

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN ENHANCING BRAND AWARENESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE FOUNDER'S EXPERIENCE OF TILOVAVE.ID

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### ABSTRACT

The rise of social media has transformed marketing communication, particularly for MSMEs and local brands building brand awareness. It now serves not only as a promotional tool, but also as an interactive space for storytelling and creating emotional connections. This study aims to explore the meaning of social media communication strategies for increasing brand awareness, based on the subjective experience of Tilovave.id's founder. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, it examines the founder's experiences, values, and meaning-making around implemented strategies. Data were collected through an in-depth interview with the founder, digital observation of social media activity, and documentation of posts and audience interactions. Thematic analysis followed stages of data condensation, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that Tilovave.id's strategy is understood as building an authentic brand identity through visual consistency, experience-based storytelling, communicating quality and trust, and sustained two-way interaction. Authenticity and emotional engagement emerge as key to organic brand awareness where the audience not only recognizes the brand visually, but also develops trust and emotional bonds. The study contributes theoretically by enriching digital marketing communication research through a phenomenological lens, and practically by aiding MSMEs in designing more meaningful, authentic, and relationship-oriented social media strategies.

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The development of information and communication technology has changed the way organizations interact with the public, where social media has now become a strategic channel in modern marketing communication. The transition from conventional media to social media has created great opportunities for business brands to build brand awareness through interactive and participatory two-way dialogue (Okuchemiya & Majority, 2025). Social media communication strategy is no longer merely the dissemination of information, but has become an important instrument in creating audience engagement emotionally and cognitively, thus able to strengthen brand presence in consumers' minds (Sularno, 2025; Tsaqif et al., 2025).

Previous research shows that social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have an important role in increasing brand awareness through content strategies, two-way interaction, and integrated marketing communication approaches (Utomo et al. 2024; Arunprakash et al. 2021; Harefa et al. 2025; Talib & Sari, 2024). Previous research shows that social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have an important role in increasing brand awareness through content strategies, two-way interaction, and integrated marketing communication approaches (Pienrasmi & Nur, 2021; Yumna et al., 2023). In addition, studies on marketing communication strategies and public relations practices on Instagram show that the integration of advertising, interactive marketing, and meaningful content contributes to increasing brand awareness and sustainable audience engagement (Shaseria et al. 2025; Meliani et al. 2024). However, although these studies confirm the effectiveness of social media in increasing brand awareness, most are still descriptive and emphasize quantitative indicators such as engagement rates and reach, while the subjective experiences of founders in designing communication strategies and building emotional relationships with audiences are still rarely explored (Ramadhani et al., 2024). This gap indicates the need for qualitative research with a phenomenological approach to understand the meaning-making process behind social media communication strategies in building brand awareness.

This phenomenon is also seen in Tilovave.id, a local brand that utilizes social media as the main means to build relationships with audiences while increasing brand awareness. The social media communication strategy implemented by Tilovave.id is not only oriented towards product promotion, but also focuses on efforts to build emotional closeness with audiences through messages that are personal, relevant, and consistent with brand identity. Until now, there has been little research exploring the subjective experiences of founders in understanding this social media communication strategy and how these meanings influence the process of brand awareness formation. This gap indicates the need for research that can fill the void in literature with a more in-depth and explorative approach.

This research offers novelty by using a phenomenological approach to reveal the meaningful experiences of Tilovave.id's founders regarding the social media communication strategies they implement, thereby providing new conceptual contributions to digital marketing communication studies. The focus of this research is on the meaning-making process from the experiences of Tilovave.id's founders regarding social media communication strategies in building emotional closeness with audiences as an effort to increase brand awareness. In addition, this research aims to reveal and analyze in depth the meaning of communication strategies through social media implemented by Tilovave.id's founders, by tracing how each form of message, interaction, and digital communication approach used is able to build closeness with audiences, strengthen brand identity, and create positive perceptions among consumers, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of the role of social media communication strategies in local brand development in the digital era.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich digital marketing communication studies by adding the perspective of business practitioners' subjective experiences through a phenomenological approach, as well as expanding understanding of the concept of meaningful and authentic communication strategies in the context of Indonesian MSMEs. Practically, the results of this research are expected to become a reference for MSME practitioners in designing social media communication strategies that are more meaningful, authentic, and effective in increasing brand awareness, while simultaneously becoming a basis for policymakers and MSME supporting

institutions in designing digital communication training programs that emphasize values and emotional relationships with consumers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Brand Awareness

Kotler & Keller (2016) state that brand awareness is the ability of consumers to recognize or recall a brand when thinking about a particular product category, and is an important component in the formation of brand equity because it influences the likelihood that the brand will be considered in purchase decisions. This is in line with the conceptual framework which states that brand awareness is the ability of consumers to identify and recall brands in the context of relevant product categories (Anand, 2023). The level of brand awareness is closely related to the level of consumer familiarity with the brand (Porrie & Afriani, 2025) consumers who are already familiar tend to include that brand in their consideration set, so recognized brands have a greater chance of being chosen. Brand awareness also plays a role in reducing the risk perceived by consumers because they already have initial trust in the brand, and can shape product quality perceptions (Rubio et al., 2014). This familiarity can be strengthened through company communication strategies, where the more often consumers are exposed to a brand, the stronger the associations and brand image formed (Rachmawati & Akbar, 2025). Huang & Sarigöllü (2012) show that increased brand awareness is positively correlated with brand preference and higher purchasing behavior compared to brands that are less known to consumers.

### Digital Marketing Communication

Digital marketing utilizes digital media and the internet to deliver value to consumers through interactive channels such as social media, search engines, and digital content (Ismail, 2023; Maharani & Azzahra., 2023). This strategy is effective in increasing brand awareness, consumer engagement, and business growth (Batubara et al., 2025; Munawaroh et al., 2024). Unlike conventional marketing, digital marketing drives demand while creating added value for products or services (Stokes, 2018; Raharjo & Tety, 2019). In addition to promotion, digital marketing also increases consumer loyalty and cost efficiency through social media optimization, SEO, and consumer behavior analysis (Mustofa et al., 2024), making it a strategic element in building long-term relationships and company competitiveness in the digital era (L. E. Putri et al., 2025).

### Authentic Branding

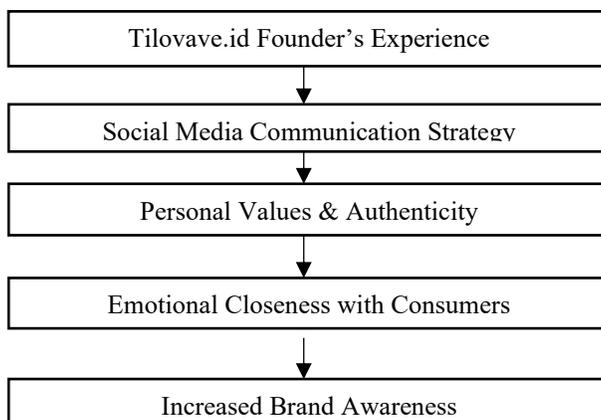
Authentic branding is an effort by brands or individuals to display honesty, consistency, and alignment between communicated values and actual practices. Beverland (2005) states that brand authenticity is formed from identity and values rooted in history, culture, and long-term commitment. In personal branding, authenticity distinguishes false images from genuine self-representation, which emerges from deep self-understanding related to values, personality, and life goals (Potgieter & Doubell, 2018). The main indicator of authenticity is the alignment between communication and actions, which builds trust and emotional attachment of audiences (brand love) (Osorio et al., 2023). This process is dynamic and continuous, through integrity, competence development, and meaningful relationships with the public, so that authentic branding functions not only as a communication strategy, but also as a reflection of individual identity and values.

### Phenomenology in Marketing

Moustakas (1994) states that phenomenology aims to understand the meaning of human subjective experience toward a particular phenomenon (Williams, 2021). In marketing, this approach is used to reveal the experiences of business practitioners in building and managing brands from their own perspective. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the Father of Phenomenology, developed this approach to provide a foundation for philosophy as a pure science, as a response to modern science which was considered far from everyday experience (Hasbiansyah, 2008). Phenomenology emphasizes understanding phenomena through subjects' direct experience, where meaning is formed through individuals' interactions with the reality they experience, including social experiences and inter-individual

communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). Thus, meaning in phenomenology is subjective and emerges from experiences that are consciously perceived and interpreted by individuals.

**Conceptual Framework**



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework emphasizes that the founders' experience in managing social media plays an important role in shaping personal and authentic communication strategies. Founders who are directly involved tend to convey brand narratives based on experience, values, and personality, so that their communication is not rigid or merely promotional. The founders' experience in managing social media influences personal and authentic communication strategies, so that brand messages are considered honest, relevant, and humane (Amanda, 2025). This authenticity encourages emotional closeness with consumers through consistent interaction and alignment of values, which in turn increases brand awareness cognitively and emotionally (Seo & Park, 2018; Wasik et al., 2025).

**METHODS**

**Research Approach**

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach with the aim of understanding the subjective meaning of Tilovave.id founder's experience in building brand awareness through social media. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore informants' personal experiences in depth and capture perceptions and values that influence digital communication strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research informant is the founder of Tilovave.id, who is directly responsible for content strategy and interaction on social media. The selection of informants was done purposively, because the informant's experience and role are relevant to the research focus in understanding communication practices and brand awareness building.

Data was collected through three main techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted in an informal atmosphere to explore the informant's experience, perceptions, and personal values. Interviews were conducted three times with a total duration of approximately four hours. Second, digital observation was conducted by monitoring upload activities, comments, and audience interactions on Tilovave.id's Instagram and TikTok accounts for three months. This observation aims to understand communication styles, forms of audience response, and engagement dynamics. Third, digital documentation includes screenshots of posts, private messages, and social media analytics data (insights and reach) which become supporting evidence for interview and observation results.

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously and interactively using the model (Miles et al., 2014) through three stages. The first stage is data condensation, which is sorting relevant information from interview results, observations, and documentation. The second stage is data presentation in the form of thematic narratives that describe the founder's experience. The final stage is drawing conclusions, which is interpreting the essential meaning of the

informant’s experience to find main themes related to communication strategies and brand awareness formation. Brand awareness is understood as the ability of consumers to recognize a brand in a particular product category in sufficient detail to make a purchase (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Data validity was tested through source triangulation, which is comparing interview results, digital observation findings, and social media upload documentation. If all three sources show consistency, the data is considered credible. In addition, research result interpretations were confirmed again to the informant through member checking to ensure meaning alignment.

## RESULTS

The research findings reveal five main themes of Tilovave.id's social media communication strategy: brand identity, visual consistency & storytelling, value delivery, founder authenticity, and emotional closeness with audiences.

**Table 1.** Brief Analysis of Tilovave.id Social Media Communication Strategy Research Findings

Main Theme	Finding Description	Phenomenological Meaning Analysis	Implications for Brand Awareness
Social media as brand identity	Founder interprets social media as the main space to build brand character and personality	Social media is perceived not merely as a promotional tool, but as self-representation and brand identity	Brand is more easily recognized and differentiated from competitors
Visual consistency & storytelling	Content displays uniform visuals and creative process stories	Consistency creates cognitive and emotional attachment in audience memory	Increases brand recall and recognition
Conveying values of quality, trust, and personalization	Content highlights details, professionalism, and attention to customer needs	Brand value is built through real experience, not promotional claims	Positive perceptions and trust in the brand emerge
Founder authenticity	Founder displays real processes, trial and error, and brand journey	Honesty and openness create authentic and humane perceptions	Brand is remembered emotionally and considered more credible
Interaction and emotional closeness	Two-way communication occurs through comments, DMs, and personal responses	Audience is positioned as dialogue partners, not merely consumers	Brand awareness grows organically through engagement

Table 1 shows that Tilovave.id’s social media communication strategy is built through the founder’s subjective meaning-making of the experience of managing the brand directly. Each emerging theme is interrelated and forms a unified authentic communication strategy, which not only increases audience engagement, but also strengthens brand awareness emotionally and sustainably.

## DISCUSSION

### Social Media Interpreted as a Space for Founder’s Personal Identity Actualization

The research findings show that social media functions as the main space for Tilovave.id to build brand identity and character. This platform enables the brand to reach audiences directly, showcase the creative process, and transparently display the product-making journey. One informant stated,

*“For me, social media is the main space to build Tilovave.id’s identity and character. There I can reach audiences directly, show creative processes, and create relationships that make the brand feel close and alive.”*

This statement confirms that digital media enables the direct delivery of values, aesthetics, and creative processes, thereby building emotional closeness with audiences. This is in line with the theory by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010). Social media enables Tilovave.id to convey values, aesthetics, and creative processes directly, thereby building

emotional closeness with audiences. The founder is directly involved in content creation, visual selection, and personal storytelling, making the brand feel more "alive" and humane. This communication strategy emerges from the founder's reflective awareness, making brand identity an extension of the self, where the boundary between personal branding and brand identity becomes fluid and mutually reinforcing.

In addition, social media functions as an effective storytelling channel, showcasing creative processes, material transformation, and authentic customer narratives, thereby strengthening brand identity and audience engagement (Fog et al., 2005). Two-way interaction through comments, questions, and content sharing further strengthens emotional closeness, increases loyalty and brand awareness, and reinforces long-term relationships with audiences (Buzeta et al., 2020; Brodie et al., 2013). These findings confirm that social media is not merely a promotional tool, but rather a strategic means to build brand identity and character, showcase creative processes, and create living relationships with audiences. The use of consistent visual content, authentic storytelling, and two-way interaction plays an important role in increasing brand awareness, building emotional closeness, and effectively conveying Tilovave.id's core values.

#### **Communication Strategy Interpreted as a Process of Getting Closer to the Audience**

The communication strategy implemented by Tilovave.id on social media emphasizes visual consistency, relevant storytelling, and understanding of the audience as the core of every content. Visual consistency includes the use of color palettes, layout, and uniform photography styles, so that every upload can be immediately recognized by the audience as part of brand identity. This strategy supports visual brand identity theory, which states that consistent visual elements increase brand recognition and make it easier for audiences to associate content with a particular brand (Hutter et al., 2013). One informant explained their experience:

*"My experience managing communication strategy focuses on visual consistency, relevant storytelling, and understanding what is being discussed by the audience. I learned that the most interesting content is content that has a story, for example the upcycle process, before/after, or the story behind the product. In addition, I also try to understand engagement patterns and adjust language style to feel more natural and relatable to young people."*

In addition to visual aspects, storytelling becomes the key to attracting audience attention. Tilovave.id presents narratives of the creative process, material transformation, and customer stories, in accordance with Brand Storytelling theory which emphasizes that authentic stories increase engagement and positive brand associations (Fog et al., 2005). Strategies such as storytelling, natural language, and content aligned with current issues are forms of digital empathy, because audiences want to feel understood, not just offered products.

Audience understanding becomes the main factor. Tilovave.id adjusts language style, content type, and upload timing based on the behavior and preferences of young audiences. This strategy supports the findings of Muharam et al. (2024) that personal content and relevant interaction increase engagement and strengthen emotional relationships. Educational content, such as clothing care tips or the upcycling process, provides added value beyond promotion, in line with content marketing principles that increase audience attention while strengthening the brand's professional and trustworthy image (Tan et al., 2024). Overall, visual consistency, authentic storytelling, audience understanding, and educational content form Tilovave.id's effective communication strategy. This strategy not only increases engagement, but also builds brand awareness organically, emotional closeness, and positive perceptions of the brand's quality and professionalism.

#### **Authenticity Experienced as the Foundation of Trust and Brand Differentiation**

Authenticity emerges as the most dominant core meaning in the experience of Tilovave.id's founder. The founder interprets authenticity as the courage to display real processes, including challenges, mistakes, and the trial and error journey in building the brand. This experience shows that openness is not considered a risk, but rather as a differentiating strength. The values conveyed through Tilovave.id's social media content reflect the brand's focus on quality, trust, and personalization. One informant stated:

*“The values I always emphasize through every post are Quality, Trust, and Personalization. Because Tilovave.id accepts orders, I want our content to show that each work is made with attention to detail, according to the needs and character of the customer. In addition, I also try to display professionalism as well as warmth, so that potential customers feel confident that Tilovave.id is a place they can trust to realize their dream clothing.”*

Every content created by Tilovave.id not only functions as product promotion, but also conveys the brand's core values that build audience trust. The founder states that when content displays authentic aspects, such as the production process, production failures, or emotional dynamics, audiences respond with empathy and increased levels of trust. This authenticity emerges as a consequence of consistency between personal values and communication practices, not merely a manufactured strategy, and is phenomenologically understood as the existential condition of an honest and trustworthy brand (Pulizzi, 2012). In addition, relevant and value-added content, such as practical tips, quality material guides, creative processes, or sustainability practices, has been proven to increase user engagement through comments, likes, and sharing, while strengthening perceptions of professionalism and audience trust (Putri & Sukardi, 2025; Pratama & Febriati, 2025).

Strategies that emphasize content quality and message relevance according to audience character and needs have also been proven to increase brand trust and consumer loyalty (Rupianti, 2025). By displaying the creative process, attention to detail, and balance between professionalism and warmth, Tilovave.id successfully creates emotional closeness with audiences, which becomes a key factor in building brand awareness and positive brand perception. These findings confirm that brand awareness and audience engagement are not built only through message repetition, but through audiences' emotional experiences of authentic, relevant, and value-added content that aligns with audience character.

### **Emotional Closeness Experienced as a Bridge to Brand Awareness**

Authenticity becomes the main foundation in building emotional closeness between Tilovave.id and its audience. The founder of Tilovave.id interprets brand awareness as the result of emotional closeness that is built gradually with the audience. In the founder's experience, brand awareness does not appear instantly, but rather through repeated interactions that create a sense of familiarity, comfort, and trust. One informant stated:

*“Authenticity is the main foundation. Audiences nowadays are more interested in brands that are honest, authentic, and have real stories. When I show the production process, trial and error stories, or the brand's journey, the audience feels closer and involved. This emotional closeness helps build brand awareness organically; people will remember, talk about, and even recommend the brand when they feel personally connected.”*

The research findings show that honest and open communication that displays real processes is able to build strong emotional closeness with audiences. This closeness is evident when audiences actively ask questions, share stories, and recommend the brand. This confirms that brand awareness is not only cognitive, but also relational, developing when audiences connect with the brand's values, stories, and personality. These findings are in line with brand authenticity theory which states that perceptions of brand authenticity influence consumer engagement, trust, and loyalty (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

In addition, the practice of displaying creative processes, successes, and failures, as well as personal interaction on social media, reflects authenticity and increases emotional brand engagement. Audiences are not only passive recipients of content, but also interact actively through comments, questions, and sharing experiences, which encourages brand recall, recommendations, and loyalty (Brodie et al. 2013); Gefen & Straub, 2004). Thus, authenticity becomes an important strategy in building meaningful emotional bonds with audiences, which directly impacts consumer perception, engagement, and loyalty, showing that branding success on social media depends on the brand's ability to display its authentic side, not merely aesthetics or content frequency.

### **Essence of Experience**

Increasing brand awareness becomes one of the main objectives of Tilovave.id's social media strategy. One informant explained a key experience that demonstrates the effectiveness of their social media strategy:

“One of the most memorable moments was when I uploaded the process of making an order, from sketch, material selection, to fitting. That content received a very positive response; many were interested, started asking about prices, production time, and even directly placed orders. From there I felt that process transparency and behind-the-scenes content made the audience trust more and understand the quality of Tilovave.id’s work. That moment became proof that a strategy based on process authenticity really helps increase brand awareness and attract new customers organically.”

Authentic and informative content directly contributes to increasing brand awareness, in line with theory that emphasizes that brand recognition is strengthened through consistent, relevant, and emotional interaction (Brodie et al., 2013). The "behind-the-scenes" strategy that showcases the production process and personalization value increases audience engagement, because emotionally connected consumers tend to remember, talk about, and recommend the brand.

The experience of Tilovave.id's founder shows that social media is understood as a space for authentic relationships between the self, brand, and audience. Communication strategy is implemented as a process to display personal values, build trust, and create emotional closeness, so that brand awareness emerges as a consequence of meaningful, authentic, and human-oriented communication (Pulizzi, 2012). The combination of authenticity, storytelling, educational content, and personal interaction forms a strong foundation for increasing brand awareness, because audiences are actively engaged, understand product quality, and build trust in the brand. These findings confirm that brand awareness success on social media depends on the brand's ability to convey its authentic side, real values, and build emotional engagement with audiences.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that Tilovave.id's social media communication strategy is understood as a relational process rooted in the founder's identity, authentic values, and efforts to build emotional closeness with audiences. Brand awareness emerges not from promotional intensity alone, but through meaningful, consistent, and humane communication, as well as authentic interaction and narratives that strengthen emotional relationships between the founder, brand, and audiences. These findings expand the concept of brand awareness from a phenomenological perspective as a relational and emotional phenomenon, while strengthening authentic branding theory by positioning authenticity as the existential condition of the brand.

The research limitation lies in the focus on one informant, Tilovave.id's founder, so that audience perspectives have not been explored and findings cannot yet be generalized. Further research is recommended to combine audience experiences to more comprehensively understand the relationship between communication strategy, authenticity, and brand awareness formation. Based on the findings, Tilovave.id is recommended to maintain content consistency, optimize storytelling that showcases creative processes and brand values, expand digital collaboration with aligned parties, utilize social media data analysis, and increase two-way interaction to strengthen engagement and build audience trust.

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