

IMPACT OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING ON CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital landscape, storytelling has become a pivotal strategy for brands aiming to foster deeper connections with consumers. This research investigates the relationship between digital storytelling and customer engagement by combining both primary as well as secondary research methodologies. The primary research involves analyzing consumer perspectives through structured questionnaires to understand how storytelling influences their engagement, emotional connection and attention with brands. Complementing this, secondary research evaluates behavioral engagement metrics-such as likes, shares, and comments-on platforms like Instagram and YouTube to measure the concrete impact of storytelling content. The study provides a double-layered understanding of how narrative techniques affect both perceived and actual customer engagement. Findings aim to bridge the gap between consumer sentiment and measurable interaction, offering actionable insights for brands seeking to enhance digital engagement through compelling storytelling.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Customer Engagement, Social Media Marketing, Consumer Perception, Emotional Branding, Instagram Analytics, YouTube Engagement, Brand Communication, Narrative Marketing, Primary and Secondary Research

1. INTRODUCTION

In the fast-paced digital era, where consumer attention spans are shrinking and brand choices are expanding, traditional marketing approaches have started to lose their relevance and impact. Audiences today no longer respond to static advertisements or one-way messaging. Instead, they seek connection, meaning, and authenticity in the content they consume. During this transition, digital storytelling has emerged as a transformative tool-one that goes beyond promoting products and instead focuses on summoning emotions, sharing values, and building lasting relationships.

Digital storytelling weaves together narrative elements, visual content, and emotional appeal to create experiences that resonate with audiences. It transforms brands into relatable entities with a voice and a story-inviting consumers not just to buy, but to believe, to connect, and to belong. But how effective is this strategy in truly engaging consumers? Is storytelling just a creative trend, or does it directly impact on how consumers interact with, relate with, connect with and respond to a brand?

Customer engagement, once an abstract idea, has now become quantifiable through measurable digital interactions -likes,shares,comments and other forms of consumer participation. These metrics provide rich insight into the depth of consumer involvement, brand recall, and emotional investment. Yet, the true influence of storytelling on this engagement remains an area that warrants deeper exploration.

Furthermore, the rise of digital storytelling is closely linked to the widespread use of electronic devices, which has transformed how consumers engage with content. With people spending significant time on their mobile phones, digital platforms have become the primary space for brand-consumer interaction. This shift allows brands to enclose their narratives directly into consumers' daily routines, creating more opportunities for engagement. As users scroll through content, storytelling that is authentic, relatable, real and emotionally compelling tends to stand out prompting interactions such as likes/share and comments. These responses not only indicate immediate interest of consumers but also reflect the extent to which they connect with the brand's story over time. In this context, digital storytelling becomes a key driver of sustained customer engagement, shaping how consumers perceive, respond to, and remain loyal to a brand in the long run.

This study sets out to examine that very question. It aims to investigate the impact of digital storytelling on customer engagement by analysing how audiences respond to narrative-driven content in the digital space. By doing so, it seeks to understand how stories told by brands online influence what people do and how they feel about those brands-ultimately revealing how storytelling shapes behaviour, builds loyalty, and transforms passive viewers into active participants.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool in modern brand communication, amalgamating narrative techniques with digital technology to emotionally engage audiences. According to Pulizzi (2012), storytelling in the digital age shifts marketing from promotional messages to value-driven narratives, offering brands a way to form deeper and more human connections with their audience. This is particularly important in an age where consumers are bombarded with content and attention spans are shrinking, particularly in the digital age.

Research by Ashley and Tuten (2015) emphasizes that brand storytelling on digital platforms is more effective when it is authentic, emotionally impactful, and aligned with brand identity. Their findings show that storytelling content—such as behind-the-scenes footage(BTS), customer endorsement, or founder stories—generates significantly more engagement than straightforward advertisements. Similarly, Gensler et al. (2013) argue that when consumers are emotionally invested in a story, they are more likely to share, comment, or develop long-term loyalty toward a brand.

Chong et al. (2021) explored the role of immersive digital narratives in increasing emotional connection and brand recall, stating that storytelling enhances the perceived authenticity of the brand and drives stronger behavioural responses. However, while their work effectively captures emotional outcomes, it lacks evidence-based validation through actual user engagement data such as likes, shares, or comments.

Matzner et al. (2015) suggest that storytelling strategies differ across digital platforms, and user engagement is influenced by context, design, and interactivity. But again, their study is largely conceptual and doesn't quantify the impact of specific storytelling elements on engagement metrics.

Research Gap and Contribution of the Study While the existing literature provides a strong foundation for understanding how storytelling affects consumer behaviour, several gaps remain—particularly around the use of observed engagement data and understanding consumer preferences and habits. This study addresses the following key gaps:

1. Platform Usage Behaviour is Underexplored:

Few studies investigate how frequently consumers use different digital platforms and how this influences their engagement with storytelling content.

2. Content Preferences are Not Quantified:

Although emotional and visually rich content is known to perform well, there is little research quantifying what types of brand content capture the most attention from a consumer perspective.

3. Lack of Consumer Perspective on Storytelling:

Prior work has not adequately explored how consumers themselves perceive storytelling, or what narrative elements (e.g., relatability, visuals, authenticity) make them feel more emotionally attached to a brand.

4. Limited Use of Behavioural Engagement Data:

Most prior studies are conceptual or survey-based. There is a lack of research that uses actual post-level metrics (likes, comments, shares) to derive engagement percentages and connect them to storytelling techniques.

5. Lack of Integrated Insights:

Very few studies combine quantitative behavioural data with qualitative user insights to draw a panoptic picture of engagement and brand storytelling effectiveness.

Contribution of This Study

- Collecting primary engagement data from digital content—including number of likes, comments, and shares—and calculating engagement percentages to assess performance.
- Exploring consumer preferences regarding platform usage, content types, and storytelling styles that make them feel more connected to a brand.
- Linking specific storytelling elements to actual consumer behaviours, allowing for deeper insights into what drives engagement.
- Providing practical recommendations to marketers and brand strategists on optimizing digital storytelling for maximizing reach, emotional impact, and long-term loyalty.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Objectives

1. To assess the impact of digital storytelling on customer engagement across social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube.
2. To analyse consumer preferences and emotional responses toward various forms of brand storytelling content (e.g., emotional, humorous, informative).

3.2 Research Design:

This research study follows both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data. Qualitative analysis includes presentation and analysis of data collected via questionnaire which was administered to a sample population of respondents. This analysis allows us to have a closer understanding of the phenomenon of customer engagement and how it can be related to digital story-telling.

Quantitative analysis on the other hand includes administration of Chi-square test on the data collected from secondary sources. Secondary data on followers-based customer engagement was collected from the select social media platforms for the select brands and the collected data was numerically adjusted as per the requirement of Chi-square test for independence

3.2.1 Qualitative Analysis

3.2.1.1 Objective

To gain insights into consumer perspectives on brand storytelling's influence on engagement, emotions, and purchase behaviour.

3.2.1.2 Data Collection

- **Source:** Structured questionnaire administered online through Google Forms.
- **Instrument:** Close-ended questions have been conducted with Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and some open-ended questions.

3.2.1.3 Sample

- **Size:** 100 respondents
- **Sampling Method:** Convenience sampling
- **Respondents:** Individuals under 18 and above 30 years

3.2.1.4 Key Focus Areas

- Frequency and platform of brand engagement
- Content preferences (emotional, humorous, educational, motivating etc.)
- Importance of storytelling in brand perception
- Emotional responses and purchase influence on consumers
- Memorability compared to traditional advertisements
- Attitude towards fake/non-authentic storytelling
- Willingness of the consumer to engage with new brands based on storytelling

3.2.2 Quantitative Analysis

3.2.2.1 Objective

To quantitatively analyse the impact of storytelling on engagement metrics of brands on digital platforms like Instagram and YouTube

3.2.2.2 Data Source

Publicly available data from brand accounts on Instagram and YouTube.

3.2.2.3 Data Processing

- Classification of brands based on digital storytelling presence (Yes/No).
- Calculation of engagement rates:
 - Instagram: Likes + Comments + Shares relative to Followers

- YouTube: Likes + Comments relative to Followers

3.2.2.4 Variables

3.2.2.4.1 Digital Story-telling (Independent variable)

According to Pulizzi (2012), digital storytelling is “the art of communicating brand narratives using digital formats that engage audiences emotionally and encourage deeper interaction.”

The classification of brands (e.g., US Polo Assn., Raymond) as not actively engaging in digital storytelling was obtained through an OpenAI's ChatGPT, based on an evaluation of their content presence and storytelling formats across digital platforms.

3.2.2.4.2 Customer Engagement (Dependent variable) Definition

Engagement rate measures the audience's active interaction with content relative to its reach (followers or views), reflecting how compelling and engaging the content is (Chaffey, 2022).

Interpretation Scale

Engagement Rate (%)	Interpretation
< 6%	High Engagement
>6%	Low Engagement

Engagement rate formula

$$ER = (\text{Interactions} \div \text{Followers}) \times 100$$

-Hootsuite. (2024).Social Media Metrics That Matter. Retrieved from <https://blog.hootsuite.com>

3.2.2.5 Statistical Tools Tool Used

Chi-Square Test of Independence to examine the relationship between storytelling presence and engagement levels.

3.2.2.6 Hypotheses Null Hypothesis (H_0):

No significant relationship exists between storytelling and customer engagement.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):

A significant relationship exists between storytelling and customer engagement.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Qualitative analysis

The purpose of this section of the study was to collect individual opinions and feelings about brand storytelling. To learn more about how individuals relate to brand content more deeply, 100 participants were given access to an open-ended questionnaire. A variety of topics, including emotional impact, relatability, attention, trust, and a personal connection to brand tales, were intended to be covered by the questions. The next sections address the insights gleaned from these replies, emphasizing recurrent themes and patterns that contribute to the understanding of how storytelling affects customer engagement.

4.1.1. Emotional Triggers in Storytelling

Question Type: Open-ended

Instrument: Descriptive qualitative (text responses)

Purpose: To identify which storytelling elements, resonate most emotionally with Gen Z.

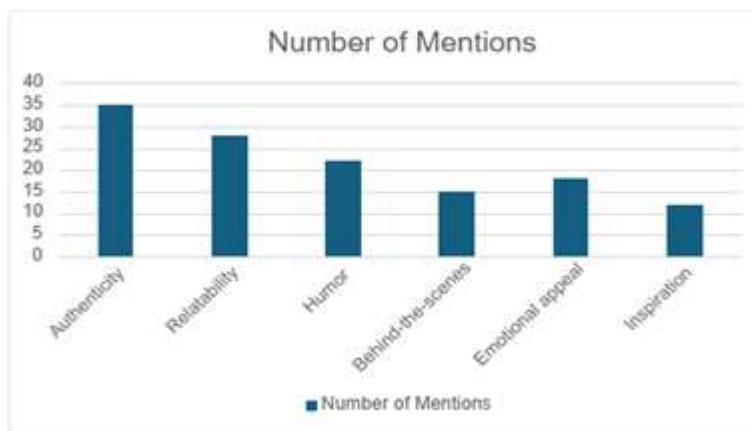


Figure 1

In figure 1, respondents most commonly mentioned authenticity, humour, relatability, and behind-the-scenes content. These elements foster emotional resonance and brand connection.

4.1.2. Influence on Purchase Behaviour

Question Type: Yes/No

Instrument: Binary close-ended question

Purpose: To measure whether storytelling impacts purchasing decisions

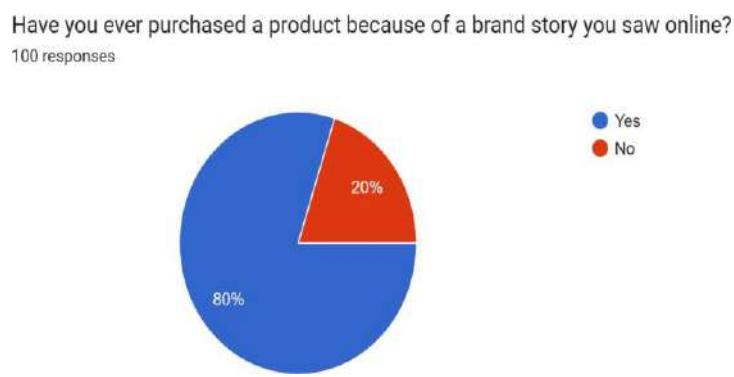


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows that a significant proportion of respondents confirmed purchasing a product after being influenced by a brand

4.1.3. Preference for Storytelling vs Traditional Ads

Question Type: Likert Scale (1–5)

Instrument: Scaled response

Purpose: To compare storytelling with traditional advertising in terms of engagement and effectiveness.

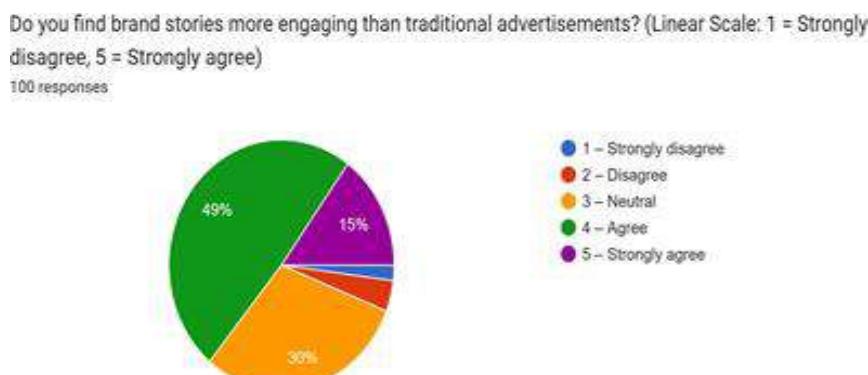


Figure 3

Figure 3 shows that the majority of respondents selected “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” when asked if they find storytelling more engaging than regular ads.

4.1.4. Platform Preference: Instagram & YouTube

Question Type: Multiple-choice

Instrument: Platform-based response selection

Purpose: To identify the digital platforms where Gen Z interacts most with branded content.

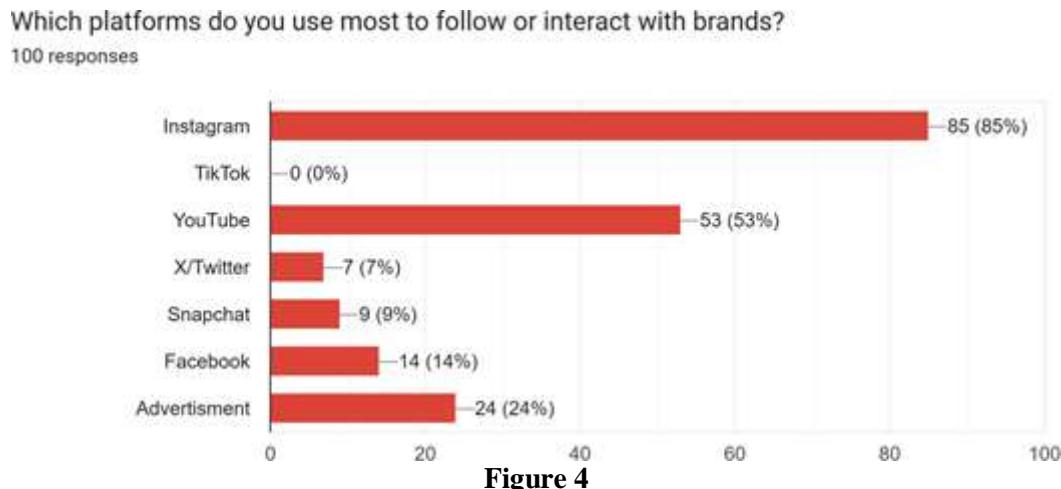


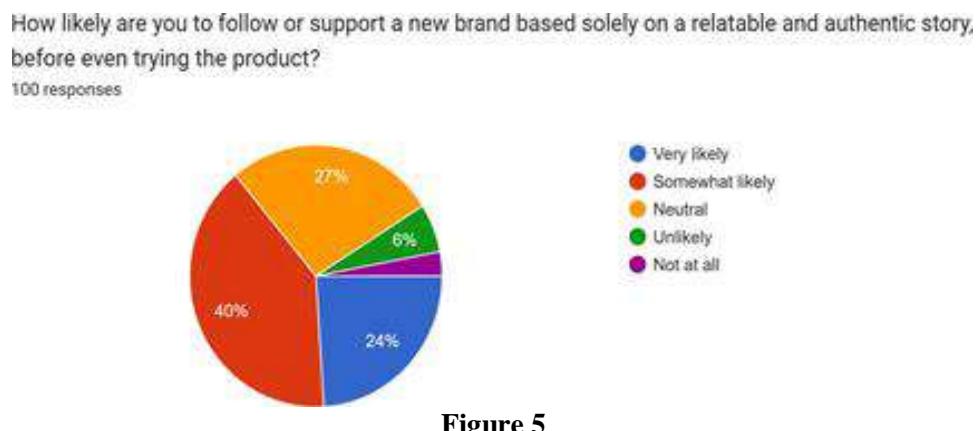
Figure 4 shows that Instagram ranked highest, followed by YouTube, showing a strong visual content preference.

4.1.5. Storytelling and New Brand Adoption

Question Type: Likert Scale

Instrument: Scaled response

Purpose: To examine the influence of a relatable story on willingness to support a new brand.



In figure 5 most respondents indicated that they are “Somewhat Likely” or “Very Likely” to follow or support a new brand based solely on an authentic and relatable story.

4.1.6. Authenticity and Trust

Question Type: Multiple-choice

Instrument: Trust-based question (Yes/No/Not Sure)

Purpose: To test the impact of inauthentic storytelling on consumer trust and engagement.

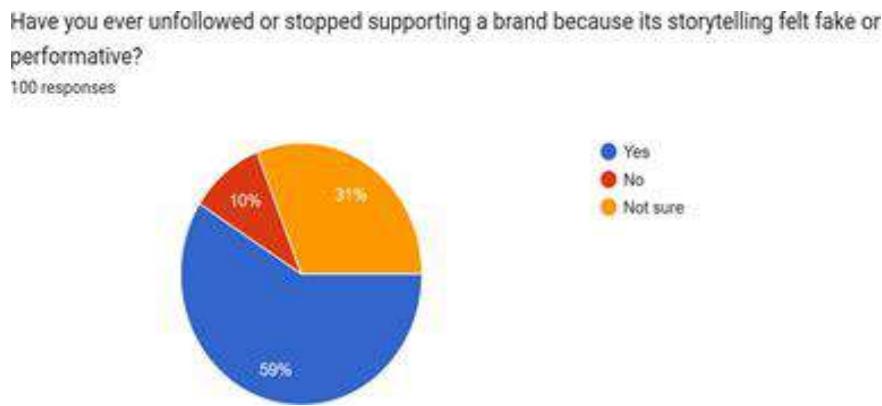


Figure 6

Figure 6 shows a notable number of respondents said they have unfollowed brands that felt fake or performative in their storytelling.

RESULTS

Emotional storytelling was clearly preferred by the participants, who said it was the most captivating and memorable. Warmth, inspiration, and nostalgia all have a big impact on brand memory and engagement. Although humorous content was valued for its entertainment value, it only worked well when it was subtle and relatable. When presented imaginatively, informative content was respected; yet, if it was extremely factual, it was less appealing. In general, stories that were genuine and emotionally charged had the most effects on customer engagement and perception.

4.2 Quantitative analysis

4.2.1 Tabulation of data

In order to establish statistical relationship between digital storytelling and customer engagement, a quantitative approach was followed in this study. Publicly available data from social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube was observed and recorded to tabulate the information so that required data sets for administration of Chi-Square test for independence are available.

The following tables highlight the analysis of the publicly available data on number of likes, comments and shares on the posts of social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram handles of select brands. This analysis includes the calculation of engagement rate too:

Table No 1: Brand Engagement Analysis for YouTube

Brand	Total No of subscribers of YouTube channel	Total no of Likes (First 50 Posts)	Total No of Comments (First 50 Posts)	Total no of interactions (Likes + Comments)	Engagement rate {(Total no of Interactions / Total no of subscribers)*100}
1)Nyka	1520000	15773	549	16322	1.073816
2)Amul	522000	390	40	430	0.82375
3)Coach	145000	15768	1983	17751	12.24207
4)Cadbury	624000	9147	793	9940	1.5929
5)Titan	561000	6247	242	6489	11.5668
6)Nike	3100000	500923	11921	512844	24.42114
7)Tanishq	204000	6828	446	7274	3.5656
8)Raymond	86000	4925	374	5299	6.1616
9)United States Polo Association	764000	38860	0(off)	38860	5.0863
10)Lee	5990	2155	313	11804	41.202
11)Life Insurance Corporation of India	122000	193283	3663	196946	161.4311
12)Bajaj	14700	525345	124	525469	3574.619

13)Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation	13640000	6116	646	6762	0.04975
14)Patanjali	11400000	60502	346	60848	0.5337
15)Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited	168000	6293	1640	7933	4.722

Table No 2: Brand Engagement Analysis for Instagram

Brand	Total number of followers	Total number of likes(First 50 posts)	Total number of shares(First 50 posts)	Total number of comments (First 50 posts)	Total number of interactions (Likes+comments+shares)	Engagement rate {Formula : (Total no of interactions/Total no of subscribers)*100}
1)Nyka	2900000	54499	8794	16816	80109	2.7623
2)Amul	509000	1628777	89446	2411	1720634	338.042
3)Coach	7900000	637545	39568	9727	686840	8.6941
4)Cadbury	412000	306093	5993	1224	313310	76.04611
5)Titan	609000	268408	3200	1117	272725	44.7824
6)Nike	299000000	5913500	349581	38723	6301804	2.1076
8)Raymond	273000	1203779	949	309	1205037	441.405
9)United States Polo Association	409000	15758	429	157	16344	3.99608
10)Lee	491000	201487	493	189	202169	41.1749
11)Life Insurance Corporation of India	180000	17110	3180	167	20457	11.365
12)Bajaj	48700	46558	835	430	47823	98.199
13)Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation.	564000	3577	284	226	4087	0.7246
14)Patanjali	1400000	12777	1234	218	14229	1.0163
15)Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited	82300	6148	836	720	7704	9.3608

The following table presents the brands with the status of digital story-telling.

Table No 3:Classification of Brands based on presence or absence of digital storytelling on social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube.

Brands	Digital Story telling (Yes)	Digital Story telling (No)
1)Amul	Yes	
2)Coach	Yes	
3)Cadbury	Yes	
4)Titan	Yes	
5)Nike	Yes	
6)Tanishq	Yes	

7)Nyka	Yes	
8)Raymond	Yes	
Brands	Digital Story telling (Yes)	Digital Story telling (No)
9)United States Polo Association		No
10)Lee		No
11)Life Insurance Corporation of India		No
12)Bajaj		No
13)Patanjali		No
14)Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation.		No
15>Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited		No

4.2.2 Chi-Square test of independence

As specified in the methodology earlier, to assess the relationship between the chosen variables of the study, Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted.

With reference to the standards of engagement specified in 3.3.2.4.2 and the brand classifications as per the chosen method specified in 3.3.2.4.1, following table for administration of Chi-square test of independence was generated:

Table No 4 Chi-Square Table

Chi-Square Test of Independence		Customer Engagement		
		High	Low	Total
Digital Story-Telling	Yes	5	2	7
	No	6	2	8
	Total	11	4	15

RESULTS

The test generated following statistics:

- Chi-Square statistic of 0.0244
- P-value of 0.875996

With the standard level of significance being 0.05, the p-value is significantly greater which indicates that result is not statistically significant.

Since there is no evidence of a significant correlation between the adoption of digital storytelling and customer engagement, the null hypothesis (H_0) is not rejected. Stated differently, any apparent variation in customer engagement levels between those who were exposed to digital storytelling and those who were not is probably the result of chance rather than a consistent storytelling effect.

This result suggests that digital storytelling might not have an independent impact on customer engagement levels within the parameters and sample of this study. Engagement may be more significantly shaped by contextual cues or other mediating characteristics. In order to find more profound patterns, future research might look into examining these moderating factors or using more sophisticated metrics of both storytelling quality and engagement intensity.

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Findings:

The quantitative analysis employing the Chi-Square test produced a statistic of 0.0244 with a p-value of 0.875996, which is well above the conventional threshold of 0.05. This suggests that the detected correlation between digital storytelling and customer engagement was not statistically meaningful in the present sample. Consequently, the null hypothesis—that there is no relationship between digital storytelling usage and customer engagement—could not be dismissed.

Nonetheless, it is vital to emphasize that this result could be affected by the small sample size. A larger and more representative dataset may reveal more significant differences in engagement (likes, comments, shares). Therefore, although the current research does not reveal a significant independent effect of digital storytelling on engagement metrics, the possibility of such a connection cannot be completely dismissed. Future research

could explore the inclusion of extra variables or moderating elements, like content category, timing of posts, audience characteristics, or the calibre of storytelling.

The qualitative assessment of consumer feedback indicated a distinct inclination towards genuine and emotional narratives. Participants often characterized influential content with terms like "relatable," "authentic," and "inspiring." Emotional narratives, which feature tales of hardship, development, and community influence, were recognized as powerful emotional catalysts, especially among younger audiences like Gen Z.

Moreover, content highlighting behind-the-scenes experiences, customer stories, and mission-focused efforts was discovered to connect profoundly, even when coming from smaller brands such as Nishorama or Benne Café. Although humorous and informative content received appreciation, emotional storytelling continually proved to be the most impactful in influencing consumer perception, brand memory, and loyalty.

5.2. Conclusion

This research offers a detailed insight into how digital storytelling affects consumer involvement and viewpoints:

Regarding quantitative analysis, the study's sample did not reveal any statistically significant relationship between digital storytelling and engagement metrics. The results indicate that engagement is probably influenced by various factors, and with a larger dataset, the impact of storytelling might be clearer.

From a qualitative perspective, genuine and emotional stories evidently showed a significant influence on consumer choices and emotional involvement. These insights emphasize that storytelling is vital for establishing trust, encouraging relatability, and strengthening brand connection, even when these impacts aren't readily quantifiable through numerical measures.

The results emphasize that although digital storytelling might not always lead to quantifiable engagement in every situation, it continues to be an impactful strategic approach for fostering enduring consumer connections and emotional ties to the brand.

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