

The Impact of Digital Transformation through Visual Content on Business Activities in Palopo City

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Abstract

The accelerating digital transformation has driven significant changes in how businesses market their products and engage with consumers. In Palopo City, the use of visual content, such as product photos, short videos, promotional designs, and visual storytelling, has become an increasingly prominent strategy. However, there is limited research specifically addressing how visual content impacts the business activities of various business actors in the region during the digital transformation process. This study aims to analyze the role of visual content in increasing visibility, sales, and customer relationships as part of the dynamics of digital transformation among businesses in Palopo City. Using a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews and field observations, this study explores the experiences and perceptions of business actors from various sectors. The research findings indicate that visual content serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a means of building brand identity, increasing credibility, and expanding market reach through digital platforms. Furthermore, businesses that are able to adapt visual content consistently and creatively tend to experience a more significant increase in business activity. This study provides a theoretical contribution related to understanding the role of visual content in digital transformation, while also offering practical implications for businesses, supporting institutions, and local governments to optimize digital strategies to drive local economic growth.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has been one of the most significant phenomena in global economic development over the past decade. This change encompasses the integration of digital technology into all aspects of business, from marketing and production to consumer communications and operational management. In the context of modern economic development, digitalization is no longer seen as an option but rather a fundamental necessity for businesses to compete in an increasingly competitive marketplace. (Singgih Purnomo, Nurmalitasari, 2024)

In Indonesia, digital transformation has accelerated, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic forced businesses to adapt to new consumption patterns based on online platforms. Recent research shows that digitalization helps businesses increase efficiency, expand market reach, and accelerate business growth through the use of digital technology. (Imam Fathoni and Nurul Asfiah., 2024) This makes digital transformation one of the main factors in business success in the era of industry 4.0.

One of the key elements of digital transformation is the use of visual content, which has now become a key strategy in digital marketing. Visual content such as product photos, short videos, illustrations, and digital designs is recognized as having greater appeal than text-based

content because it can convey messages quickly, powerfully, and emotionally.(Alfredo, 2024)As a result, visual content plays a major role in building consumer perception, increasing trust, and strengthening brand identity.

The visual content phenomenon is gaining momentum with the popularity of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and marketplaces, which require businesses to be more creative and professional in promoting their products. Recent studies confirm that visual-based digital strategies have been proven to increase consumer engagement, brand awareness, and purchasing decisions.(Sadiqi, 2024)

In many Indonesian cities, including Palopo, digital transformation is a crucial momentum for businesses to adapt to changing consumer behavior. As the center of economic growth in the Tana Luwu region, Palopo City boasts a diverse range of economic activities, from MSMEs and retail to culinary and creative services. This makes digitalization a strategic opportunity for business development across various sectors.

Although Palopo is not a metropolitan city, its internet penetration and social media usage are relatively high. Businesses in the city are beginning to utilize digital platforms to increase visibility, reach new customers, and strengthen competitiveness. However, the level of visual content utilization varies widely and is uneven across businesses, making it interesting to examine in-depth.

Digital transformation in the context of Palopo City encompasses not only the use of digital technology but also how businesses respond to change through visual creativity. While some businesses are capable of producing professional visual content that enhances product aesthetics, others struggle with content production, lack a grasp of visual storytelling techniques, or lack digital literacy.

This challenge aligns with research findings that many MSMEs in the regions still face digital barriers in the form of limited skills, minimal resources, and limited access to training.(Musytari, 2025)Thus, although the opportunities for digitalization are large, the adaptability of business actors is not always equal, thus affecting the effectiveness of using visual content.

In the context of modern marketing, visual content serves not only to introduce products but also as a strategic tool for building long-term relationships with consumers. Compelling visuals can enhance business credibility, create memorable visual experiences, and strengthen customer loyalty. This is particularly relevant for businesses in Palopo competing in an increasingly creative and crowded local market.

Furthermore, visual content plays a role in building a consistent brand identity. In the digital age, consumers tend to trust businesses that present professional visuals and a strong visual narrative. The quality of visual content is an indicator of credibility, business seriousness, and professionalism.(Riad Shams, Sheshadri Chatterjee, 2024)Therefore, research on the impact of digital transformation through visual content is becoming increasingly important.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on digital transformation, there are still few studies that specifically focus on the impact of visual content in a regional context like Palopo. Previous research has focused more on aspects of technology adoption, e-commerce, and general marketing strategies, while the role of visual content as part of digital transformation has not been explored in depth.

This research gap opens up space for further exploration into how businesses across various sectors utilize visual content to grow their businesses. By understanding the actual

experiences of these businesses, this research can provide a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of visual content in increasing business activity in Palopo.

Therefore, this study uses a qualitative approach to explore business actors' perspectives on the use of visual content as part of digital transformation. Through in-depth interviews and field observations, this research aims to understand how visual content is used, the challenges faced, and its impact on real-world business activities.

The research findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of literature on business digitalization and visual content, particularly in the context of developing regions. Furthermore, this research is also expected to provide practical contributions in the form of recommendations for effective visual content strategies for businesses in Palopo City. This research not only explains the phenomenon of visual content use in digital transformation but also provides an overview of how businesses in Palopo can optimize digital potential to strengthen their competitiveness. By understanding local dynamics, this research provides an important basis for developing more targeted policies and mentoring programs.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach to deeply understand the experiences, perceptions, and practices of business actors in utilizing visual content as part of the digital transformation process. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the social realities experienced by business actors directly, particularly regarding changes in marketing behavior and business activities in a digital context. Qualitative research is highly relevant when the focus of the research emphasizes the meaning, context, and dynamics occurring within the research subjects in depth, rather than simply measuring the relationship between variables quantitatively. (Bryda, G., & Costa, 2023)

The research design used was a phenomenological qualitative study, as this study aims to understand the phenomenon of visual content utilization based on the real-life experiences of business owners in Palopo City. The phenomenological approach allows researchers to capture the essence of business owners' experiences in facing digital technology changes, from the adaptation process, content utilization, to its impact on business activities. This design choice aligns with contemporary research trends that emphasize in-depth exploration of the digital behavior of MSMEs or small businesses in various regional contexts. (Arista & Hermawan, 2025)

The research participants consisted of various types of business actors in Palopo City, including the culinary, fashion, creative services, general trade, and home-based businesses. Participant selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely selecting informants who were deemed capable of providing relevant information according to the research needs. Participant criteria included: business actors who have used digital media in marketing

activities, actively produce or utilize visual content, and have at least one year of experience running a business. The number of informants in qualitative research is not determined numerically, but based on the principle of data saturation, which is when the information obtained is repeated and no significant new data is found. (Palinkas et al., 2016)

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and direct observation of business actors' digital activities, including their visual content creation methods, promotional strategies, customer interactions on digital platforms, and changes in business activities before and after the use of visual content. Secondary data came from documents, local government reports, scientific publications related to MSME digitalization, and various relevant literature sources. The integration of primary and secondary data was carried out to increase the credibility of the research results.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and visual content documentation. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing researchers to flexibly explore participants' opinions while remaining within the research questions. Participatory observation was conducted by observing how businesses produce visual content, edit it, select distribution platforms, and interact with consumers online. Documentation was conducted by collecting examples of visual content uploaded by businesses for additional analysis.

The research instruments included interview guides, observation sheets, and field notes used to record data during the data collection process. All interviews were recorded with the informants' consent and then transcribed for analysis. The researchers also used digital tools such as screen recording and visual documentation to ensure data accuracy.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive analysis model, which includes three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers grouped interview and observation results according to key themes, such as visual strategies, digital challenges, creative processes, and their impact on business activities. In the data presentation stage, various findings were organized into narratives and matrices to clarify emerging patterns. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying the meaning of the findings, linking them to relevant theories, and ensuring that the conclusions were truly based on field data.

To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation techniques, including source triangulation, technical triangulation, and time triangulation. Triangulation was conducted by

comparing interview data from various business actors, combining interviews and observations, and cross-checking data at different points in time to ensure consistency. The validity of the findings was also strengthened through member checking, which involves asking informants to re-examine the researcher's interpretations to ensure the data remains accurate and contextual.

Using a systematic approach and methods, this research is expected to yield a deep and comprehensive understanding of how digital transformation through visual content impacts business activities in Palopo City. The qualitative approach allows researchers to holistically capture the dynamics, experiences, and adaptations of business actors, allowing the research results to make a substantive contribution to the digital business literature and serve as practical recommendations for business actors and policymakers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that digital transformation has significantly impacted business activity patterns in Palopo City, particularly through the use of visual content. Field observations and in-depth interviews indicate that businesses increasingly recognize that visual content is a crucial element in attracting consumer attention. This change is not limited to medium-sized businesses, but is also evident among small businesses and mobile businesses, which have now actively adopted digital strategies.

One of the research's key findings is that Palopo businesses utilize social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook as primary channels for distributing visual content. These platforms enable businesses to reach consumers without geographic boundaries. Many businesses report that short video-based content is the most effective form of promotion because it's easy to share and quickly captures the attention of social media users.

Interviews with several informants revealed that businesses in Palopo experienced an increase in customers after consistently producing visual content. A culinary entrepreneur (Informant K2) stated that his sales increased after uploading aesthetically pleasing videos of his kitchen. This demonstrates that today's consumers are not only interested in products, but also in the visual experience of how those products are made.

The phenomenon of viral content was also a key finding in this study. Business owners often don't realize that simple content like food preparation processes, cafe table displays, or mobile carts can capture the attention of social media users. This organically viral content has a direct impact on increasing customer visits.

This research found that businesses in Palopo also receive significant support from local content creators who, consciously or unconsciously, promote their businesses. Many creators engage in soft selling without solicitation, and this provides positive exposure, especially for emerging businesses.

In this context, one of the most striking phenomena was the entry of UUNO Indonesia into Palopo City in 2024. This beverage brand not only opened two branches with a cafe concept designed for millennials and Gen Z, but also introduced the first mobile coffee cart in Palopo which began operating in September 2024. The presence of this mobile cart became a visual object that attracted the attention of Palopo residents.

UUNO Indonesia's coffee cart features a minimalist and modern design that makes it stand out in the urban environment. Field observations indicate that many Palopo residents

spontaneously take photos or videos while interacting with the cart. This content is then shared on social media, indirectly providing organic promotion for UUNO.

UUNO Indonesia is rapidly gaining digital exposure thanks to its presence bolstered by local content creators. Many creators produce lifestyle-themed content, such as traveling around Palopo for coffee, UUNO beverage reviews, or daily vlogs about buying coffee. This content not only showcases the products but also highlights the cart's aesthetics and the city's atmosphere.

One local content creator (Informant C2) explained that he created UUNO content because the cart's visuals were "Instagrammable" and easily featured on FYP. The creator added that content featuring the cart's activities, such as moving locations, preparing drinks, or interacting with customers, received a positive response from Palopo TikTok users.

Not only creators, but Palopo residents have also been instrumental in UUNO's viral success. An interview with one informant (U4) revealed that people often upload UUNO content without being asked because the cart looks "unique and modern." This demonstrates the power of engaging visuals to drive subconscious promotion among the public.

UUNO's viral content also influences customer perception of the brand. Many customers reported learning about UUNO not from advertising, but from other users' content. This finding confirms that user-generated content (UGC) plays a crucial role in building brand awareness for businesses in Palopo.

Another interesting finding is that UUNO's viral content not only increases popularity but also influences the brand's operational patterns. Informant U2 stated that cart locations are often determined based on the points that appear most frequently in community content. In other words, UUNO uses visual data from social media as a strategic reference for determining routes and operating hours.

Other businesses, such as mobile food vendors, fashion retailers, and trendy beverage vendors, are also leveraging visual content to enhance their business appeal. Some collaborate with local photographers to produce high-quality content that can boost engagement on social media.

Furthermore, businesses are modifying the appearance of their products to make them more visually appealing. For example, some beverage vendors are improving the aesthetics of their packaging, while culinary businesses are making food plating more presentable for content purposes. These changes demonstrate a real adaptation to the digital ecosystem.

For micro-business owners, visual content also provides a way to promote their brand without significant expense. Informant M3 said he didn't have a budget for paid promotions, but a simple video of his cart attracted many customers after being shared on the local Palopo community's Instagram account.

The study also found that visual content influences the emotional connection between businesses and customers. Customers feel closer to a brand when they see the product manufacturing process, the owner's face, or the ambiance of the establishment. Some customers even admitted to visiting a place simply because it "looked good on TikTok."

The effectiveness of visual content is also evident in increased customer engagement through comments, direct messages, and inquiries regarding stock availability or opening hours. Several businesses report that the majority of customer inquiries come from users who see their visual content on social media.

In the context of UUNO Indonesia, customer interaction on social media is very active. Many people tag UUNO accounts or share the location of carts when they encounter them on the street. Some customers even become "information providers," voluntarily updating their followers on the cart's whereabouts.

Overall, the research findings indicate that visual content not only promotes products but also helps build the identity and brand image of businesses in Palopo. Visual content serves as an effective means of communication between businesses and consumers, especially among the younger generation.

The results of this study confirm that digital transformation through visual content has had a significant impact on business activities in Palopo. The case of UUNO Indonesia serves as a concrete example of how visual content, organic virality, and the participation of local creators can transform how brands are perceived, discussed, and developed within the local business ecosystem.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings

No	Findings Theme	Description of Findings	Example of Informant Quotes
1	Utilization of Visual Content	Business actors use visual content to attract consumers' attention through social media.	"Short videos keep people interested." (K2)
2	Content Virality	Simple content often goes viral organically and increases the number of subscribers.	"Uploaded for fun, then it went viral." (V1)
3	The Role of Local Creators	Palopo creators often make soft sells without being asked.	"The cart is aesthetic." (C2)
4	Unconscious Promotion	People often promote businesses without realizing it.	"I uploaded it because it was good." (U4)
5	The case of the Indonesian UUNO	UUNO went viral through its modern mobile cart since Sept 2024.	"We create content to feel like part of the city." (U1)
6	Impact on Sales	Virality increases turnover and customers.	"After it went viral, it immediately became popular." (M3)
7	Brand Visual Identity	Visual content shapes the image of Gen Z local businesses.	"Came because I saw the content." (F2)
8	Product Visual Adaptation	Business actors modify the appearance of products for content.	"I changed the packaging." (K5)
9	Customer Interaction	Social media increases customer engagement.	"Lots of DMs after watching the video." (L3)
10	Decision-making	UUNO determines routes based on citizen content.	"We saw the location from the video." (U2)

Source: Researcher Processed Results (2025)

Figure 1. Visual Content Influence Scheme



Figure 1 shows the flow of how visual content acts as the main medium that generates virality, organic promotion, brand identity formation, and increased customer interaction, thus impacting the growth of business activities.

Figure 2. UUNO Indonesia Viral Content on Social Media

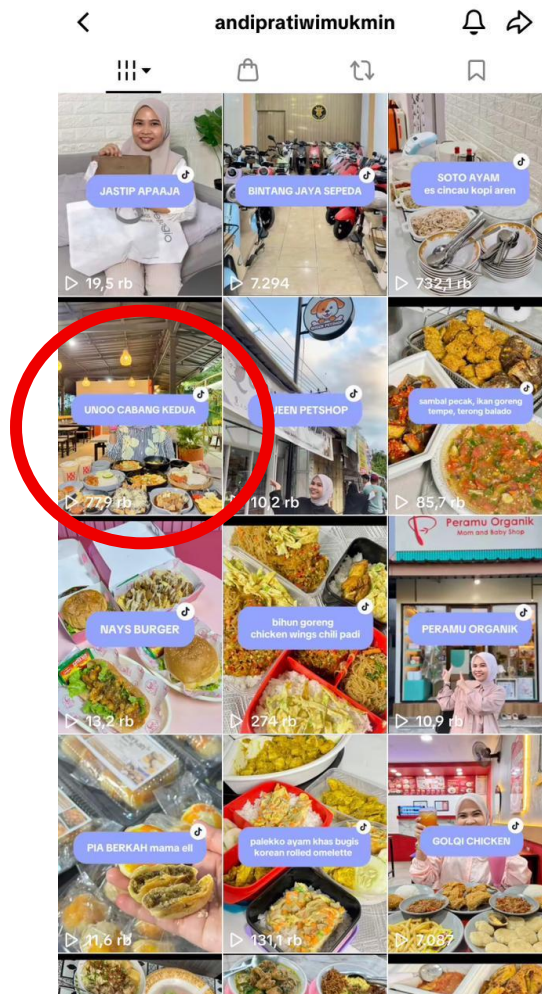


Figure 2 shows an example of UUNO Indonesia's viral content circulating in Palopo. One content piece from a creator in Palopo City garnered tens of thousands of views.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that digital transformation has changed the activity patterns of business actors in Palopo City. Digitalization is not only defined as the use of technological devices, but also as a shift in mindset in marketing products, building a business image, and reaching consumers. This change aligns with global trends where MSMEs increasingly rely on digital platforms as part of their core business strategies. In the context of Palopo, digital transformation appears even stronger because its residents are highly active on social media, especially among Gen Z and millennials, who are key market segments.

Visual content is a key element in this dynamic digital transformation. Research shows that visuals have the power to influence consumer perceptions of a business's quality, professionalism, and attractiveness. This is consistent with recent research confirming that visual identity plays a significant role in creating brand recall and encouraging consumer action to visit or purchase a

product after viewing engaging content. In Palopo, short video content has proven more effective than photos because it better creates a virtual, in-person experience.

Palopo consumers' tendency to respond to visual content also indicates that modern audiences prefer visual narratives over textual promotions. Narratives such as the food preparation process, the atmosphere of a business, or customer expressions in videos create an emotional impact that makes consumers feel closer to the brand. This proves that visual-based marketing not only communicates information but also builds emotional bonds that are crucial for business sustainability.

The phenomenon of content virality is a key element of this discussion. Field findings indicate that businesses often experience a sharp increase in subscribers after their content goes viral, even if the content was created spontaneously and without a specific strategy. This suggests that the virality mechanism operates through algorithms that rely on user interaction, allowing even simple content to have a significant impact if it receives a positive response from the public. This virality indirectly provides significant economic benefits for businesses.

In the Palopo context, virality doesn't occur individually, but rather as part of the community's digital culture. Residents frequently upload their daily activities, including when they purchase local products. Unwittingly, this content becomes free promotion for businesses. This phenomenon can be understood as a form of community participation in collaborative marketing, where consumers act as unpaid promotional agents but have a significant impact.

The role of local content creators is also crucial in strengthening this digital transformation. Local creators are not only content creators but also part of the creative economy ecosystem, accelerating the spread of information about businesses in Palopo. Creators often create soft-selling content without direct request from businesses, especially if the visuals are compelling. They play a crucial role as a bridge between local businesses and digital audiences.

The case of UUNO Indonesia demonstrates how local content creators can accelerate a brand's popularity. The presence of UUNO's modern, minimalist, and aesthetic coffee cart makes it easy for creators to integrate it into their content. This reinforces the theory that visual aesthetics play a significant role in determining whether a brand easily penetrates local digital culture. Creators act as visual curators, providing legitimacy to the brand through the content they produce.

Beyond creators, other businesses in Palopo are also beginning to recognize the importance of visual aesthetics. They are modifying product displays, packaging, and even the design of their premises to meet the visual standards of digital platforms. This reflects a significant shift in the business strategies of local MSMEs, who now view visuals as an investment, not just an accessory. This adaptation is creating a shift in business culture that is oriented toward digital imagery.

This visual adaptation also impacts the relationship between businesses and customers. Visual content allows for more natural interactions, such as comments, direct messages, and re-sharing. This creates a two-way relationship that strengthens customer loyalty. This relationship pattern demonstrates that modern consumers aren't just buying products, but also the digital experiences and engagement that brands offer.

Research findings also reveal that visual content can be used as a tool for operational decision-making. This is evident in the case of UUNO Indonesia, where coffee cart routes were determined based on viral hotspots on social media. This strategy demonstrates that visual data (citizen content) can serve as a social indicator in determining consumer behavior and potential areas for increasing sales.

The case of UUNO Indonesia concretely demonstrates how a brand can grow rapidly without paid promotion. The virality of its cart is proof that a visual-based strategy can create a ripple effect that massively increases brand exposure. This is relevant to the concept of the visibility economy, where brands that are most visible and frequently featured in public content have the greatest opportunity for growth.

From an ecosystem perspective, digital transformation through visual content also strengthens the creative economy in Palopo. Collaboration between entrepreneurs, photographers, video editors, and digital creators opens up new job opportunities and creates an interconnected business ecosystem. This demonstrates that digital transformation not only benefits entrepreneurs but also expands economic opportunities for the creative sector.

These findings demonstrate that visual content has become a determining factor in business success in the digital age. Visuals are not just a promotional tool, but also a strategic asset that defines a brand's identity and values. Businesses that fail to optimize visuals tend to fall behind, unable to compete with brands with strong visual strategies.

The research also shows that digital transformation in Palopo has its own unique characteristics, namely strong organic community promotion. This distinguishes Palopo from other large cities, where promotions are typically dominated by large brands with paid advertising. In Palopo, the power of the digital community is a key driver of local business growth.

Overall, this discussion confirms that visual content is a key foundation for digital transformation for businesses in Palopo. Visual quality, virality, the role of local creators, and community participation are key factors in increasing visibility, trust, and business growth. The case of UUNO Indonesia reinforces the understanding that the right visual strategy can transform a new brand into a local phenomenon in a short time.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital transformation through visual content has a significant impact on business activities in Palopo City. Visual content has proven to be a key tool in increasing visibility, establishing brand identity, and strengthening emotional connections between businesses and consumers. Content virality, whether intentionally created or organic, can result in increased sales, expanded market reach, and built customer trust. The role of local content creators and community participation in creating and sharing content are also important factors in accelerating business growth. The case of UUNO Indonesia demonstrates that visual aesthetics, cart mobility, and digital community support can transform a new brand into a local phenomenon in a short time. These findings confirm that visual content is not only a promotional tool but also a strategic element that forms the foundation of the digital transformation process for businesses in the modern marketing era.

Overall, this research provides insight that businesses that are able to adapt to visual demands and optimally utilize the digital ecosystem will be more competitive amidst changing consumer consumption patterns. Visual content-based digital transformation creates significant opportunities for small businesses in areas like Palopo to thrive without relying on paid promotions. Thus, visual content has proven to be a crucial instrument for the sustainability and growth of local businesses in the digital economy.

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