

Humanized Digital Marketing Strategy through TikTok Live Interaction: A Case Study of 6JayaMotor Malang Automotive SME

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the application of Humanized Digital Marketing (HDM) through TikTok Live interactions at 6JayaMotor Malang SME. Using a single case study qualitative approach, data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The results show that HDM is realized through four main dimensions: empathy and authenticity, brand anthropomorphism, digital trust, and consumer engagement. Honest, responsive, and personalized communication strategies build audience trust and loyalty. This study confirms that the success of SME digital marketing depends not only on technology but also on the ability to create authentic human connections in the digital space.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the way brands interact with consumers, making social media an essential strategic element in the modern marketing landscape (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). This shift has led to the emergence of a new approach, namely Humanized Digital Marketing (HDM), a strategy that emphasizes humanity, authenticity, and empathy in the digital space. HDM aims to create emotional connections that go beyond mere transactions, by connecting technology and personal touch to build long-term loyalty and trust. In this context, Lourenço and Ferreira (2024) emphasize that strategies that highlight human values, particularly through brand anthropomorphism, are able to strengthen consumer identification and engagement more deeply than transactional promotional approaches. The presence of this strategy is a response to the challenges of low public trust and fierce competition in gaining consumer attention in the virtual world.

For Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), adapting to digitalization is not just an option, but an important factor in maintaining business sustainability and competitiveness. In Indonesia, MSMEs are the backbone of the economy, so their ability to utilize digital channels, as emphasized by Wardani et al. (2021), to increase visibility and market reach is a strategic necessity. In this context, the TikTok app has emerged as one of the most influential platforms in Indonesia, ranking at the top with more than 157 million active users (Statista, 2024). TikTok's short and interactive video format, particularly its Live Streaming feature, facilitates real-time communication that uniquely showcases the authentic side of business owners, which is a crucial prerequisite in building consumer trust (Simanullang & Wulandari, 2022).

In certain sectors such as automotive, the use of digital platforms shows its own dynamics. The use of TikTok in the context of automotive MSMEs, particularly in the sale of used motorcycles, presents an interesting case study. The used motorcycle industry is traditionally characterized by a high level of purchase risk, which inherently requires a very strong level of consumer trust. The case of the 6JayaMotor Malang SME demonstrates effective practices in applying empathy-based interactions to build consumer trust. A study by Pratiwi and Rohman (2023) emphasizes that effective digital marketing strategies are not only sales-oriented but also build trust through two-way interactions with consumers. This concept aligns with the humanized marketing approach, where the human aspect is at the core of digital communication. This approach demonstrates the tangible application of humanized digital marketing in the micro-sector, where technology is used as a medium to strengthen social and emotional bonds between businesses and consumers.

Based on the above description, this study attempts to examine humanized digital marketing strategies through Live TikTok interactions at 6JayaMotor Malang MSMEs. The difference between this study and other similar studies is its focus on the Humanized Digital Marketing approach in Live TikTok interactions, which has not been widely researched. This study is oriented toward understanding how humanization dimensions such as empathy, authenticity, and emotional closeness play a role in building consumer trust and

engagement in the context of social media-based digital marketing. Theoretically, this research contributes to expanding the understanding of humanization in digital marketing strategies. Practically, the results of this research are expected to become a model for digital communication strategies that can be replicated by other SMEs in building long-term relationships with their consumers.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Digital transformation has shifted the marketing paradigm from a transactional approach to a strategy that places relationships and engagement at the center of marketing activities (Parebong, 2024). Social media now functions not only as a channel for distributing messages, but also as a space for social interaction that allows brands to show their human side and build emotional connections with consumers (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). In this context, the concept of humanized digital marketing (HDM) emerged, an approach that emphasizes empathy, authenticity, and emotional closeness as the core of digital communication. This approach is increasingly relevant given the phenomena of information overload and digital fatigue, which make consumers more selective about marketing messages.

Humanized Digital Marketing (HDM)

Humanized Digital Marketing (HDM) places humanity at the core of digital communication strategies: rather than simply conveying product features, it showcases values, attitudes, and emotional responses that enable consumers to feel a connection with the brand. In practical studies in the context of MSMEs, this approach requires business actors to understand the psychological needs of consumers in the online space and respond to them empathetically (Nurhidayat et al., 2022). Research in the context of MSMEs in Indonesia confirms that digitalization should be utilized not only for visibility, but also to build social closeness and trust (Wardani et al., 2021).

Recent literature highlights two important points that reinforce the basis of HDM. First, comparative studies between the influence of human actors and virtual actors find that although virtual influencers are effective in some contexts, consumers tend to show higher identification with human actors and recommendations that feel more personal—a finding that supports the importance of the human element in brand communication. This finding is relevant when brands choose strategies that emphasize the human touch to increase credibility and engagement (Belanche, D., et al., 2024). Second, literature examining the role of empathy and authenticity in marketing confirms that messages perceived as sincere and empathetic are more effective in building long-term relationships than transactional messages. In HDM practice, elements such as transparency, responsiveness, and personal stories are the primary means of creating a humanized brand experience (Lourenço & Ferreira, 2024).

Brand Anthropomorphism dan Brand Identification

One of the key mechanisms of HDM is brand anthropomorphism, the attribution of human attributes or behaviors to brands through language, visuals,

or communicative actions. Anthropomorphism makes brands more emotionally identifiable to consumers, thereby increasing brand identification. On a psychological level, when consumers view brands as "figures" that have values and intentions, they are more likely to associate themselves (self-brand congruity) with those brands, which in turn strengthens loyalty and engagement (Lourenço & Ferreira, 2024).

Recent empirical studies in various contexts show the positive effects of anthropomorphism on consumer affective variables, including trust and brand identification. Specifically, research on brands that emphasize warmth and empathy tends to increase consumers' perceptions of closeness and brand advocacy intentions, findings that are relevant for MSMEs that use the owner or staff persona as the face of the brand in digital content (Sehgal, N., et al., 2023). In the local SME context, simple practices such as using personal language, honestly displaying store activities, and differentiating brand personalities (e.g., the "face" of the owner) have been proven to increase perceptions of closeness and loyalty (Pratiwi & Rohman, 2023). Thus, anthropomorphism is not only a communicative strategy but also a psychological mechanism that bridges HDM and brand identity formation.

Digital Consumer Trust

Digital trust is a central variable that determines whether online interactions will lead to long-term relationships or merely momentary transactions. Relationship Marketing theory places trust as the foundation for commitment and sustainable relationships; the translation of this theory into the digital realm shows that trust is gained through consistency, transparency, and openness in communication (Wardani et al., 2021).

Live streaming platforms show that authentic and responsive interactions increase the perception of business integrity and reduce perceived risk, especially in the purchase of high-value or risky products such as used motorcycles. Studies on live streaming commerce and the phenomenon of parasocial relationships on platforms such as TikTok state that real-time interactions can transfer a sense of trust because viewers get a social presence experience that mimics face-to-face interactions (Maulidina, Z., 2023). In MSME practices, quick responses to questions, openness in displaying product conditions, and consistency in communication during live sessions are indicators that greatly determine the level of consumer trust (Pratiwi & Rohman, 2023). Therefore, digital consumer trust is not only an outcome of HDM strategies but also an important mediator between brand identification and consumer engagement.

TikTok Live Interaction & Engagement

TikTok, as a platform, offers unique features such as short viral videos and live streaming, enabling brands to engage in real-time two-way communication. In Indonesia, with its massive user penetration (Statista, 2024), TikTok has become a strategic arena for SMEs to experiment with humanized content and direct interaction. Empirical research on TikTok Live and live commerce shows that interaction characteristics (interactivity, spontaneity, authenticity) and host/seller credibility greatly determine engagement levels and purchase intent.

Live interactions create parasocial/trans-parasocial relationships between owners/hosts and audiences, which strengthen feelings of closeness and trust – important prerequisites in high-risk online transactions (Laurensia, A., 2024).

In the automotive sector, live sessions featuring open inspections of engine conditions, honest discussions about product shortcomings, and empathetic interactions have been shown to increase audience participation (comments, questions, reactions) and strengthen affective brand engagement (Simanullang & Wulandari, 2022). Thus, TikTok Live functions not merely as a promotional channel, but as a relational space that facilitates the transformation of HDM into tangible trust and engagement.

Based on the latest local and international literature, it can be concluded that humanized digital marketing is a highly relevant and applicable approach for MSMEs that want to build long-term relationships with consumers through live platforms such as TikTok (Fasluki et al., 2023) . This study, which examines HDM practices at the Malang-based SME 6JayaMotor, is expected to provide empirical contributions that enrich the understanding of brand anthropomorphism mechanisms, trust formation, and engagement dynamics in the context of live streaming commerce.

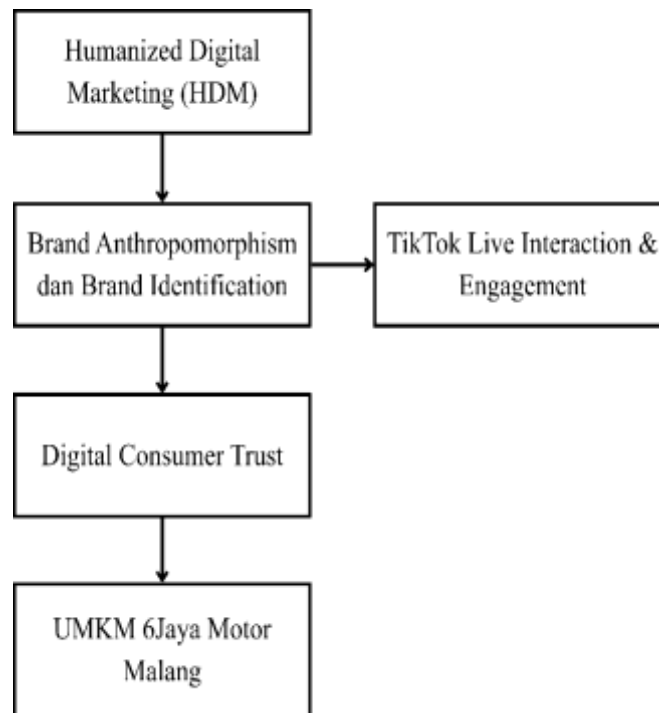


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a single case study design that focuses on the practice of Humanized Digital Marketing (HDM) through Live TikTok interactions at 6JayaMotor Malang MSME. The case study design was chosen because the HDM phenomenon is contextual, dynamic, and inseparable from the social experiences of business actors and consumers (Yin, 2018). This approach allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of how empathy,

authenticity, and relational communication are applied in digital marketing strategies. This study aims to:

1. Describe the application of humanized marketing principles in SME digital communication.
2. Analyze how TikTok Live interactions build consumer trust and engagement.
3. Interpreting the social meaning behind relationship-based communication digital marketing practices.

Data Sources

The research data consists of primary and secondary data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation.

Table 1. Research Data Sources

Jenis Data	Sumber Data	Bentuk Data	Tujuan Penggunaan
Primary	Owners/managers of 6JayaMotor SMEs and active TikTok Live customers	Interview transcripts, audio recordings, and narrative responses	Exploring communication strategies, empathy values, and digital trust experiences
Primary	Direct observation of TikTok Live sessions	Observation notes, screenshots, interaction patterns	Documenting humanistic communication forms and real-time engagement
Secondary	Digital archives (TikTok videos, customer comments, testimonials, promotional posts)	Documentation data	Triangulation and confirmation of interview and observation results

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which is the selection of informants who are considered to have the best understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The sample consisted of:

1. Business owners (key informants): because they play a direct role in the implementation of TikTok Live and digital marketing strategy decision-making.

2. Active consumers (supporting informants): those who frequently participate in TikTok Live sessions and have direct experience with humanized interactions from business actors.

This study adheres to the principles of social research ethics, including:

1. Voluntary consent (informed consent),
2. Confidentiality of informant identities, and
3. Transparency of research objectives.

Thematic Analysis

The data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which consists of three main stages:

1. Data Reduction
Selecting and grouping data based on the main themes of humanized digital marketing, brand anthropomorphism, consumer digital trust, and audience engagement. Each interview and observation result was coded into meaning units according to the indicators that emerged.
2. Data Display
Organizing the reduction results in the form of matrices and maps of relationships between concepts according to the conceptual model (HDM → Anthropomorphism → Trust → Engagement). This stage makes it easier for researchers to trace patterns of relationships between interrelated themes.
3. Conclusion Drawing & Verification
Interpret the meaning of each finding theme, then verify the results through source triangulation (owner–consumer–digital content) and member checking to ensure the credibility of the interpretation.

Data validity was tested using four criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely:

1. Credibility: through data triangulation and informant confirmation;
2. Dependability: maintaining consistency in the analysis process and audit trail records;
3. Confirmability: separating raw data from subjective interpretations;
4. Transferability: providing detailed contextual descriptions so that the results can be applied to similar MSME contexts.

RESULTS

This study used a qualitative thematic analysis approach following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018). Each stage of the analysis was conducted to explore how the principles of Humanized Digital Marketing (HDM) were realized through TikTok Live interactions at the 6JayaMotor Malang SME.

Table 2. Thematic Findings of Humanized Digital Marketing at 6JayaMotor Malang

Main Theme	Key Indicators	Description of Findings
Empathy & Authenticity	Honest communication, storytelling, customer-centric messaging	Business owners show empathy through transparent product explanations and personal experience narratives.
Brand Anthropomorphism	Personal branding, emotional tone, humor	Business owners become the "human face" of the brand, creating emotional closeness and trust through authentic interactions.
Consumer Digital Trust	Transparency, consistency, quick response	Trust arises from openness of information and consistency in answering questions during TikTok Live.
Consumer Engagement	Two-way communication, spontaneous reactions, social warmth	Live sessions spark active interaction and foster a sense of closeness between viewers and businesses.

All patterns and thematic codes were identified through a process of repeated reading and comparison of data from interviews, field observations, and TikTok content documentation. The analysis was carried out in three main steps:

1. Data Reduction: Identifying and coding empirical data related to empathy, humanistic interaction, and digital trust.
2. Data Presentation: Grouping patterns into conceptual themes (HDM → Anthropomorphism → Trust → Engagement).
3. Conclusion Drawing: Synthesizing the meaning of the relationships between themes and verifying them through source triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation).

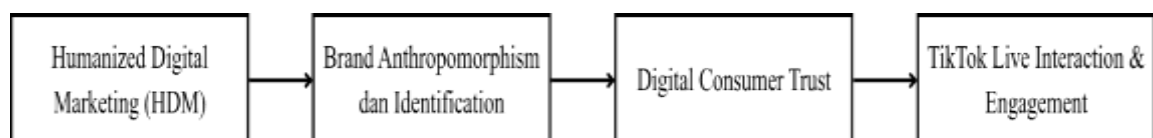


Figure 2. Conceptual Flow of Research Findings

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that Humanized Digital Marketing (HDM) changes the form of digital communication from transactional to relational and meaningful. The practices of empathy and authenticity implemented by the owner of 6JayaMotor strengthen the emotional connection between the brand and consumers. This aligns with the findings of Lourenço and Ferreira (2024), who state that brands that display human values are more effective in building brand identification and trust. In this context, brand anthropomorphism emerges through the presence of the owner as the main figure in digital interactions. He is not just a seller, but a human representation of the brand itself. This finding confirms the study by Pratiwi and Rohman (2023) that personal communication that displays the character of the business owner can foster customer closeness and loyalty.

Furthermore, consumer digital trust is built through openness and responsiveness. Owners always answer questions directly and honestly during TikTok Live sessions, demonstrating transparency, which is the basis of trust (Wardani et al., 2021; Simanullang & Wulandari, 2022). Quick responses to comments and a willingness to show the actual condition of the product increase the audience's perception of credibility and sense of security. In addition, consumer engagement is strengthened through spontaneous two-way communication (Aji et al., 2022). TikTok Live sessions create a familiar and participatory atmosphere, where consumers feel part of the brand community. These findings support the conceptual model that HDM encourages brand anthropomorphism, which then builds digital trust and generates emotional engagement among the audience.

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this study expand the concept of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) into the context of digital humanization, where technology does not replace humans, but rather becomes a medium that strengthens social and empathetic relationships between brands and their consumers. Practically, this study shows that for MSMEs, the Humanized Digital Marketing strategy through TikTok Live can be an efficient, authentic, and low-cost approach to building digital reputation and long-term consumer loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the application of Humanized Digital Marketing (HDM) at 6JayaMotor Malang MSME through TikTok Live interactions has proven to be capable of changing digital communication patterns from transactional to relational and meaningful. The values of empathy, honesty, and authenticity demonstrated by the business owner in each live session are key factors in building digital trust and consumer engagement.

The results of the study confirm that brand anthropomorphism plays a significant role in this process. The presence of the owner as the main figure makes the brand appear more human, so that consumers can more easily identify the values, character, and personality of the business. Transparency in answering questions, showing the condition of the product directly, and responsiveness to

comments strengthen consumer credibility and sense of security, which are the foundations for the formation of digital trust. Additionally, spontaneous two-way communication during TikTok Live creates a familiar and participatory atmosphere, thereby increasing consumer engagement and fostering emotional closeness with the brand.

These findings not only confirm previous theoretical concepts regarding brand anthropomorphism, relationship marketing, and the role of authenticity in building trust, but also expand our understanding of how digital humanization can be effectively applied in the context of MSMEs. Practically, this research shows that HDM through TikTok Live can be an efficient and low-cost digital strategy for building reputation, increasing loyalty, and maintaining long-term relationships between SMEs and their consumers.

Recommendations

1. For SMEs, it is recommended to highlight human values such as empathy, honesty, and social closeness in every digital content, especially in interactive sessions like TikTok Live or Instagram Live.
2. For digital marketing practitioners, humanization-based strategies need to be prioritized to build long-term reputation, not just short-term sales growth.

FURTHER STUDY

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, this study only focuses on a single case, namely the 6JayaMotor Malang SME, so the results cannot be generalized to all SME sectors. Second, this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, so data interpretation is highly influenced by the social context and the researcher's subjectivity.

For future research, it is recommended that:

1. Conducting comparative studies between several MSMEs in different sectors to observe variations in HDM implementation across various industrial contexts.
2. Combining quantitative approaches, such as statistically measuring the impact of HDM on consumer trust and loyalty levels.
3. Investigating the role of digital platform algorithms (such as TikTok For You Page) in the success of humanized marketing strategies, as technological aspects also influence audience exposure and interaction.

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