

Instagram as Sensemaking Media: Emotional and Interactive Strategies in Digital Communication

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Abstract

This study aims to understand how Instagram is used as a sensemaking medium in digital communication. Referring to Karl Weick's sensemaking theory (1995), this study explores seven dimensions of sensemaking: identity construction, retrospective, enactment of sensible environments, social interaction, ongoing communication, extracted cues, and plausibility. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, with data collected through interviews with two informants, namely the Owner and the digital marketing admin. Data analysis was carried out using NVivo software. The results of the study show that Instagram is not only used as a visual promotional tool, but also as a participatory space to build meaning with customers. The communication strategies implemented involve emotional narratives, visual consistency, two-way communication, and data-based decision making. Collaboration between strategic and technical actors within the organization creates adaptive, relevant, and sustainable communication practices. This study concludes that sensemaking is an effective framework for understanding the dynamics of digital communication on social media, as well as providing practical contributions to the development of communication strategies in the competitive digital era.

Keywords: Content Strategy, Digital Marketing Communication, Interactive Communication, Sensemaking, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has changed the way individuals and organizations interact with consumers to create meaning, especially through social media (Sidharta et al., 2024). Social media not only functions as a channel for distributing information, but has transformed into a complex social interaction space, where individuals and organizations shape meaning through fast and dynamic communication (Brill et al., 2022). One of the most widely used platforms in digital marketing communication strategies today is Instagram (Kis et al., 2024). platform offers visual and interactive features that allow brands to build more personal and dynamic relationships with audiences (Wulandari et al., 2025).

Two-way communication through comments, direct messages, and interactive features such as polls and Q&A, allows companies to respond to consumer needs and expectations in real time. In this context, digital communication is not just about delivering messages, but rather a sensemaking process, namely how individuals create meaning from the messages, symbols, and interactions they encounter (Weick, 1995). Emotional and interactive



digital communication strategies are becoming increasingly important in attracting attention, maintaining customer engagement and purchasing decisions (Barta et al., 2023; Putri & Alfian, 2024). Social media users are not only consumers of information, but also active actors in shaping and negotiating the meaning of every interaction they experience (Giannakis et al., 2022).

Many organizations now use Instagram not only as a promotional medium, but also as a strategic space to build meaning and strengthen emotional connections with audiences (Kumar & Masvood, 2023). Instagram has evolved into a digital communication platform that combines the power of visuals, personal narratives, and real-time interactions, allowing brands to convey messages in a deeper and more meaningful way (De Veirman et al., 2017). Features such as Stories, Reels, and Live open up opportunities for businesses to present immersive experiences that not only influence consumer perceptions but also encourage active involvement in the digital communication process (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). In this context, interactions on Instagram become more than just promotions, but also form an ecosystem of meaning where audiences participate in building an understanding of brand values and identity.

However, the rapid dynamics in the era of digital disruption often create uncertainty, ambiguity, and the need to continuously adapt. This is where the role of sensemaking becomes crucial. As explained by Weick (1995), sensemaking is the process by which individuals or organizations interpret complex realities through the creation of understandable and shared meanings (Weick, 1995; Le Bris, 2021; Petersen, 2022). In the context of digital marketing communications, sensemaking becomes an important mechanism for business actors to read market signals, understand consumer responses, and navigate digital platform algorithms and trends more strategically (Combe & Carrington, 2015).

By sensemaking, organizations not only react to change but also create a framework of meaning that allows audiences to understand and respond to brand messages emotionally and participatively. This process involves analyzing digital data (insight), reading visual narratives, and interpreting consumer interactions that ultimately underlie valuable, adaptive, and sustainable decision-making (Vickers & Bennett, 2024). Therefore, it is important to understand how visual strategies, personal narratives, and interactive responses implemented by brands on Instagram shape the sensemaking process in the minds of audiences.

This study aims to explore how Instagram is used as a sensemaking medium in digital communication, emphasizing the emotional and interactive strategies used by business actors, as well as their impact on consumer perception and loyalty. This study is not only important for expanding theoretical understanding of social media as a meaningful communication space, but also provides practical contributions to the development of more humanistic and participatory digital marketing strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how Instagram is used as a sensemaking medium in building an emotional and interactive digital communication strategy. This approach was chosen because it is in line with the research objectives that emphasize the exploration of meaning, narrative, and communication practices that are formed dynamically and contextually in the daily life of the organization (Creswell, 2018). This search not only focuses on the content of the message conveyed, but

also on how business actors and social media managers interpret digital situations, respond to audience interactions, and build meaningful experiences for customers.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with three main informants who have strategic roles in managing the Millen Florist Nusantara Instagram account, namely the business owner, digital marketing staff, and social media admin. To analyze the data, researchers used the NVivo application as an aid in the thematic coding process. This application helps researchers organize interview data systematically, identify patterns, categories, and main themes related to digital sensemaking practices (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). The use of NVivo strengthens accuracy and traceability in the data interpretation process, which is very relevant in the context of this study, where the meaning of visual communication and digital interaction is at the core of the organization's communication strategy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital communication through Instagram has undergone a transformation from just a promotional medium to an interactive space that allows for the sensemaking process, which is a process in which organizations and audiences together build an understanding of reality, brand identity, emotional values, and social relations formed through communication (Pinarbaşı & Kırçova, 2021). platform is no longer just a place to disseminate information or display products, but has become an integral part of a communication strategy that emphasizes participation, interaction, and collective meaning creation (Mefalopulos, 2008). Millen Florist Nusantara consciously utilizes the features available on Instagram such as visual feeds, stories, reels, polls, and direct messages to create an emotional, personal, and continuous communication experience. This strategy is key in building and maintaining customer loyalty, where the interactions that are established are not one-way, but reflective, responsive, and based on value proximity.

Within the framework of the sensemaking theory developed by Weick (1995), one of the main dimensions that appears dominant in Millen Florist's communication practices is identity construction, namely how an organization's identity is formed through a process of interaction and interpretation that continues to develop. Brand identity is not only present through a logo or visual design alone, but through a narrative that is built consistently and touches on the emotional aspects of customers' lives. Millen Florist's digital marketing admin explained that the strategy implemented not only displays products visually, but also includes the story behind the moment of using the product:

"We focus on visual consistency and storytelling, so we don't just upload photos of flowers, but we give stories behind the moments, such as anniversary flowers or condolences. So there is an emotional touch that makes customers feel close" (Marketing).

Narratives like this show how brand identity is not only defined by products, but by emotional experiences that can be understood by customers personally. Meanwhile, the retrospective dimension in sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) is also clearly visible in Millen Florist Nusantara's digital communication practices. Retrospective sensemaking refers to the process of building meaning based on past experiences where individuals or organizations reflect on what has happened and then interpret it as a basis for making relevant decisions in the present. In this context, organizations do not only move instinctively or reactively, but

consciously look back to understand the patterns of success and failure that occur in their digital communication strategies. This practice is reflected in the routine of evaluating Instagram content that is carried out periodically. The digital marketing admin stated that every week they actively check the insights from each upload that has been published, such as the level of engagement, number of likes, shares, saves, comments, to responses from the story feature.

"Every week we check insights. The data is used to evaluate which content is performing well, which needs to be improved" (Marketing).

This activity reflects the way the organization looks back to shape future decisions, a key feature of the sensemaking process. The dimension of "enactment of sensible environments" is executed by creating a digital experience that feels real and relevant. Instagram is interpreted as a space to show not only products, but also the emotional value behind each flower. The owner of Millen Florist said,

"Instagram helps us build emotional closeness. Every content we create is not just about selling, but we insert meaning, stories, and personal touches. That's what makes customers feel more connected" (Owner).

Meanwhile, the "social" or social process in sensemaking is also present in the two-way interaction pattern between Millen Florist and customers. Quick responses to audience questions are answered quickly. Direct Message, story polling, and Q&A features are concrete manifestations of the collective meaning-making process. Millen Florist's marketing and owners acknowledge that direct consumer involvement on social media is very helpful in building trust and comfort, which ultimately has an impact on the high level of repeat orders. In addition, customers who feel appreciated through story reposts or other interactions tend to show stronger loyalty. This shows that the meaning of the brand is built collectively with the audience.

"We always try to reply to DMs and comments as quickly as possible. In fact, many customers repeat orders because they feel comfortable chatting directly via Instagram" (Marketing).

The ongoing dimension refers to the understanding that the process of meaning formation is not final, but rather takes place continuously and dynamically. Meaning is not produced from a single moment, but is formed continuously through repeated interactions, experiences, and interpretations over time. In the context of Millen Florist Nusantara's digital communication, this principle is clearly reflected in the pattern of content production and distribution that is carried out routinely and consistently through Instagram. Content is not created randomly or occasionally, but is designed as part of an ongoing strategy that is continuously updated based on responses and changes in audience preferences. The digital marketing admin explained that consistency is the main principle in social media management. Every week, the team creates an upload schedule that considers the best time based on audience activity insights.

"We post at least 3-4 times a week. For the hours, we adjust them based on insight, usually in the afternoon or evening after work hours" (Marketing).

The statement indicates that decisions in communication do not only follow intuition, but are based on data that is continuously monitored and analyzed periodically. This supports the idea that sensemaking is a living process that requires constant attention and involvement. In fact, in practice, seemingly simple daily content is actually part of continuous interpretive work where organizations try to understand changes in audience tastes, platform dynamics,

and developing social trends. By maintaining a regular rhythm of digital communication, Millen Florist creates a stable and intimate connection with its customers. This pattern allows the organization to remain present in the audience's daily life without losing relevance. The ongoing dimension in this context emphasizes the importance of continuity in building trust, managing expectations, and maintaining brand existence amidst the very fast flow of information. Thus, ongoing sensemaking becomes an important foundation in creating a communication experience that is not only temporary, but also forms a consistent and sustainable long-term relationship.

In addition, the extracted cues dimension describes how individuals or organizations capture certain clues from the environment as basic materials in forming meaning and designing actions. In the context of digital communication, these clues can be data, interaction patterns, or audience responses to the content presented. Millen Florist Nusantara actively applies this principle by utilizing Instagram Insight to read audience characteristics and formulate more targeted content strategies. The digital marketing team not only produces content routinely but also ensures that each content has emotional and visual relevance that matches the profile of their followers. The digital marketing admin explained that the majority of Millen Florist's followers are young women who like aesthetic things and are sensitive to emotional touches.

"Our followers are mostly women aged 20-35 who like aesthetic things.

That's why our content is made feminine, soft, and full of meaning"

(Marketing).

This statement shows that the decision-making process in compiling content is based on digital and concrete cues, such as age, gender, visual interests, and engagement patterns. This data becomes strategic raw material for determining the style of caption language, visual color tone, and the most touching and effective narrative in attracting the audience's attention. By understanding these preferences, Millen Florist is able to create content that is not only visually appealing, but also has high emotional resonance for the target audience. Furthermore, this process shows how the organization interprets small signals from the audience and integrates them into the message production process. This indicates that the communication carried out is not only based on visual creativity, but also on sensitivity to the dynamics of the ever-changing audience. By focusing content on the most active and responsive segmentation, Millen Florist not only increases engagement, but also strengthens the brand image as an entity that cares, is relevant, and is close to customers.

In the sensemaking theory according to Weick (1995), one important dimension is plausibility, namely the tendency of individuals or organizations to act based on what is considered reasonable rather than demanding absolute accuracy or absolute certainty. In the highly dynamic world of digital communication filled with uncertainties such as algorithm changes, interaction fluctuations, or rapidly shifting audience trends, organizations are required to be able to interpret situations quickly and responsively (Weick, 1995). This is where the principle of plausibility becomes very relevant. Instead of waiting for complete data or in-depth research results, Millen Florist Nusantara often makes decisions based on experience and strategic intuition that are considered the most logical and appropriate to the context at that time. This can be seen from the statement of the owner of Millen Florist who emphasized the importance of improvisation and flexibility in dealing with declining interactions.

"We usually deal with it with small campaigns or giveaways. What's important is that we never stop posting content and it has to be varied, not just selling but also educating." (Owner).

The statement shows that communication continuity is a priority, and to achieve it, the team does not rely entirely on statistical figures or complex analytical reports. Instead, decisions to run small campaigns, increase educational content, or add content variations are based on previous experiences and direct observation of audience responses. This strategy is not only reactive, but also reflects the organization's ability to read the context and formulate tactical steps that are not too rigid. In this practice, the plausibility approach becomes a form of adaptive sensemaking, where the digital communication team is not fixated on one particular pattern or indicator, but is flexible and open to various possibilities. Actions are taken not because they are the most technically accurate choices, but because they are considered the most reasonable and relevant in the situation at hand.

Table 1. Sensemaking Themes and Informant Contributions in Digital Communication

Sensemaking Theme	Main Focus	Informant Contribution
Enactment of Sensible Environment	Creating emotional space through product visualization	Digital Marketing: Creates emotionally resonant floral visuals for key moments Owner: Emphasized Instagram as an emotional product display.
Extracted Cues (Insight-Driven Content)	Analyzing insights (audience data, engagement patterns)	Digital Marketing: Analyzes follower demographics and engagement trends. Owner: Understands content must align with audience segments.
Identity Construction	Storytelling that connects with customer's personal moments	Digital Marketing: Crafts empathetic and relatable captions. Owner: Sees the brand as part of customers' meaningful life events.
Ongoing Communication	Consistent posting and daily engagement	Digital Marketing: Schedules weekly content using a calendar. Owner: Ensures regular posting and encourages varied content.
Plausibility in Decision Making	Flexible responses to digital marketing challenges	Digital Marketing: Implements giveaways and campaign improvisation. Owner: Promotes adaptability in uncertain digital environments.
Retrospective Evaluation	Evaluating past content performance	Digital Marketing: Conducts weekly insight reviews. Owner: Acknowledges its importance but lacks in-depth data analysis.
Social Interaction	Two-way communication through DM and comments	Digital Marketing: Actively responds to messages and builds trust. Owner: Oversees communication and values responsive customer service.

Source: Researcher Data Analysis

To gain a comprehensive understanding of how Instagram is used as a sensemaking medium by Millen Florist Nusantara, this study combines the theoretical approach of the sensemaking concept by Weick (1995) with empirical data from in-depth interviews with two key informants from Millen Florist Nusantara: the owner and admin of digital marketing. Through the process of coding and thematic analysis, it was understood that the two informants contributed in a complementary manner. Owners tend to play a role in the strategic aspects and emotional value of the brand, while admins emphasize more on technical implementation and daily content management on Instagram.

Table 1 contains four main elements: first, the main nodes or major themes that reflect the seven dimensions of sensemaking; second, the main focus that explains the specific aspects of the observed digital communication strategies; third, the roles in sensemaking that describe the theoretical function of each theme based on Weick's framework; and fourth, the informant contributions, which summarize the quotes, views, or actual practices provided by each informant on each dimension. The structure of this table presents a holistic picture of how meaning is constructed, managed, and maintained in Millen Florist's digital communication.

The sensemaking process in Millen Florist's digital communication involves not only the formulation of effective messages, but also the integration of visual meaning, social interaction, and adaptation to platform dynamics. In the analysis of each theme, it was found that each sensemaking dimension is applied in real terms in the organization's social media practices. For example, the enactment of sensible environment dimension is reflected in a visual strategy that arouses emotions, while extracted cues are applied through reading followers' insights and demographics. Meanwhile, identity construction is carried out by presenting the brand in the customer's personal moments, and ongoing communication is realized through a consistent content schedule. Even in situations that require improvisation, such as a decrease in interaction, the team applies plausibility in decision making by holding giveaways or small campaigns. Evaluation of content performance and social relations built through DM and comments also show that the retrospective evaluation and social interaction dimensions are actively carried out.

From all these findings, it can be concluded that the use of Instagram by Millen Florist Nusantara is not only based on marketing strategies, but involves a complete sensemaking practice both from the organizational and consumer side. This process involves combining emotional narratives, utilizing digital data, social engagement, and communication continuity, thus creating a digital space that is more than just a promotional platform. Instagram becomes an arena for forming shared meaning, where brand identity, emotional values, and customer engagement are managed in a strategic and long-term valuable digital communication ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Instagram not only functions as a social media for visual promotion, but has developed into a strategic space for organizations in building meaning with customers, especially through the sensemaking approach developed by Weick (1995). In the context of Millen Florist Nusantara, the use of Instagram as a digital communication medium involves seven dimensions of sensemaking, namely: identity construction, retrospective, enactment of sensible environments, social, ongoing, extracted cues, and plausibility. These seven dimensions are actually applied in the practice of managing digital content and

interactions, both by business owners as determinants of brand value direction, and by digital marketing admins as technical implementers who are adaptive to platform dynamics. Through an approach that focuses on emotional narratives, two-way communication, and insight-based evaluation, Millen Florist has succeeded in forming an empathetic brand identity and establishing emotional ties with customers. Consistent content, compiled based on demographic and performance data, and designed to touch customers' personal moments, is the foundation for forming loyalty and engagement. The strategic decisions taken are also flexible and contextual, reflecting actions driven by logical assessments (plausibility) in facing digital challenges.

In addition, the collaboration between the owner and digital marketing shows the importance of integration between strategic vision and operational implementation in building an effective sensemaking process. This process does not only take place in visual and text narratives, but also in social interactions that are continuous and responsive to changes in the digital environment. Instagram, in this case, becomes a relational and participatory media where customers not only receive messages, but also participate in shaping them. Thus, this study confirms that a digital communication strategy that combines emotional, data-driven, and interactive dimensions which is carried out within a sensemaking framework contributes significantly to building customer loyalty and strengthening brand presence in the digital era. Millen Florist Nusantara provides an example of a practice that can be used as a model by other MSMEs in managing meaningful, adaptive, and sustainable digital communication.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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