

The Effect of Storytelling Marketing on Purchase Intention with Empathy as a Mediating Variable

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ABSTRACT

Social media is a platform for brands to present creative advertisements, one of which is storytelling ads. In Indonesia, many advertisers have started using storytelling techniques. Therefore, this study aims to determine the effect of storytelling marketing on the purchase intention of the viewers with empathy as a mediating variable. The elements of storytelling used in this study are perceived esthetic, narrative structure, and self-reference. The proposed research model is based on heuristic theory. This study uses Gojek's advertisements to verify the relationship in the proposed model. Data was collected from 191 respondents through an online closed questionnaire. The Partial Least Squares and Sobel tests were used to analyze the data. The results showed that perceived esthetic and narrative structure have no effect on purchase intention. Self-reference and empathy have a positive effect on purchase intention. Perceived esthetic has no effect on empathy. Narrative structure and self-reference have a positive effect on empathy. Empathy in this study only mediates the positive effect of self-reference on purchase intention.

Keywords: Storytelling Marketing; Empathy; Purchase Intention

1. Introduction

Currently, brands from Indonesia are starting to make advertisements in the form of stories or commonly called storytelling marketing. Storytelling as a way of marketing communication has been used for a long time. Stories can be a powerful tool for communicating brand messages (Moin, 2020).

Advertisers realize the benefits of storytelling to increase the value of brand recall, consumer engagement, and create an emotional connection with consumers (Joshi et al., 2022). Hsiao et al. (2013) explained that stories and storytelling are important to encourage consumers to participate in commercial activities. Therefore, how advertisers influence viewers' purchase intentions through stories needs to be explored further.

One of the Indonesian companies that regularly creates storytelling advertisements is Gojek Tokopedia (GoTo/Gojek). Databoks (2022) informed that GoTo's sales and marketing costs

reached Rp2.81 trillion as of July 31, 2021. Advertisements as part of their marketing are broadcast both outside the network and within networks which include social media.

Such a large cost is not surprising because storytelling marketing is aimed to evoke the emotional feelings of the viewers (Chantika and Kusumawati, 2021). To create an advertisement that evokes empathy, planning is needed in order to create plot, character, and esthetic elements (Pan and Chen, 2019) that grab the attention of the target viewers. Thus, viewers' behavioral intentions toward brands are expected to be unaffected by overly complex cognitive activities as described in the heuristic theory (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Viewers are expected to have the urge to purchase any service from GoTo.

The dimensions of storytelling marketing used in this study consist of perceived esthetic, narrative structure, and self-reference. The three dimensions were chosen because their effect on empathy still shows inconsistent results. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of these three dimensions on purchase intention either directly or through the empathy variable.

Perceived esthetic was found to have a positive effect on empathy by Akgun et al. (2015) and Hsiao et al. (2013), but found no effect by Chantika and Kusumawati (2021) and Ko and Hsu (2019). Narrative structure was found to have a positive effect on empathy by Li and Liu (2020), Akgun et al. (2015), and Hsiao et al. (2013), but was found to have no effect by Chantika and Kusumawati (2021) and Ko and Hsu (2019). Self-reference was found to have a positive effect on empathy by Chantika and Kusumawati (2021), Ko and Hsu (2019), Akgun et al. (2015), and Hsiao et al. (2013). Self-reference is interesting to be re-examined because in some studies it has the least effect, while in other studies it has the greatest effect on empathy.

This study is expected to contribute by examining the direct effect of the three dimensions on the purchase intention variable which is still rarely done by previous researchers. So far, the testing of these three dimensions on behavioral intentions is still through mediation mechanisms. It has never been tested whether these three dimensions, simultaneously, have a direct effect on purchase intention. Therefore, this study will compare which effect is more dominant. In addition, it was also found the positive influence of esthetic dimensions (Choi, 2019; Teng et al., 2018), narrative structure (Tabassum et al., 2020), and self-reference (Phua and Kim, 2018) on purchase intention.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Heuristic Theory

Heuristic or unconscious routines that were popularized by Tversky and Kahneman in the 1970s can reduce the complexity of tasks such as assessing probabilities and predicting values. Heuristics are quite helpful in making quick judgments or solutions (Hsiao et al., 2013). Heuristics can serve as useful evaluation tools for designers and usability professionals (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Similarly, heuristics can be used to evaluate goods and services (Hsiao et al., 2013). Three heuristics commonly used to assess probability and predict value are the representativeness heuristic, the availability heuristic, and the adjustment and anchoring heuristic (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974).

2.2 Storytelling Marketing

Perceived esthetic (PE) is defined by Reber et al. (2004) as a pleasant subjective experience directed at an object and not mediated by intervening reasoning. PE is the viewers' level of perception of the visual richness and visual appeal of the brand's microfilm (Ko and Hsu, 2019; Hsiao et al., 2013). Thus, PE in the context of storytelling advertising means when an advertisement is visually able to create a sense of pleasure in a person. This dimension is in line with the representative heuristic theory.

Representativeness heuristic is a psychological term that describes how one judges the probability of an event by finding events that are known to be comparable and assuming that the probabilities will be similar (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). In relation to storytelling advertisements, consumers rely on esthetic things in advertisements to evaluate the possibility of the goods or services offered can attract their interest. Hsiao et al. (2013) gives an example of a special iPhone design as an example for other manufacturers to attract people's attention as if their products have similarities with the iPhone.

Narrative structure in advertisements is the level of viewers' perceptions of the completeness and causality of plot structures in brand advertisements (Hsiao et al., 2013; Ko and Hsu, 2019). Organizing information with a narrative structure can help consumers to remember important information (Yueh et al., 2020). In line with the availability heuristic theory, one uses the most remembered part of their experiment to deal with certain situations.

Availability plays an important role in consumer purchasing decisions (Zheng, 2022; Akgun et al., 2015). Thus, the narrative structure can be an important element in advertising to keep consumers remembering the brand and product information. Escalas (2004) explained that the character develops a goal that leads to action, which results in a certain outcome. Thus, the characters in the story are intended to encourage consumers to do similar things such as buying goods or using the services demonstrated in the story.

Self-reference in advertising is a form of cognitive process when consumers relate advertising information to their feelings of self (Martin et al., 2004). Self-reference in Ko and Hsu (2019) is described as the level of a similar experience that viewers remember when watching a brand's microfilm. Based on the two definitions, concluded that every advertisement presents a scene or information that has the potential to make the viewers feel connected because they have experienced things like the advertisement. Thus, there is a process of comparing with consumer experience as a basis for assessment.

The assessment process is explained in the adjustment and anchoring heuristic theory. In many situations, one makes an estimate by starting with an initial value adjusted to produce a final answer (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). The starting value or starting point is the anchor. For example, if a person needs to assess another person's ability, the anchor for the final (adjusted) assessment might be the person's own level of ability (Hsiao et al., 2013).

Thus, it can be concluded that advertising in the form of storytelling gives consumers the opportunity to assess whether the goods and services offered will be suitable for them or not.

Consumers will compare the information in the storyline with their personal experiences. The impact will encourage the formation of certain attitudes or intentions in consumers.

2.3 Empathy

As the purpose of storytelling marketing, the three dimensions are made in such a way as to generate empathy from the viewers. Empathic response is one's absorption in another's feelings (Escalas and Stern, 2003). Based on the definitions, it can be concluded that someone who is empathetic can imagine themselves experiencing the same thing as the experiences of others. Empathic response is the deep and engaging type of engagement that contemporary advertisers seek to get their viewers's attention (Mooradian et al., 2008). Thus, this empathy is deliberately provoked from the viewers to encourage them to do something according to the advertiser's expectations.

2.4 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention estimates the probability of buying by a potential consumer for a product over a certain period of time (Whitlark et al., 1993). Purchase intentions are formed on the assumption of pending transactions and, as a result, are often considered an important indicator of actual purchases (Chang and Wildt, 1994). Therefore, it is very important to generate consumer intention to buy to encourage actual purchase. Intentions that last for a certain period of time must be maintained by creating brand recall, for example, through storytelling.

2.5 Hypothesis Development

2.5.1 Relationship between Storytelling Marketing and Purchase Intention

Marketers can use the representativeness heuristic in creating storytelling ads by presenting esthetic to explain the advantages of a product or service. Consumers tend to buy products with higher esthetic perceived value (Chang et al., 2020). Choi (2019) and Teng et al. (2019) found that esthetic had a positive effect on purchase intention.

Escalas and Stern (2003) show that stories with a good narrative structure can increase emotional advertising reactions, such as encouraging feelings of optimism or warmth. Therefore, a good narrative structure is an important element of a story. Narrative advertising has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions (Cassar et al., 2021; Yueh et al., 2020; Tabassum et al., 2020; Krakow et al., 2018).

When consumers link to advertised products, they can easily process related messages (Chou et al., 2020). Therefore, evoking self-references in memory is a key component of a successful storytelling ad (Akgun et al., 2015). The likelihood of buying a product is positively influenced by self-reference in Chou et al. (2020) and Phua and Kim (2018). Thus the author proposes a hypothesis:

H1: Perceived esthetic has a positive effect on purchase intention.

H2: Narrative structure has a positive effect on purchase intention.

H3: Self-reference has a positive effect on purchase intention.

2.5.2 Relationship between Storytelling Marketing and Empathy

Storytelling ads do not directly persuade consumers, but consumers themselves who find

answers through advertising stories. Thus, consumers have indirect experiences regarding product features and usage through empathy with the main character of the advertisement (Park and Lee, 2014).

Perceived esthetic was found to have a positive effect on empathy by Akgun et al. (2015) and Hsiao et al. (2013). Narrative structure was found positively affects empathy by Li and Liu (2020), Akgun et al. (2015), and Hsiao et al. (2013). Positive effect of self-reference on empathy found by Chantika and Kusumawati (2021), Ko and Hsu (2019), Akgun et al. (2015), and Hsiao et al. (2013). Thus the authors propose the following hypothesis.

H4: Perceived esthetic has a positive effect on empathy.

H5: Narrative structure has a positive effect on empathy.

H6: Self-reference has a positive effect on empathy.

2.5.3 Relationship between Empathy and Purchase Intention

The story format can produce a stronger positive influence and emotional response than the information format in terms of increasing purchase intention (Yueh and Zheng, 2020). As long as viewers are inspired by an advertisement, they will develop a positive attitude towards it (Li and Liu, 2020). The positive effect of empathy on consumer intentions was found by Chantika and Kusumawati (2021) and Akgun et al. (2015). Thus the author proposes a hypothesis:

H7: Empathy caused by advertising has a positive effect on purchase intention.

2.5.4 The Role of Empathy in the Relationship between Storytelling Marketing and Purchase Intention

Viewers' perceived esthetic while watching advertisements can increase their empathy (Akgun et al., 2015 and Hsiao et al., 2013). Narrative structure was found to have a positive effect on viewers' empathy by Li and Liu (2020), Akgun et al. (2015), and Hsiao et al. (2013). Self-reference has a positive effect on empathy (Chantika and Kusumawati, 2021; Ko and Hsu, 2019; Akgun et al., 2015; Hsiao et al., 2013).

Empathetic viewers can be encouraged to support by buying Gojek services compared to similar services from competing brands. If consumers are very interested in a story, then they can identify with the actor in a similar way and even support the company by buying the product (Yueh and Zheng, 2020). The positive effect of empathy on consumer intentions was found by Chantika and Kusumawati (2021) and Akgun et al. (2015). The authors propose a hypothesis:

H8: Empathy mediates the positive effect of perceived esthetic on purchase intention.

H9: Empathy mediates the positive effect of narrative structure on purchase intention.

H10: Empathy mediates the positive effect of self-reference on purchase intention.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Population and Samples

The population used in this study is consumers who have watched Gojek's storytelling advertisement, so the size is not known with certainty. Hair et al. (2010: 662) explained that if the SEM models containing five constructs with more than three items (observed variables), the minimum sample is 100. It must have at least five times as many observations as the number of

variables to be analyzed (Hair et al., 2010: 102). So the minimum sample is the five times of the number indicators plus the paths ($5 \times (27+10) = 185$). Respondents will first watch the ad before starting to fill out the questionnaire, so convenience sampling was used to take samples.

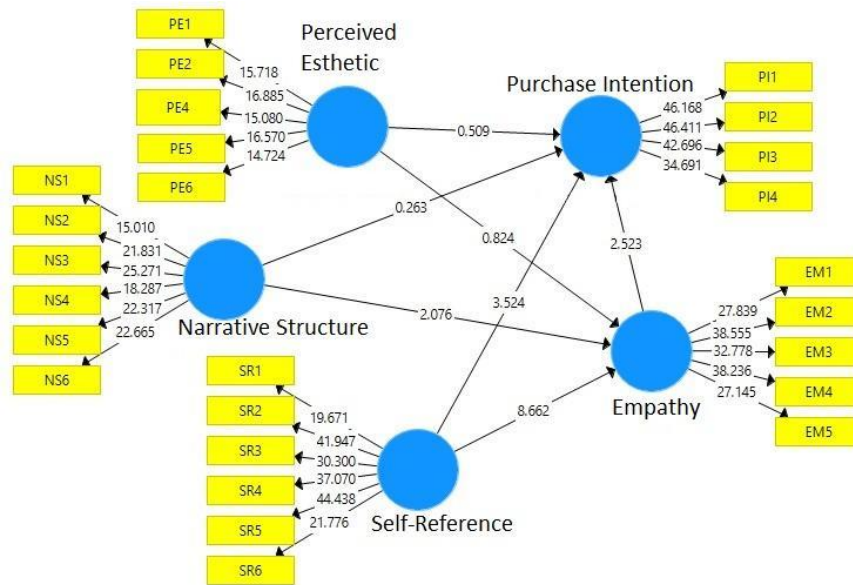


Figure 1. Research model

3.2 Variable Measurement

A closed questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale will be used to measure each variable. The questionnaire consists of 6 item indicators of perceived esthetic (Lavie and Tractinsky, 2004), 6 item indicators of narrative structure (Delgadillo and Escalas, 2004), 6 item indicators of self-references (Martin et al., 2004), 5 item indicators of empathy (Escalas and Stern, 2003), and 4 item indicators of purchase intention (Dam, 2020).

3.3 Data Analysis Tool

The data will be analyzed using SmartPLS software. The hypothesis will be tested using SEM-PLS. The effect of mediation will be tested using the Sobel test.

4. Results

4.1 General Description of Respondents

This research survey was conducted on 191 respondents who have watched Gojek’s storytelling ads at least once.

Table 1. General description of respondents

Gender			Occupation			Domicile		
Female	152	79.58%	Colleger	118	61.78%	Java Residents	180	94,24%
Male	39	20.42%	Private Sector Employee	34	17.80%			
Age			Government/BUMN Employee	13	6.81%			

17-26	152	79.58%	Housewife	11	5.76%	Outside Java Residents	11	5,76%
27-36	20	10.47%	Entrepreneur	7	3.66%			
37-46	8	4.19%	Student	3	1.57%			
>46	11	5.76%	Others	5	2.62%			

The majority of respondents are collegers because they are most familiar with social media, including YouTube, so they probably have watched Gojek’s storytelling ads at least once. Gojek’s storytelling ads have also been shown on television or in cinemas, so respondents other than students probably have watched them. For respondents aged >46 years watching the advertisements through videos provided in the questionnaire. Both collegers and noncollegers are also familiar with various Gojek products like goride, gosend, gofood, gopay, gotix, and others.

4.2 Outer Model Evaluation

4.2.1 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is used to measure whether the indicators of variables included are valid or not. The indicator is declared valid if the outer loading value is greater than 0.7. During the first validity test with a total of 27 indicators, it was found that the PE3 indicator was not valid (<0.7) so that the indicator was discarded. Then the second validity test (26 indicators) was carried out with the results of all indicators are valid with an average outer loading value of 0.803.

4.2.2 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is part of the measurement model to see the validity of a model. Ghozali (2014) states that the model has sufficient discriminant validity if the AVE root of each construct is greater than the correlation between constructs. The results of the analysis for the discriminant validity are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Result of the discriminant validity analysis

Variables	Perceived Esthetic	Narrative Structure	Self- Reference	Empathy	Purchase Intention
Perceived Esthetic	0.745				
Narrative Structure	0.723	0.771			
Self-Reference	0.506	0.631	0.806		
Empathy	0.495	0.602	0.752	0.840	
Purchase Intention	0.357	0.422	0.570	0.542	0.879

The discriminant validity results show that the AVE root value for all variables is greater than the correlation value between constructs. Thus, it has fulfilled the requirements and can be processed to the next step.

4.2.3 Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability

Cronbach’s Alpha and composite reliability are used to see the reliability of a construct. A construct is considered reliable if it has a Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability greater than 0.70. The five variables have an average Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.870 and an average composite reliability value of 0.906. Thus the five variables are declared reliable.

4.3 Inner Model Evaluation

The inner model describes the effect between variables. The evaluation of the inner model is done by looking at the value of the R square. The result of the R square for the empathy variable shows that perceived esthetic, narrative structure, and self-reference affects empathy by 0.594. The result of R square for the purchase intention variable shows perceived esthetic, narrative structure, and self-reference affects purchase intention by 0.356. Both R square values are moderate because they are above 0.33 (Ghozali, 2014: 42).

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is used to see the significance of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The independent variable is stated significant if the t statistic has a value greater than 1.96 and the p-value is below alpha 0.05. The results of the t-test analysis and significance can be seen in Table 3.

The values in the table are obtained by performing the bootstrapping procedure and sobel test. Sobel test was not carried out for perceived esthetic and narrative structure variables. This is because they do not have a direct influence on purchase intention which is a condition for mediation to occur. Thus, H8 and H9 are automatically rejected.

Table 3. Result of bootstrapping and sobel test

Path	Coefficient	t value	P value	Conclusion
PE -> PI	0.042	0.509	0.611	H1 is rejected
NS -> PI	0.023	0.236	0.793	H2 is rejected
SR -> PI	0.351	3.524	0.000	H3 is accepted
PE -> EM	0.061	0.824	0.410	H4 is rejected
NS -> EM	0.172	2.076	0.038	H5 is accepted
SR -> EM	0.613	8.662	0.000	H6 is accepted
EM -> PI	0.243	2.523	0.012	H7 is accepted
SR -> EM -> PI		2.429	0.015	H10 is accepted

5. Discussion

The results of hypothesis testing show that only self-reference and empathy have a direct effect on purchase intention. These results are in line with the research of Chantika and Kusumawati (2021), Chou et al. (2020), and Phua and Kim (2018). Empathy was also found to partially mediate the positive effect of self-reference on purchase intention.

This study found that the direct effect of self-reference on purchase intention is greater than the indirect effect through empathy. Thus, advertisers in Indonesia can use advertisements that make viewers feel connected to every scene that appears. The message conveyed becomes easier to understand so that consumers will empathize and be encouraged to buy the product.

Narrative structure affects empathy which is in line with research by Li and Liu (2020) and Akgun et al. (2015). Self-reference has a positive effect on empathy which is in line with the research of Chantika and Kusumawati (2021) and Ko and Hsu (2019). Perceived esthetic has no effect on empathy which is in line with the research of Chantika and Kusumawati (2021). Thus, if

advertisers only prioritize perceived esthetic in advertisements, they cannot generate viewers empathy, especially viewers from Indonesia.

6. Conclusion

Referring to the representativeness heuristic theory, the explanation that can be given regarding perceived esthetic which has no effect on purchase intention is the possibility that visually rich advertisements have not been able yet to describe the quality of products, especially services, in the eyes of consumers. Thus, they do not cause empathy and purchase intentions. Referring to the availability heuristic theory, explanations can be given regarding narrative structures that do not affect purchase intentions. Even the creative narratives in advertisements are able to touch or inspire the viewers, it has not made them compelled to buy products, especially services.

Referring to the adjustment and anchoring heuristic theory, self-reference in advertising is able to encourage the viewers to buy products, especially services, due to scenes that make the viewers feel connected. For example, the scene of a Gojek consumer trying to please her family by buying them a gift using gopay. Probably the Indonesian consumer understands the scene easily because they have experienced similar events. Thus, heuristic theory has played a role in explaining the effect of storytelling marketing on empathy and purchase intention.

Two variables whose hypotheses are not supported even though they are theoretically strong are the limitations of this study. Further studies are needed to verify it. Future research can re-examine the marketing storytelling variable against other variables, such as brand awareness.

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