astiani 2022) on audience reception of a television series. These studies confirm that audiences are active in interpreting media messages; however, the application of this framework to the digital communication of local fashion brands on Instagram, particularly Rucas.co, has not been widely examined.

Rucas.co is a local Indonesian streetwear brand that actively utilizes Instagram as a digital communication medium through visual strategies, campaigns, and interaction with its followers. Although Rucas.co's digital activity appears fairly active through consistent uploads, influencer collaborations, and the use of interactive features, a high number of followers, likes, or engagement does not necessarily reflect how active followers actually perceive and understand the brand's digital (Jaya and Syam Maella 2025). This gap underlies the need for a study on how active followers receive the digital communication of @rucas.co.

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze the digital communication of the @rucas.co Instagram account from the perspective of active followers using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory, which encompasses three audience decoding positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. Academically, this study is expected to enrich the study of digital communication and brand management, while practically it is expected to serve as an evaluation material for Rucas.co and as a reference for other local brands and digital communication practitioners in designing more effective communication strategies.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as a construction shaped through individual experience, interaction, and interpretation (Butsi 2019). This paradigm was chosen because it aligns with the aim of understanding how active followers interpret the digital communication of @rucas.co based on their own experiences. The study used a descriptive-analytic approach, which describes and simultaneously analyzes the phenomenon under study in depth (Sugiyono, 2017), combined with a qualitative research method (Creswell and Creswell 2018) that seeks to understand the meaning individuals give to a social phenomenon.

The object of the study was the official Instagram account @rucas.co, while the subjects were five active followers of the account determined through purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2017) based on the following criteria: having followed the @rucas.co account for at least one year, actively interacting with its published content, and having purchased a Rucas.co product. The five informants came from different domiciles and occupational backgrounds, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of Research Informants

Informant	Name	Age	Domicile	Occupation
I	Adit Firmansyah	23	Bandung	Freelancer
II	Arva Dwika	23	Jember	Student
III	Adam Zakaria	21	Lombok	Student
IV	Rizkhan	21	Pangandaran	Student
V	Farrel Nasywa	24	Jepara	Student

Data were collected through two techniques: digital observation of the content and interactions on the @rucas.co Instagram account during May 2026, and semi-structured interviews with the five informants conducted online via Discord and Google Meet, along with one offline interview, during June 2026. The two techniques complemented each other: digital observation provided a picture of the communication produced by Rucas.co, while the interviews revealed how these messages were received and interpreted by active followers.

Data analysis referred to the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three stages: (1) data reduction, i.e., selecting and grouping data obtained from observation and interviews according to the research focus; (2) data display, i.e., organizing the reduced data into descriptive narratives supported by interview quotations and documentation; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, i.e., classifying the data into Stuart Hall's three decoding positions — dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional — based on how each informant interpreted the digital communication messages of @rucas.co.

Data validity was examined through source triangulation (comparing interview results with observation results of the account), member checking (re-confirming interview results with the informants), and an audit trail (a systematic record of the entire research process). The research was conducted from May to June 2026, covering the stages of literature review, instrument preparation, observation of the @rucas.co Instagram account, interview implementation, data analysis, and report preparation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Overview of the Research Object

Rucas.co is a local Indonesian streetwear brand founded by Rubin Castor in late 2018 and has grown rapidly since 2019, focusing on modern, high-quality yet affordable denim products (Sonia 2024). The brand's growth increased significantly after collaborating with content creator Bimo Putra Dwitya in 2020, eventually earning an award from the Indonesian World Records Museum (MURI) for its successful online sales performance. The @rucas.co Instagram account is actively used to publish product launches, promotions, and collaborations, while also building brand identity and image through consistent visual content.

3.2 Digital Observation Results

Observation of the @rucas.co account during May 2026 shows that the account actively utilizes Instagram as a digital communication medium through product photo uploads, Instagram Stories, communicative captions, and interaction with followers in the comment section. Visual communication, captions, interactivity, and engagement are the main characteristics of the digital communication built by this account, in line with the optimal use of Instagram features described by (Nanda 2022).

3.3 Active Followers' Perspectives Based on Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding Theory

Based on interviews with the five informants, the digital communication of @rucas.co was analyzed using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model to identify how messages delivered through the feed, captions, Stories, and other interactive features were interpreted by the audience.

The dominant-hegemonic position was found in Informant II (Arva) and Informant III (Adam). Both accepted and interpreted Rucas.co's digital communication in accordance with the meaning constructed by the brand, without rejection or divergent interpretation (Storey, 2010). Arva considered Rucas.co's digital communication to be well-planned and consistent, while Adam felt the content successfully balanced product information with brand image delivery. Both also appreciated the visual quality, the casual and communicative language style of the captions, and the optimal use of the feed, Story, and

Reels features. This acceptance aligns with their experience as active followers who are accustomed to following fashion trends on social media, allowing the message to be received in accordance with the preferred meaning constructed by the brand. This finding is consistent with (Asfahani 2022) dan (Wibisono and Haqqu 2024), who also found that a dominant position tends to emerge when messages are delivered clearly, consistently, and relevantly to the characteristics of the target audience.

The negotiated position was found in Informant I (Adit), Informant IV (Rizkhan), and Informant V (Nasywa). All three essentially accepted Rucas.co's digital communication positively, but still made adjustments to its meaning based on personal experience and needs (Storey, 2010). Adit felt that the consistent visuals increased the product's appeal but hoped that product specifications, such as materials, could be presented in more detail. Rizkhan acknowledged that the messages were generally easy to understand, but noted that some posts were initially interpreted differently before he read the caption in full. Nasywa felt that some content emphasized branding and lifestyle more than in-depth product information. None of the three rejected the brand identity or the communication strategy used, but the form of negotiation appeared through their expectation for more detailed product information. This finding is consistent with (Wibisono and Haqqu 2024) and (Ulumuddin 2020), who explained that a negotiated position emerges when audiences actively connect media messages with their own personal experiences and needs.

The oppositional position was not found in this study. All five informants understood the intent of the digital communication conveyed by @rucas.co and showed no rejection of the dominant meaning constructed through its content; the differences in interpretation that emerged were limited to constructive input regarding the completeness of product information. This result differs from the findings of (Astiani 2022), who found that all of her informants held an oppositional position because the dominant meaning was considered inconsistent with their values and emotional experiences. This difference suggests that the emergence of an oppositional position is heavily influenced by audience characteristics, media context, and the extent to which the message aligns with the needs and interests of its target market.

3.4 Discussion

Overall, the observation, interview, and documentation results reinforce one another: the digital communication of @rucas.co, delivered through a combination of visual elements, captions, and interactive Instagram features, tends to be received positively by its active followers, with the majority of reception falling within the dominant and negotiated spectrum rather than the rejection spectrum. Clarity of message delivery, visual consistency, communicative language, and the optimal use of Instagram features are the supporting factors behind this positive reception. This finding reinforces Stuart Hall's argument that audiences are active in constructing meaning from media messages rather than being passive recipients, and that the meaning of a message can vary depending on the experience, needs, and social background of each individual (Rahmadanti and Suranto 2024); (Febrian 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings regarding the digital communication of the Instagram account @rucas.co from the perspective of active followers using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the digital communication delivered through the feed, captions, Instagram Stories, Reels, and other interactive features is generally well received by active followers of @rucas.co because it is considered clear, easy to understand, and suited to the characteristics of the target audience. Second, the dominant-hegemonic position was found in two of the five informants, who accepted and interpreted the messages in accordance with the meaning constructed by the account managers. Third, the negotiated position was found in three informants, who essentially accepted the messages but still adjusted their meaning based on personal experience and information needs. Fourth, the oppositional position was not found in this study, so the differences in interpretation that emerged remained at the level of negotiation rather than rejection. Fifth, overall, active followers' perspectives on @rucas.co's digital communication tend to be positive, indicating that the brand's digital communication strategy is fairly effective in generating interpretations aligned with its communication objectives.

5. SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on these findings, Rucas.co is advised to maintain the visual consistency and communication style it has established, while enhancing the completeness of product information (materials, sizes, and other details) in every upload to better meet the audience's information needs. For

other local brands, this study can serve as a reference showing that communicative messaging, consistent visuals, and the optimal use of Instagram features contribute to building brand image and audience engagement. For digital communication practitioners, this study underscores the importance of message clarity and content relevance, given that audiences do not always accept messages wholesale but negotiate their meaning based on personal experience. For future researchers, it is recommended to expand the number and diversity of informants, examine other social media platforms such as TikTok or X, and combine Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory with other communication theories or approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between brand digital communication and audience interpretation.

6. CO-AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

This article is the work of a single author. The author declares no conflict of interest in this article. The author was solely responsible for the entire research process, from problem formulation, data collection through observation and interviews, data analysis, to the preparation of the manuscript.

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