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The Effect of Visual Content and Instagram Reels Marketing on Consumers' Decisions to Choose Photography Services at Raja Foto Studio Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how visual content and Instagram Reels marketing relate to consumers' decisions to choose photography services at Raja Foto Studio Medan. Drawing on signaling theory, static feed photos and Reels videos are treated as two quality signals for a service whose outcome can only be judged after consumption. This quantitative causal associative study collected five-point Likert-scale questionnaire data from all 100 eligible consumers (census) and analyzed them with multiple linear regression. Visual content was positively associated with consumer decision scores ($t(97) = 2.705$, $p = 0.008$), as was Instagram Reels marketing ($t(97) = 2.566$, $p = 0.012$). The overall model was significant, $F(2, 97) = 11.196$, $p < 0.001$, with $R^2 = 0.188$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.171$. A descriptive allocation of R^2 (beta × zero-order r) assigned approximately 9.76 percentage points to visual content and 9.02 to Reels; these are not shares of bookings caused by each format, and their difference was not tested statistically. The findings apply to customers who had already booked, are consistent with a signaling theory interpretation, and do not test whether reach predicts booking conversion. Maintaining both formats is advised.

Keywords: *Consumer decision; Instagram Reels marketing; photography services; signaling theory; visual content*.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers increasingly evaluate a service on social media before contacting its provider. The Digital 2026 report recorded 180 million social media user identities in Indonesia in October 2025, or 62.9% of the population (Kemp, 2025). Such evaluation is harder for services than for goods, because perceived risk rises when attributes can only be judged during or after consumption (Mitra et al., 1999), which leads consumers to rely on observable cues to infer quality (Connelly et al., 2011). Photography services make this problem acute. Their output is visual, so social media content is both promotion and the most direct preview of the result, while the moments being photographed, such as graduations or weddings, usually cannot be repeated.

Raja Foto Studio Medan, which offers graduation, family, group, and bridal sessions, uses its Instagram account @rajafotomedan as its main storefront. A preliminary observation by the authors in July 2026 found about 14,000 followers and 1,637 posts in two formats. Feed photos typically reached 600 to 4,400 views, whereas Reels showing behind-the-scenes moments, before-and-after edits, and trending audio reached between 342 and about 12,000 views. Wider reach did not clearly lead to bookings, since one video with more than 4,000 views drew 17 comments, mostly about prices, and the administrator reported that many people who inquired after watching Reels did not book.

The practical question is therefore which format matters in consumers' decisions, although reach itself is not tested in this study.

Previous studies generally report positive links between social media content and purchase decisions or intentions, including Instagram visual content for photography services (Anggoro & Pranata, 2020), content quality as an antecedent of purchase intention via Instagram (Herle, 2025), and Reels for halal cosmetics (Aliva et al., 2026), Shopee users (Chandrawijaya & Angelia, 2022), and sponsored advertising (Imreh-Tóth et al., 2026). Studies in the IBEC Proceedings show similar patterns for TikTok content (Wiranata et al., 2025), skincare marketing content (Rambe & Ginting, 2024), and influencer marketing among Generation Z in Medan (Prasetio & Gultom, 2025).

This consensus breaks down once formats are separated. Rahman & Mutasowifin, (2025) found that Instagram feed and Stories affected purchase decisions whereas Reels did not, while Aliva et al., (2026) and Chandrawijaya & Angelia, (2022) reported positive Reels effects. This contradiction is the first gap. The second is theoretical. Content effects are usually explained by the capacity to attract attention rather than by credibility as evidence of quality, whereas signaling theory suggests that signals differing in how hard they are to fake may carry different weights in decisions. The third is methodological, since Reels has been measured within a broader content marketing construct or social media has been treated as a single variable (Vanessa & Rezeki, 2024), which blends the two formats into one score. The fourth is contextual. Evidence on Reels comes mostly from physical products, and the photography studies identified by the authors predate the launch of Reels in Indonesia in June 2021 (ANTARA, 2021). To the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has compared static visual content and Reels from one account in photography services.

The novelty of this study is threefold. First, static photos and Reels are treated as two quality signals that may convey different cues, so the comparison is grounded in theory rather than being a mere combination of variables. Second, the study measures the two formats separately, using items that explicitly name their object, and estimates their associations with the decision within one model; correlation and multicollinearity diagnostics show how much the predictors overlap but do not by themselves establish construct validity. Third, the test is conducted on photography services after Reels became available. The study aims to analyze the partial and simultaneous associations of visual content and Instagram Reels marketing with consumers' decisions to choose Raja Foto Studio Medan, and to describe how the explained variance is distributed between them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers' Service Choice Decisions

A purchase decision moves from need recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives to purchase and post-purchase behavior (Situmorang et al., 2025), and Kotler et al., (2022) note that consumers do not always pass through these stages in order. For services, search and evaluation weigh more heavily because quality can only be judged during or after consumption (Mitra et al., 1999). This study measures the decision up to the point of booking through four indicators: information search, evaluation of alternatives, choice certainty, and booking decision (Kotler et al., 2022). Post-purchase behavior is excluded because it reflects satisfaction with the service rather than the influence of content on the choice.

In a comparable service setting, Vanessa & Rezeki, (2024) studied all 78 customers of a bridal service using saturated sampling and found that social media and customer trust affected the decision to use the service (adjusted $R^2 = 0.672$). Because social media was measured as one construct, the role of each content format remained unknown.

Visual Content

Visual content is defined here as static photos on the studio's feed, such as session portfolios, concept examples, and package information. This restriction keeps the construct separate from Reels. Li & Xie, (2020) found that high-quality professional photos generated higher engagement on Twitter and Instagram. Content quality is associated with brand awareness and purchase intention (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020), and aesthetic quality with consumer engagement (Bazi et al., 2023). Following Anggoro & Pranata, (2020) and Bazi et al., (2023), the construct is measured through aesthetic appeal, clarity of the visual message, and relevance of service information.

Anggoro & Pranata, (2020) surveyed 100 followers of SweetEscape, a vacation photography provider, and found that visual content affected purchase decisions, but their study predates Reels. Rahman & Mutasowifin, (2025) later separated the Instagram features of Kopi Kenangan and found significant effects for Feed and Stories but not for Reels and Live.

Instagram Reels Marketing

Instagram Reels marketing refers to the use of short videos to introduce services, show work processes and results, and attract prospective consumers. Reels has been available in Indonesia since 23 June 2021 (ANTARA, 2021). Short videos combine motion, audio, and narrative, and their content characteristics affect purchasing behavior (Meng et al., 2024). Luo et al., (2025) identified usefulness and entertainment as drivers of purchase intention, and Kim & Ko, (2012) included entertainment and trendiness among social media marketing activities. The construct is therefore measured through entertainment and trendiness, adapted from Kim & Ko, (2012), and informational usefulness, adapted from Luo et al., (2025).

Visual Content and Consumer Decisions

An aesthetic, clear, and relevant portfolio is observable evidence of a studio's capability. Under signaling theory, such signals reduce uncertainty about quality that cannot yet be observed, and digital content marketing can foster engagement and trust (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Feed content has influenced purchase decisions even when Reels from the same account did not (Rahman & Mutasowifin, 2025).

H1: Visual content has a positive effect on consumers' decisions to choose photography services at Raja Foto Studio Medan.

Instagram Reels Marketing and Consumer Decisions

Reels that show the photo session process may provide additional cues about how the service is delivered, not only about its results. This study does not assume that such videos are more credible than static photos, since their credibility was not directly measured. Usefulness and entertainment in short videos drive purchase intention (Luo et al., 2025), short video platform factors relate to repurchase intention (Lin et al., 2022), and short video content has influenced purchase intention in Medan (Wiranata et al., 2025). Reels has also influenced purchase decisions (Aliva et al., 2026; Chandrawijaya & Angelia, 2022), and social media marketing has shaped purchase intention in a beauty service setting (Salhab et al., 2023). The hypothesis is nonetheless tested critically, given the contrary result reported by Rahman & Mutasowifin, (2025).

H2: Instagram Reels marketing has a positive effect on consumers' decisions to choose photography services at Raja Foto Studio Medan.

Simultaneous Effect of Visual Content and Instagram Reels Marketing

Prospective consumers may browse the feed and watch Reels from the same account before deciding, and signals from one source are more convincing when they are consistent (Connelly et al., 2011). The two formats are therefore expected, as a set, to be associated with the decision. The hypothesis concerns this joint association; an interaction between the formats is not tested.

H3: Visual content and Instagram Reels marketing simultaneously affect consumers' decisions to choose photography services at Raja Foto Studio Medan.

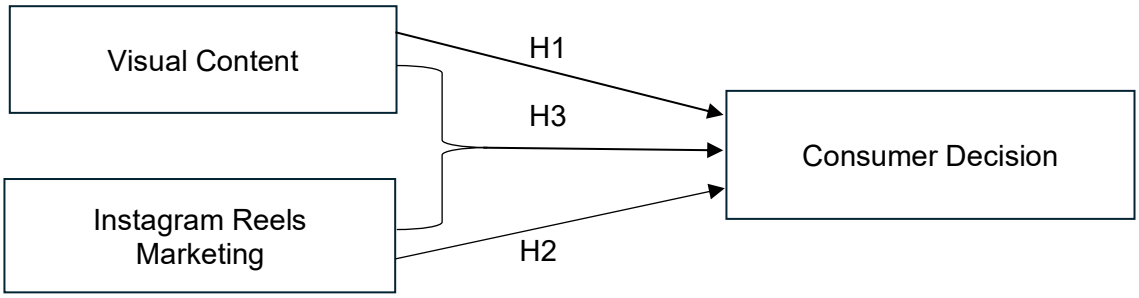


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study used a quantitative approach with a causal associative design. It was conducted at Raja Foto Studio Medan, Jalan Letda Sujono No. 131 A-B, Medan. Data were processed using SPSS.

Population and Sample

The population comprised all consumers who used the studio's services between January and December 2025, were recorded in its booking data with Instagram as their information source, were at least 17 years old, and had viewed both feed photos and Reels before booking. All 100 consumers meeting these criteria were included through saturated sampling (a census), so the results apply to this population and are not intended to be generalized to other studios.

Instrument and Data Collection

An online questionnaire was sent via WhatsApp, with the management's permission, to all members of the population and was collected from July to September 2026. Reminders were sent until every member had responded, and all items were mandatory, so there were no missing data. Items used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), were adapted from the sources in Table 1, and explicitly named their object, for example "photos on the @rajafotomedan feed" and "Reels videos on @rajafotomedan". Variable scores were computed by summing item scores, giving possible ranges of 6 to 30 for each predictor and 8 to 40 for the decision variable. Participation was voluntary, consent was requested at the start, and respondents' identities were not disclosed.

Table 1.
Operational Definitions and Indicators of Variables

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators	Number of Items	Source
Visual Content (X1)	Static photos on the @rajafotomedan feed showing portfolios, concepts, and service information	Aesthetic appeal; clarity of visual message; relevance of service information	6	Anggoro & Pranata, (2020); Bazi et al., (2023)
Instagram Reels Marketing (X2)	Short videos on the @rajafotomedan Reels feature showing the service process, results, and atmosphere	Entertainment; informational usefulness; trendiness	6	Kim & Ko, (2012); Luo et al., (2025)
Consumers' Service Choice Decision (Y)	The process consumers go through until they decide to use the studio's services	Information search; evaluation of alternatives; choice certainty; booking decision	8	(Kotler et al., 2022)

Source: Compiled by the authors, 2026

Instrument Pilot Test

The instrument was first piloted with 30 respondents outside the population, namely consumers aged at least 17 who had used the studio's services outside the population period and had viewed both formats before booking. They were not included in the main data collection.

Item validity was tested with Pearson item-total correlations (critical r = 0.361 for n = 30, two-tailed α = 0.05), and reliability with Cronbach's alpha (criterion above 0.60).

Data Analysis Technique

The analysis comprised descriptive statistics (N, mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum of each score), classical assumption tests, and multiple linear regression. Residual normality was tested with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (significance above 0.05). Multicollinearity was assessed with the conventional thresholds of tolerance above 0.10 and VIF below 10, together with the stricter guideline that VIF should ideally be about 3 or lower (Hair et al., 2019). Heteroscedasticity was examined through a scatterplot of standardized predicted values against studentized residuals. The regression model was:

$$Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + e$$

where Y is the service choice decision, X_1 is visual content, X_2 is Instagram Reels marketing, a is the constant, b_1 and b_2 are the coefficients, and e is the error term.

H1 and H2 were tested with t-tests (critical t = 1.984; df = 97; α = 0.05, two-tailed), requiring a coefficient in the hypothesized direction, and H3 with the F-test (critical F = 3.09; df = 2, 97). To describe how the explained variance is distributed between the formats, R^2 was allocated to each predictor as its standardized beta multiplied by its zero-order correlation with the decision. This allocation includes information shared by the predictors, so it is not each predictor's unique incremental R^2 and is used descriptively rather than as a test of which format is stronger. The unique share of each predictor is reported as its squared part (semipartial) correlation.

RESULTS

Validity and Reliability Tests

Validity and reliability tests were performed on the pilot data from 30 respondents who met the criteria described in the method section.

Table 2.
Validity and Reliability Test Results

Item	r-value	r-table	Validity	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability
X1.1	0.633	0.361	Valid	0.857	Reliable
X1.2	0.787	0.361	Valid		
X1.3	0.846	0.361	Valid		
X1.4	0.791	0.361	Valid		
X1.5	0.804	0.361	Valid		
X1.6	0.761	0.361	Valid		
X2.1	0.653	0.361	Valid	0.654	Reliable
X2.2	0.618	0.361	Valid		
X2.3	0.583	0.361	Valid		
X2.4	0.720	0.361	Valid		
X2.5	0.596	0.361	Valid		
X2.6	0.487	0.361	Valid		
Y.1	0.743	0.361	Valid	0.871	Reliable
Y.2	0.706	0.361	Valid		
Y.3	0.784	0.361	Valid		
Y.4	0.599	0.361	Valid		
Y.5	0.746	0.361	Valid		
Y.6	0.594	0.361	Valid		
Y.7	0.893	0.361	Valid		
Y.8	0.810	0.361	Valid		

Source: SPSS output, 2026

All 20 items exceeded the critical r of 0.361 (range 0.487 to 0.893). Cronbach's alpha was 0.857 for visual content and 0.871 for consumer decisions, while Instagram Reels marketing reached 0.654, which meets the 0.60 criterion but is the lowest of the three.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics of Variable Scores (N = 100)

Variable	Possible Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Visual Content (X1)	6 to 30	7	30	21.52	4.70
Instagram Reels Marketing (X2)	6 to 30	6	30	21.86	5.11
Consumers' Service Choice Decision (Y)	8 to 40	12	40	29.77	6.08

Source: Processed data, 2026

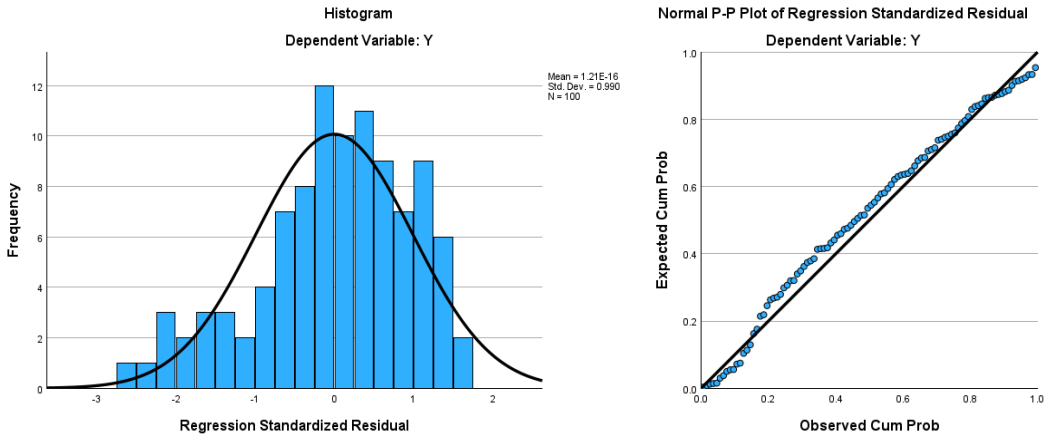
Mean scores were 21.52 for visual content, 21.86 for Instagram Reels marketing, and 29.77 for consumer decisions, corresponding to average item scores of about 3.59, 3.64, and 3.72. Observed scores covered most of each possible range (Table 3).

Classical Assumption Tests

Table 4.
Normality Test Results

Test Method	N	Test Statistic	Asymp. Sig.	Remarks
One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov	100	0.072	0.200*	No clear departure

Note: * Lower bound of the true significance, as reported by SPSS. Source: SPSS output, 2026

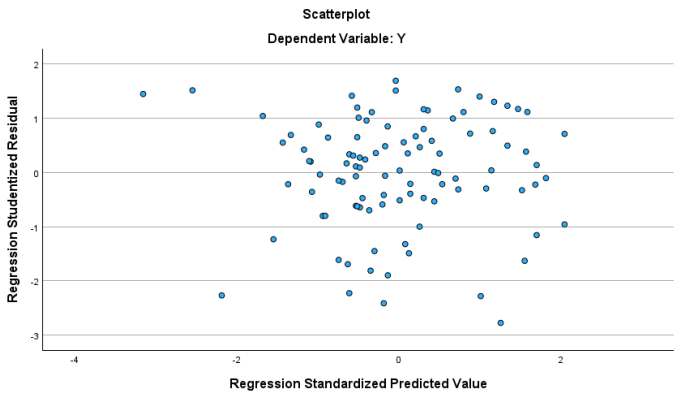


Source: SPSS output, 2026

Figure 2. Histogram and Normal P-P Plot of Residuals

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance of 0.200 is reported by SPSS as a lower bound of the true significance rather than an exact p-value. The test and residual plots (Figure 2) showed no clear departure from residual normality, although the histogram has a slightly longer left tail.

Tolerance = 0.856 and VIF = 1.168 (Table 6) indicated no problematic multicollinearity under both the conventional cut-off and the stricter guideline. The correlation of 0.379 between the two predictors indicates moderate overlap; it shows that the scores do not duplicate each other but does not by itself establish distinct constructs.



Source: SPSS output, 2026

Figure 3. Scatterplot for the Heteroscedasticity Test

The residuals in Figure 3 are scattered above and below zero without a clear pattern, so there is no indication of heteroscedasticity.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis and t-Test

Table 5.
Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis and t-Test

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	t-table	Sig.	Remarks
Constant	15.720	3.022	-	5.202	-	< 0.001	-
Visual Content (X1)	0.346	0.128	0.268	2.705	1.984	0.008	Significant
Instagram Reels Marketing (X2)	0.302	0.118	0.254	2.566	1.984	0.012	Significant

Source: SPSS output, 2026

Based on Table 5, the resulting regression equation is:

$$Y = 15.720 + 0.346X_1 + 0.302X_2 + e$$

Both coefficients are positive. Holding the other predictor constant, a one-point increase in visual content is associated with a 0.346-point increase in the decision score, and a one-point increase in Reels with a 0.302-point increase. H1 is accepted ($t = 2.705 > 1.984$; $p = 0.008$), as is H2 ($t = 2.566 > 1.984$; $p = 0.012$).

F-Test and Coefficient of Determination

Table 6.
Results of the F-Test, Coefficient of Determination, and Multicollinearity Test

Measure	Value	Criterion	Remarks	Sig.
F-value	11.196	> 3.09	Significant	< 0.001
R / R Square	0.433 / 0.188	-	-	-
Adjusted R Square	0.171	-	-	-
Tolerance (X1, X2)	0.856	> 0.10	No multicollinearity	-
VIF (X1, X2)	1.168	< 10	No multicollinearity	-

Source: SPSS output, 2026

The calculated $F(2, 97)$ of 11.196 exceeds 3.09 ($p < 0.001$), so the two predictors, taken together, are significantly associated with consumer decisions and H3 is accepted. With $R^2 = 0.188$, 81.2% of the observed variation remained unexplained by this model.

Variable Contributions

R^2 was allocated descriptively to each predictor as beta × zero-order r (Table 7). Because the predictors are correlated ($r = 0.379$), each allocation contains part of their shared information.

Table 7.
Allocation of Explained Variance (Beta × Zero-Order r)

Variable	Beta (Standardized)	Zero-Order r	Allocated Share of R^2
Visual Content (X1)	0.268	0.364	0.0976 (9.76%)

Variable	Beta (Standardized)	Zero-Order r	Allocated Share of R^2
Instagram Reels Marketing (X2)	0.254	0.355	0.0902 (9.02%)
Total			0.1877 (18.77%)

Source: Calculated by the authors from SPSS output, 2026

The allocation was approximately 9.76 percentage points for visual content and 9.02 for Reels, and the sum of 18.77 matches $R^2 = 0.188$ after rounding. These figures are not unique incremental R^2, causal effects, or shares of booking conversions. The squared part correlations were about 6.1% for visual content and 5.5% for Reels, leaving about 7% of the explained variance shared by the two formats. The 0.74 percentage-point difference was not tested statistically, so the results show neither that one format is stronger nor that the two are equally effective.

DISCUSSION

Effect of Visual Content on Consumer Decisions

Visual content was positively and significantly associated with consumers' decisions (B = 0.346; p = 0.008). This agrees with Anggoro & Pranata, (2020) for SweetEscape and with Rahman & Mutasowifin, (2025) for feed content. In signaling terms, the portfolio can be read as an observable signal of the very result being purchased. This remains an interpretation, because signal credibility and reach were not measured.

Effect of Instagram Reels Marketing on Consumer Decisions

Instagram Reels marketing was also positively and significantly associated with consumer decisions (B = 0.302; p = 0.012), supporting Aliva et al., (2026) and Chandrawijaya & Angelia, (2022) but differing from Rahman & Mutasowifin, (2025), who found no Reels effect for a coffee product. For a low-risk beverage, Reels may serve mainly as entertainment, whereas for photography services it can show the session process and editing results that buyers of a high-risk service look for. This explanation is interpretive, since the two product types were not compared directly.

The Reels scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.654, indicating limited internal consistency; examining its three dimensions separately would clarify the source of this limitation.

Simultaneous Effect and Relative Contribution

Jointly, the two predictors were significantly associated with consumer decisions ($F(2, 97) = 11.196$; $p < 0.001$). This shows that the predictor set is associated with the outcome, not that the formats complement each other, because no interaction was tested; the proposition that consistent signals from one source are more convincing (Connelly et al., 2011) remains an interpretation for future testing. The descriptive allocations of R^2 were numerically close, about 9.76 and 9.02 percentage points, but their difference was not tested and does not indicate equal effectiveness. Because reach was not modeled and non-bookers were not surveyed, the study cannot explain the gap between views and bookings noted in the preliminary observation.

With $R^2 = 0.188$, 81.2% of the observed variation remained unexplained by this model. Vanessa & Rezeki, (2024) reported an adjusted R^2 of 0.672 for a bridal service, compared with 0.171 here, but this comparison is descriptive only, as the settings, measures, and respondents differ; one visible difference is that their model included customer trust. Drawing on the preliminary observation, price, the administrator's response quality, recommendations, and trust in the studio are therefore candidates for

future testing rather than established explanations, and trust has been identified as a driver of purchasing through Instagram (Herzallah et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Among customers who had already booked, visual content (t = 2.705) and Instagram Reels marketing (t = 2.566) were positively and significantly associated with the decision to choose Raja Foto Studio Medan, both partially and jointly (F = 11.196). The two variables explained 18.8% of the variation, with numerically close descriptive allocations of R^2 of about 9.76 and 9.02 percentage points; these do not indicate equal effectiveness, and their difference was not tested statistically. The findings are consistent with a signaling theory interpretation, but signal credibility, the link between reach and booking conversion, and the source of the difference from Rahman & Mutasowifin, (2025) were not tested.

RECOMMENDATION

The studio is advised to maintain the quality and consistency of both its feed portfolio and its Reels, since both formats showed positive associations with consumer decisions and numerically close descriptive allocations of explained variance. This study does not, however, identify an optimal division of content effort between the formats or a strategy for converting inquiries into bookings. Clear package and pricing information in the profile or captions may also answer frequent price questions, although its effect on bookings was not tested.

This study has several limitations. Respondents had already booked, so the results cannot explain why other viewers did not book, and reach and booking conversion were not analyzed. The reliability of the Reels variable was relatively low (Cronbach's alpha = 0.654), and the separation of the two formats rests on item wording, inter-variable correlation, and multicollinearity diagnostics, which do not establish construct validity. Future research should include prospective consumers who have not booked, analyze the Reels dimensions separately, and add variables such as price perception and trust.

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