



Skin Game's Storytelling Strategy in Building Brand Image as a Basic Skincare for Indonesian Skin

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Abstract

Background: Storytelling has emerged as a central strategy in digital brand communication, particularly in the skincare sector, where building consumer trust and brand image is essential. However, prior studies have been predominantly quantitative and focused on consumer perspectives, leaving a gap in qualitative exploration from the brand's standpoint in local contexts.

Objective: This research focuses on Skin Game as one of Indonesia's local skincare brands through the lenses of Narrative Theory, Narrative Paradigm, and Rhetorical Theory in examining how the brand uses storytelling to build its image and corporate reputation. This study examines the brand storytelling strategies of Skin Game, a local Indonesian skincare brand, through the integrated lenses of Narrative Theory, Narrative Paradigm, and Rhetorical Theory to understand how storytelling constructs brand image and reputation.

Methods: A qualitative exploratory case study design was employed, combining semi-structured interviews with four key informants and content analysis of Skin Game's Instagram, TikTok, and official website from February 2024 to August 2025.

Results: Findings reveal that Skin Game constructs its brand identity through local relevance, educational content, and emotional intimacy, delivered via personal language, minimalist visuals, and inclusive representation of tropical skin. These narrative strategies strengthen authenticity and consumer trust, reinforcing its positioning as a *Basic Skincare Expert*.

Conclusion: Storytelling functions as a strategic communication practice that enables local brands to build emotional connections, credibility, and long-term brand equity. The integration of narrative and rhetorical frameworks provides actionable insights for developing authentic, sustainable marketing strategies in competitive local markets.

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INTRODUCTION

Brand communication has transformed in the digital era from merely promoting products to narrating compelling stories (Rachman et al., 2024; Van Laer et al., 2019). Nowadays, brands must compete not only for consumer attention but also for the perceived value that consumers associate with them (Suryadi et al., 2018). This competition extends beyond product features to encompass the narratives brands present. Consequently, communication strategies have evolved from simply informing the public about products to creating emotional experiences and narratives that shape public perception (Davies et al., 2019). One of the most prevalent strategies

is brand storytelling, which conveys a brand's values and identity through authentic, relevant, and emotionally resonant narratives (Key et al., 2025; Okafor, 2025; Peho, 2020). Prior research indicates that storytelling serves as an effective mechanism for fostering emotional connections Kaur (2024), enhancing customer loyalty Moin (2024), and solidifying a brand's image and reputation over time. In the skincare sector, where trust between consumers and brands is paramount, narratives must embody sensitivity, empathy, and a genuine understanding of consumer needs (Kittler, 2025).

Indonesia represents a rapidly growing skincare market characterized by distinctive consumer trends. In addition to the country's tropical climate, Indonesian consumers face specific physiological challenges such as hyperpigmentation, excessive sebum production, and sensitivity to UV rays (Darmawan et al., 2020). This situation creates a demand for products that are not only effective but also tailored to local needs. Within this context, essential skincare products such as cleansers, moisturizers, and sunscreens have become increasingly important for consumers seeking to address skin concerns without complicating their routines (Goh et al., 2023). While basic skincare remains a solution to many skincare-related concerns, the way brands communicate this can significantly influence consumer trust through either relevance or irrelevance. However, previous research on brand storytelling has been largely quantitative in nature and focused primarily on consumer perspectives (Crespo et al., 2023). There have been limited qualitative explorations from the brand perspective, particularly regarding how companies strategically design and implement storytelling on digital platforms (Umoren et al., 2022).

This methodological gap is compounded by contextual limitations, as most existing studies focus on Western or luxury skincare markets, thereby overlooking the branding dynamics of local brands in emerging economies such as Indonesia. In addition, prior studies have largely emphasized quantitative marketing approaches and consumer perspectives while giving limited attention to narrative construction and storytelling from the organizational perspective. Furthermore, no previous research has specifically examined how a local Indonesian skincare brand develops and articulates its brand narrative. These gaps highlight the need for further investigation into how local skincare brands construct and communicate their narratives within the Indonesian beauty industry, which remains underexplored in the literature. To address these methodological, contextual, and empirical gaps, this study examines Skin Game, a local skincare brand that positions itself as an "Expert Basic Skincare for Indonesian Skin."

Grounded in its slogan, "simple but functional," the brand offers practical minimalist solutions while consistently presenting itself as a skin listener attuned to consumers' skincare journeys. Through transparent communication, customer education, and direct consultation services, this approach is reinforced by storytelling derived from user-generated and emotionally resonant campaigns. Although storytelling has emerged as a significant theme in branding across various fields, prior research has predominantly concentrated on the lifestyle and luxury sectors (Tuikka, 2025). Other studies have explored cultural and heritage branding, as well as culinary storytelling. However, storytelling within functional contexts, such as general skincare that emphasizes practicality and everyday relevance, remains underexplored. The effectiveness of leveraging relatability in advertising makes the case of Skin Game particularly distinctive.

Failing to articulate this perspective effectively highlights the importance of theory as a crucial component in developing a robust analysis of such cases by cohesively explaining how storytelling functions in branding. While earlier studies have examined various facets of storytelling as narrative Herman (2012), and some have focused on storytelling from rhetorical perspectives (West & Turner, 2021), few studies have integrated Narrative Theory, the Narrative Paradigm, and Rhetorical Theory. This integration is valuable because these frameworks offer contrasting yet complementary insights into how stories operate in brand communication. For example, Narrative Theory explains how narratives generate meaning and value (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2008). Building on this, the Narrative Paradigm posits that coherence and fidelity serve as benchmarks of narrative rationality, clarifying why certain stories are perceived by audiences as more credible and engaging (Fisher, 1985). On the other hand, Rhetorical Theory emphasizes the role of ethos, pathos, and logos in shaping audience attitudes (Zinaida, 2026). In combination, these frameworks provide a clearer understanding of the strategic ways Skin Game constructs coherence, emotional impact, and persuasive communication across interactive

dimensions.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to analyze the brand storytelling strategy of Skin Game in shaping the company's identity and brand equity as a basic skincare brand aligned with Indonesian consumers. This research aims to examine how a local skincare brand implements storytelling as a strategic communication tool to build emotional connections, trust, and differentiation within a highly competitive market by analyzing its brand narrative communication patterns. This study is distinctive in its brand-centered qualitative approach, which bridges three theoretical frameworks while addressing storytelling in functional branding, thereby providing implications for both theory and practice in sustainable marketing within transitional economies.

METHOD

Research Design

The current study was a qualitative investigation employing an exploratory holistic single-case study design. This particular design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the narrative communication strategies employed by Skin Game, which directly and indirectly influenced the brand's image and reputation as a basic skincare line relevant to the characteristics of Indonesian skin. When the distinctions between a phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined, a holistic single-case study is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to examine a phenomenon in its entirety within its real-life context (Yin, 2009).

This paper analyzed Skin Game as a singular bounded case of story-driven branding within Indonesia's local skincare industry. This design supported a multichannel, contextual, and integrative examination of storytelling practices while maintaining the entirety of the case as a single unit of analysis.

The research was grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which posits that social reality is a subjectively constructed outcome derived from both individual and collective interpretations. Within this framework, the researcher acted as the primary research instrument, engaging deeply with the data to elucidate the meanings embedded in Skin Game's narrative and its implications for brand positioning—specifically, how the brand's narrative decisions influenced its perceived identity and competitive position in the minds of consumers.

Unit of Analysis

Skin Game operated as a cohesive entity, and the unit of analysis in this study was the Skin Game brand as an organization implementing brand storytelling strategies through digital platforms such as Instagram and through organic audience engagement on platforms such as its official website. The current research utilized a holistic single-case study method, examining the entirety of Skin Game's communication activities as the actions and internal mechanisms of a functional system (Yin, 2009).

Data Collection Techniques

The methodologies employed to synthesize the data were primarily twofold. Initially, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four key informants: the internal public relations practitioner (the Chief Executive Officer), an external public relations consultant, and two content creators responsible for producing narrative content for Skin Game. These informants were deliberately selected because of their strategic and operational significance in the formulation and execution of the brand's communication strategies.

Subsequently, a narrative content analysis was conducted on Skin Game's official communication platforms, including Instagram and the official website, covering the period from February 2024 to August 2025. The analysis of posts, captions, stories, and website articles incorporated both textual and visual storytelling elements to examine how narratives were constructed. The methodological triangulation resulting from the combination of interviews and content analysis enhanced the credibility and validity of the findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis followed Spradley's four interconnected stages of ethnographic analysis, progressing systematically from domain and taxonomic analysis to componential and cultural

theme analysis. This framework provided a structured pathway for transitioning from initial descriptive codes to deeper interpretive insights, ultimately uncovering the cultural significance embedded within Skin Game's narrative practices.

To establish a holistic overview of the phenomenon, the analysis began with domain analysis to identify the broad categories outlining the general scope of the research object. Five interview transcripts, alongside selected Instagram and TikTok posts, were manually annotated using color-coded highlighting in Microsoft Word. Through repeated readings of this multimedia dataset, several predominant domains emerged, specifically emotional connection, authenticity, and educational engagement.

Next, taxonomic analysis was conducted to uncover the internal structure of these domains and determine their interrelationships. The objective at this stage was to map specific subcategories and identify their relationships. The domains were organized into distinct subthemes based on how different narrative elements supported the core foundation of the Skin Game brand, such as how emotive storytelling enhanced perceived brand authenticity and how educational explainer content reinforced overall brand positioning.

During the componential analysis phase, the identified categories were systematically contrasted to isolate their defining attributes by comparing elements both within and across domains to identify key distinguishing characteristics. Cross-referencing the interview data with the digital content revealed distinct platform-specific strategies. While Skin Game utilized Instagram for long-form, highly structured, and brand-building narratives, its TikTok content was markedly more concise and specifically tailored to align with current platform trends and algorithmic preferences. This contrast highlighted how the brand maintained a core identity while dynamically adapting its storytelling style across different digital environments.

In the final stage of cultural theme analysis, the relationships among the various domains were integrated into a singular overarching cultural narrative. This phase synthesized the components to understand how the analyzed domains intersected and contributed to the broader meaning of the study. This process culminated in the formulation of a central meta-theme: storytelling as a framework for empathetic communication of brand identity and trust. To conceptually ground these findings, this final phase integrated theoretical reflections from Narrative Theory and Rhetorical Theory. Narrative Theory illuminated how the brand's stories fostered coherence, meaning, and audience resonance, while Rhetorical Theory clarified how the strategic interplay of ethos, pathos, and logos generated persuasive and emotionally compelling brand narratives.

Data Validity and Credibility

The validity and credibility of the data were maintained through both source and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved corroborating findings across four key informants with distinct roles in the brand's communication strategy, thereby minimizing individual bias. Method triangulation involved comparing interview data with independently collected digital content from Instagram and TikTok, ensuring that emerging interpretations were confirmed across different forms of evidence. Together, these mechanisms strengthened the internal consistency and trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research employs a qualitative examination of comprehensive interview data obtained from three internal informants affiliated with Skin Game to derive its conclusions. The individuals directly responsible for strategizing and implementing the brand communication initiatives include the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), as well as Instagram and TikTok specialists. The content analysis of media associated with Skin Game was supplemented by interview data to provide a comprehensive indication of the application of storytelling strategies in strengthening brand image.

From the coding process, six principal themes considered relevant to the research objectives emerged: (1) Storytelling as the predominant strategy, (2) Form and style of narrative, (3) Adaptation across platforms, (4) Creative development and evaluation, (5) Brand image and consumer perceptions, and (6) Emotional proximity and engagement. For each theme, the

findings derived from the interviews and content analysis are presented in a precise and concise manner.

Skin Game Brand Communication with Story Being the Main Strategy

Internal stakeholders at Skin Game unanimously identify storytelling as the cornerstone of the company's communication framework. Executive and public relations insights reveal that this narrative-driven approach was intentionally designed to highlight core corporate values rather than focusing strictly on product attributes. By embedding authentic narratives into its foundational identity from the outset, the brand treats storytelling not as a temporary promotional gimmick, but as a permanent, long-term strategic asset. This strategic emphasis yields clear results, as digital media specialists note that narrative content consistently generates higher emotional resonance and engagement metrics compared to standard product-centric posts.

The effectiveness of this narrative strategy extends across multiple digital platforms, adapting seamlessly to distinct format requirements while preserving core brand authenticity. On TikTok, despite the constraints of brief, high-energy video formats, structured narratives remain essential because peer-to-peer recommendations and real consumer experiences serve as the foundation of audience trust. Similarly, on Instagram, marketing data confirm that audiences connect more deeply with story-driven layouts. As demonstrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the brand frequently leverages multi-slide carousel posts to pair personal transformation milestones, such as skin recovery journeys, with foundational educational content, including clarification of the distinction between skin hydration and moisture retention.

Ultimately, by prioritizing transparent, relatable, and personal narratives over aggressive sales tactics, the brand successfully positions itself as an empathetic partner in skin health rather than merely a product distributor. This comprehensive, long-term approach fosters stronger consumer trust and a more robust market reputation than conventional competitor marketing strategies. By framing the brand as an attentive listener rather than simply a seller, Skin Game transforms standard commercial communication into an ongoing and meaningful dialogue with its community.



Figure 1. Storytelling through light educational content on skincare concepts (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025)

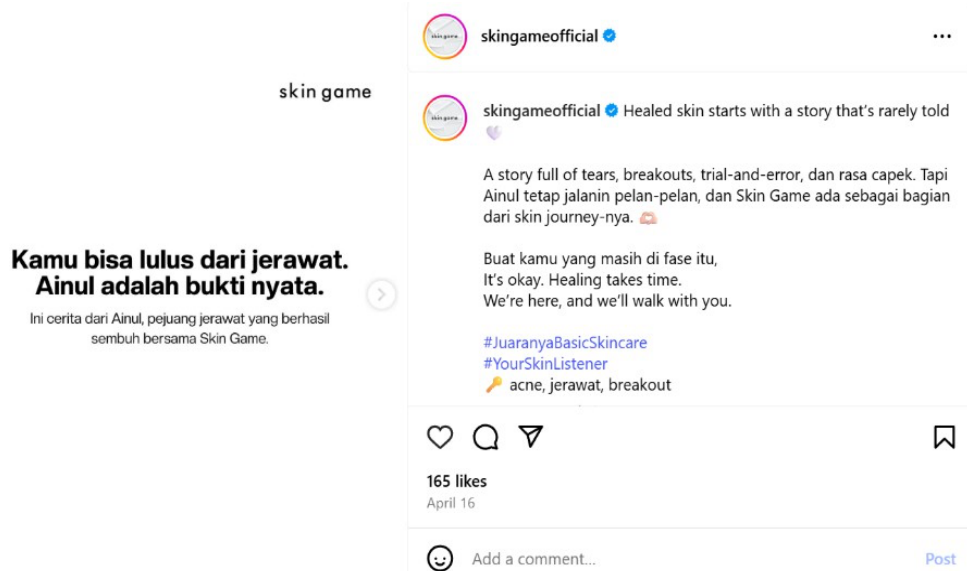


Figure 2. Storytelling through consumer acne recovery journey on Instagram (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

TikTok: Less serious and more relatable storytelling. Pure promotional posts, such as product bundles, do not elicit the same level of interaction. On the other hand, original stories—such as women sharing how mercury creams negatively affected them or sharing their personal experiences with acne—are received much more powerfully. As a TikTok Specialist, the fact that short, original, and authentic stories work best—and are trusted most by audiences—supports this pattern.

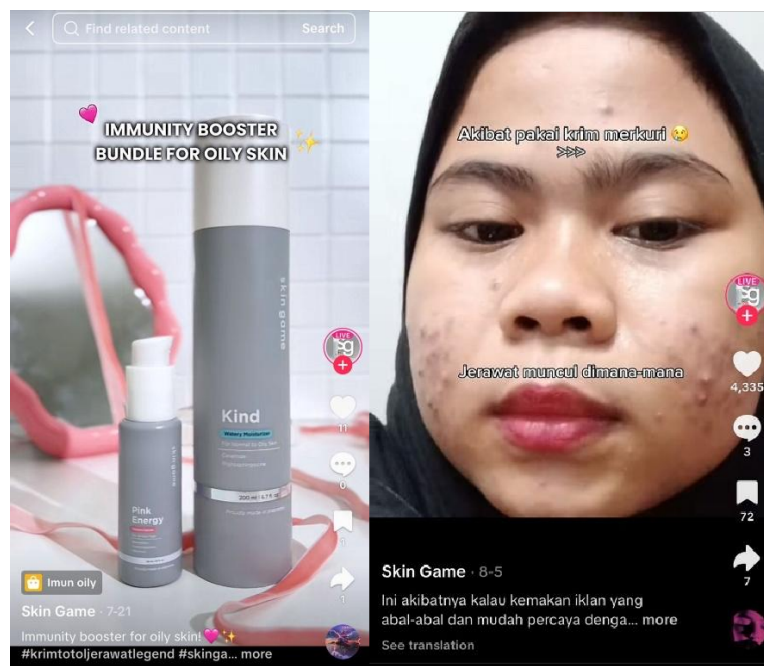


Figure 3. Storytelling through product-focused and cautionary consumer narratives on TikTok (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

Altogether, these results reaffirm the assertions of the CEO, PR Specialist, and PR Consultant that storytelling is not a short-term promotional tactic but an enduring strategic mindset. Skin Game strikes the right balance between empathy, education, and authenticity by consistently tailoring its narratives across platforms, resulting in strong engagement and a trustworthy brand image within the skincare category.

On the Digital Storytelling of Skin Game: Form and Style of Narrative

Skin Game's communication strategy is deliberately framed to be personal, conversational, and deeply relatable, consciously avoiding rigid or overly engineered corporate rhetoric. Insights from executive leadership and public relations specialists indicate that the brand's primary objective is to maintain an organic narrative framework. This approach ensures that consumers perceive the brand's stories as authentic reflections of daily reality rather than structured marketing campaigns. A critical element of this intimate approach, as highlighted by the Instagram Specialist, is the strategic use of everyday language and the informal "aku-kamu" ("I-you") pronoun dynamic. This specific linguistic choice establishes a sense of proximity and familiarity, allowing the brand to address common consumer pain points, such as oily or sensitive skin, through highly accessible and lightweight educational content.

This conversational ethos is precisely calibrated across digital platforms to maximize peer-to-peer connection. On TikTok, the brand utilizes a direct, one-to-one communication style that mimics a personal dialogue rather than a commercial pitch. To prevent the audience from feeling overwhelmed by sales tactics, the platform's content strategy maintains an equal balance by dividing the focus evenly between soft educational material and product messaging. Public relations assessments emphasize that this communication style remains entirely gender-neutral, grounded, and authentic. By prioritizing the lived experiences of peers over heavily manufactured marketing messages, the brand capitalizes on consumer trust, using emotional resonance as a core differentiator from its competitors.

Empirical content analysis confirms these internal communication strategies, demonstrating that the brand heavily relies on grounded, personal narratives. This is particularly evident on Instagram, where consumer-generated testimonials, such as documented acne recovery journeys, are seamlessly integrated with simple educational insights on topics such as skin hydration. This synergy between strategic intent and content execution demonstrates how directly addressing consumer struggles allows the brand to project a genuinely compassionate voice. Ultimately, the combination of informal language and shared consumer experiences validates the brand's goal of transforming traditional commercial broadcasting into a close, relatable, and trustworthy dialogue.



Figure 4. Narrative style through testimonial-based before-and-after storytelling (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025)



Figure 5. Narrative style through light educational explanation of skincare concepts (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

On TikTok, the style adapts into more creative and emotionally driven narratives, from playful metaphors, such as construction workers “fixing acne overnight,” to raw testimonials showing real skin struggles and gradual recovery. These forms resonate more strongly than purely promotional posts, which often receive lower engagement.

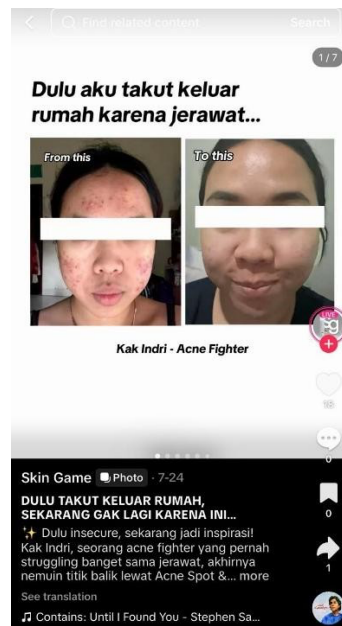


Figure 6. Storytelling through testimonial-based recovery narratives and creative visual metaphors on TikTok (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

The research revealed that authenticity and relatability are at the core of engagement across the platforms. This means that, in practice, Skin Game can reinforce its positioning by continuing to complement Instagram with both empathy and light education, and TikTok with emotionally charged storytelling that feels natural and authentic, while maintaining its values and adapting the medium to the audience. This not only keeps the brand credible but also provides consumers seeking honesty and relatability in skincare narratives with an experience they can connect to. This two-pronged strategy distinguishes Skin Game from competitors that favor hard-sell marketing and elevates the brand as an authority perceived as helpful and consumer-driven.

Adaptation of Skin Game's Story telling Strategy Cross Platform

Skin Game's narrative distribution is systematically tailored to capitalize on the unique strengths and user behaviors of each digital platform. Executive leadership and public relations specialists explain that, while storytelling serves as the immutable essence of the brand across all channels, content formats are flexibly adapted to contemporary trends. The PR consultant emphasizes that this cross-platform agility represents a deliberate corporate strategy rather than superficial trend-following. By maintaining this balance, Skin Game adapts its communication style across Instagram, TikTok, and its website without ever losing its foundational message: an explicit dedication to addressing the needs of tropical skin.

The execution of this strategy varies significantly based on platform-specific audience expectations. The Instagram specialist observes that users on the platform tend to seek more serious engagement, requiring narratives to be framed in an aesthetic, deeply informative, and visually professional manner. In contrast, the TikTok specialist notes that capturing attention within a fast-paced algorithmic environment demands lighthearted, high-impact content that resonates within the opening seconds while strictly preserving the brand's core message.

Empirical content analysis further substantiates these strategic adaptations, particularly through the brand's curated presence on Instagram. Here, Skin Game constructs structured narratives utilizing carousel and static posts that blend before-and-after visuals, dermatologist endorsements, and consumer spotlights. This sleek and informative content delivery pairs explicit product breakdowns with expert validation, effectively establishing institutional credibility for discerning consumers in search of reliable skincare solutions.

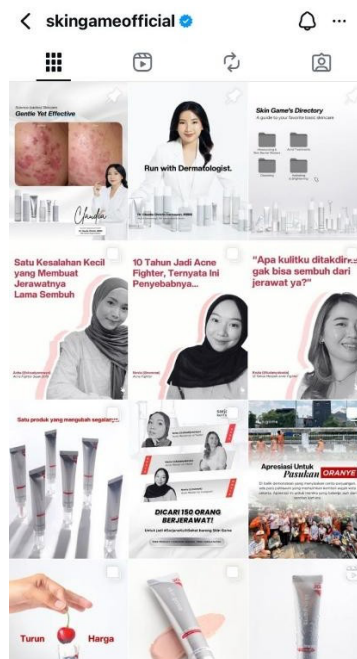


Figure 7. Overview of diverse storytelling formats on Instagram as part of cross-platform adaptation (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

In contrast, TikTok content is lighter, faster, and more playful, using POV formats, humor, and short testimonial-style videos that feel spontaneous and relatable. Here, stories are condensed into snappy hooks within the first few seconds to capture attention while still embedding the brand's empathetic narrative.

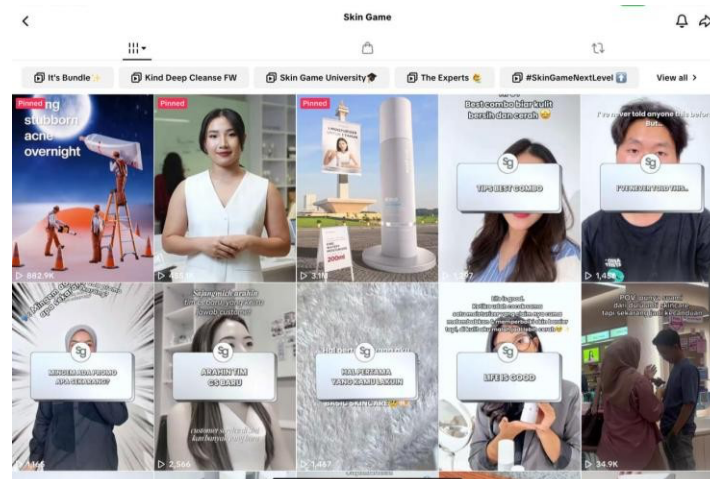


Figure 8. Overview of diverse storytelling formats on TikTok as part of cross-platform adaptation (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

This cross-platform difference highlights how Skin Game maintains a consistent brand identity while expertly adapting the tone of its content to audience expectations, resulting in a balanced and clear message across channels. On Instagram, the brand emphasizes polished, credible storytelling, while on TikTok, it fosters spontaneous and more emotion-driven anecdotal narratives, allowing the brand to remain relevant to the technical and cultural norms of both platforms while simultaneously securing audience loyalty and trust in the long term.

Skin Game Storytelling Content: A Creative Process and Evaluation

The creative pipeline at Skin Game begins with comprehensive consumer research, which the social media team subsequently translates into actionable content concepts. Executive leadership and public relations specialists reiterate that every campaign is fundamentally anchored in an acute understanding of both physiological skin needs and prevailing audience anxieties. To maintain strict quality control and optimization, the brand conducts regular weekly performance evaluations; the Instagram Specialist notes that tracking metrics such as engagement and shareability reveals that narrative-driven content consistently achieves the highest distribution rates.

While systematic research and experimental trial and error are critical to this process, digital execution requires a high degree of cultural agility. The TikTok Specialist observes that staying attuned to platform trends is essential, although the primary creative challenge involves distilling elaborate consumer stories into brief yet highly impactful visual snapshots. To navigate these constraints, the PR Consultant outlines a foundational three-step narrative architecture derived from audience research: capturing immediate interest through a relevant hook, cultivating deeper engagement through relatable storytelling, and ultimately delivering a sincere, unvarnished brand promise.

Empirical content analysis confirms that Skin Game's creative methodology is highly platform-adaptive yet selective in its execution. For instance, the brand's Instagram strategy shifted away from traditional functional copywriting that focused narrowly on product specifications, pivoting instead toward shorter, playful, and trend-driven language aligned with Gen Z communication norms. By replacing purely rational appeals with culturally grounded hooks, the brand experienced a substantial increase in organic engagement and shareability. This strategic evolution demonstrates that adopting a tone of voice that authentically mirrors the consumer's cultural landscape is far more impactful than standard commercial advertising.

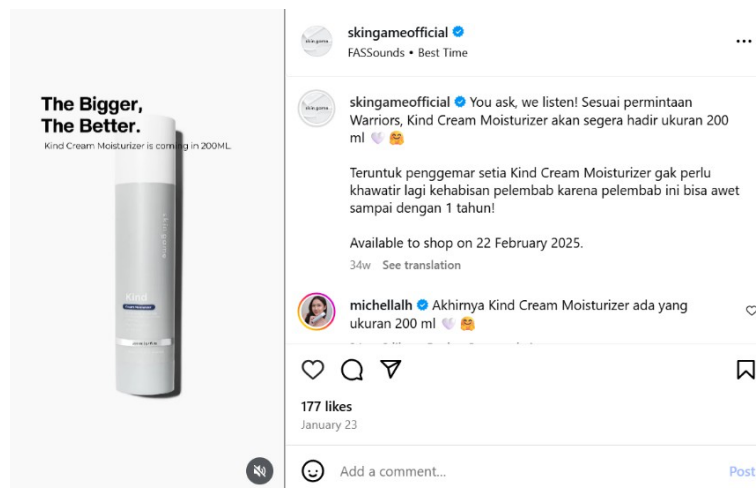


Figure 9. Instagram post using functional and explanatory copywriting for product launch (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).



Figure 10. Instagram post adopting playful, trend-driven language to resonate with Gen Z (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

However, on TikTok, merely adopting trends did not guarantee strong results. Challenge-based content, such as the Nicki Minaj trend, generated minimal interaction, whereas storytelling-based videos, such as an emotional story featuring an elderly couple's enduring love, resonated much more strongly. These findings further align with the TikTok Specialist's view that trends need to be filtered through a storytelling lens, as well as with the PR Consultant's perspective that emotional relevance and an authentic brand promise are central pillars of truly effective storytelling.

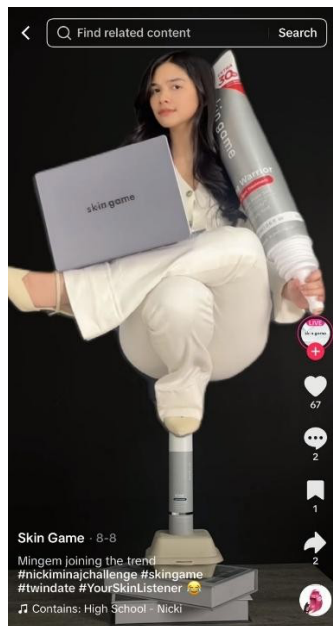


Figure 11. Challenge-based TikTok content using the Nicki Minaj trend with modest engagement (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).



Figure 12. Storytelling-driven TikTok content portraying an elderly couple's enduring love with strong resonance (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

Translated into practice, this means that Skin Game should continue testing trends by integrating them into intrinsic, emotionally resonant stories rather than positioning them within narratives merely as tactics. Third, storytelling and soft-selling approaches consistently outperform hard-selling or purely trend-based executions, implying that the highest level of impact from a brand's creative process occurs at the intersection of cultural relevance and emotional authenticity.

All in all, the evidence supports that Skin Game's best content lies not in chasing trends but in optimizing them into stories aligned with its brand identity as a long-term skincare ally for Indonesian consumers.

Customer Perception of Skin Game Story Telling and Brand Image

Executive leadership and public relations specialists at Skin Game emphasize that the brand's market presence is fundamentally sustained through the consistency and relevance of its core narratives. Rather than focusing solely on product quality, the company seeks recognition for actively accompanying consumers throughout their personal skincare journeys. This narrative approach is validated by internal insights from the Instagram Specialist, who observes that story-driven content excels because it validates consumers' experiences and fosters the trust necessary to address meaningful topics. This relationship is further strengthened by regional alignment; as the TikTok Specialist points out, public perception strongly favors Skin Game because it is recognized as a homegrown brand uniquely attuned to the specific environmental needs of tropical skin. Building on this momentum, the PR Consultant notes that, as consumer confidence in domestic brands rises, Skin Game strategically reinforces this favorable perception through authentic and high-impact storytelling.

Empirical content analysis across digital platforms confirms the practical execution of this unified brand-building strategy. On Instagram, the brand seamlessly integrates localized narratives and highly relevant topical issues, such as managing tropical skin conditions and educating the public about the severe risks associated with mercury-contaminated cosmetics. A definitive example of this transparent, consumer-centric methodology is the interactive campaign titled *"Dicari 150 Orang Berjerawat"* ("Wanted: 150 People with Acne"). This initiative serves as a practical demonstration of brand transparency and active consumer participation. By inviting direct engagement and showcasing real, unvarnished consumer realities, Skin Game effectively bridges the gap between corporate identity and everyday consumer experience, establishing a highly collaborative and trusted community ecosystem.



Figure 13. Instagram testimonial narrative highlighting consumer struggles with mercury-based products (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).



Figure 14. Instagram campaign *"Dicari 150 orang berjerawat"* emphasizing transparency and participatory engagement (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

Transformation stories—some showcasing real people recovering from acne, others featuring intergenerational testimonials—are shared by TikTok users and emotionally convey a sense of empathy, making Skin Game relatable as a skincare companion. These strategies illustrate that the positive perception of Skin Game cannot be attributed solely to the product claims it makes; rather, it primarily stems from authentic stories supported by consumers' experiences.

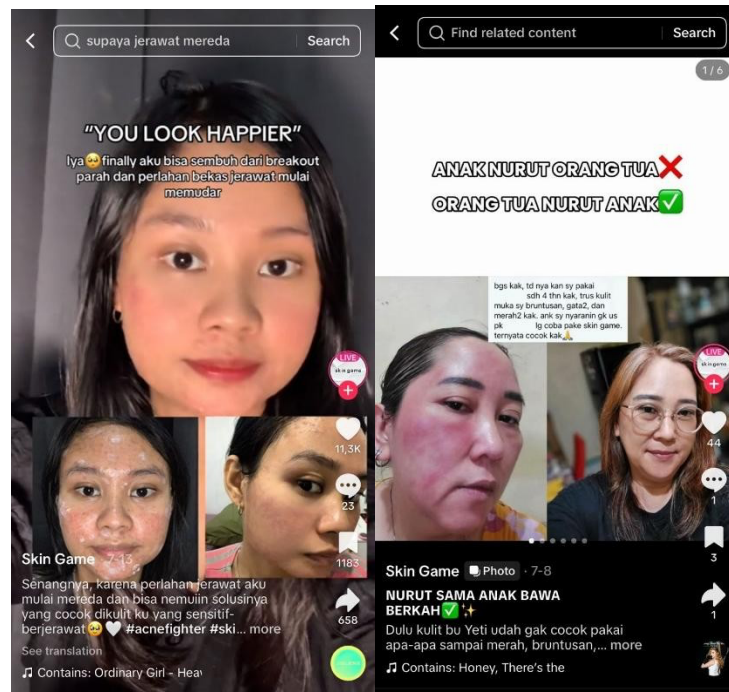


Figure 15. On TikTok, user-generated stories about journeys and experiences, from acne recovery stories to intergenerational anecdotes, create emotional stickiness and reiteration of Skin Game's identity as a skincare companion (Skin Game Official, 2025). Retrieved on September 12, 2025).

Put simply, the results suggest that while culture is critical, a story that elicits emotion yields the greatest dividends. Instagram can be leveraged for educational and participatory campaigns that emphasize authority and inclusivity, while TikTok can be utilized to build trust through authenticity and testimonials. By adopting this dual-system approach, Skin Game adds an extra layer of connection and credibility for consumers.

When collated, these pieces of evidence tell us that Skin Game is able to maintain its channel-native narrative and retain its credibility as a local brand, perceived not only for the quality of its products but also as an empathetic brand that supports Indonesians throughout their skincare journey.

The Emotional Proximity and Skin Game Storytelling Involvement

Executive leadership and public relations specialists at Skin Game emphasize that emotional resonance forms the foundational core of the brand's communication strategy. Because contemporary audiences seek to feel genuinely valued and heard, consumer-centric storytelling is utilized to fulfill this interpersonal need. Internal insights from the Instagram Specialist indicate that organically narrated user experiences yield higher engagement because their inherent authenticity fosters an emotional bond and a sense of mutual trust between the seller and the consumer. This dynamic is further supported by the TikTok Specialist, who observes that campaigns addressing sensitive personal vulnerabilities, such as skin insecurities, elicit more profound emotional reactions and greater audience involvement. From a strategic perspective, the PR Consultant asserts that emotion is the defining factor that translates corporate planning into active engagement, noting that an established and loyal consumer community can serve as a powerful force for organically propagating the brand's narrative.

Empirical content analysis reveals that Skin Game systematically constructs a sense of

episodic intimacy by shifting its focus away from purely product-centric marketing. The brand's messaging often integrates individual consumer experiences with broader societal realities, particularly within the context of economic instability in Indonesia. A key example is the "Skin Game Peduli ODGJ" initiative, which demonstrates how the brand embeds empathy and social responsibility into its core identity. By addressing both the personal anxieties of its consumers and broader humanitarian concerns, these narratives reinforce relational ties and cultivate a brand image rooted in genuine empathy. Consequently, the brand transcends its commercial function, transforming its communication into a platform for shared social consciousness and community support.



Figure 16. Skin Game Peduli ODGJ: Empathy and Support for Mental Health Issues (Skin Game Official, 2025. Retrieved on September 12, 2025)

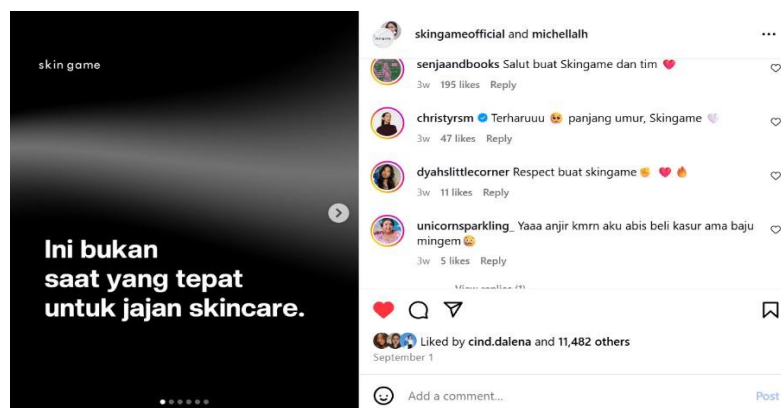


Figure 17. An Ad at Your Fridge Door: The Acquisition of Pleasures and a Feeble Response to Economic Conditions (Skin Game Official, 2025) Retrieved on September 12, 2025)

TikTok has emotional engagement percolating through everyday relational stories, e.g., father-daughter skincare shopping moments, as well as sincere testimonials of acne recovery journeys. The former appeals to emotions by invoking values nearly everyone shares, such as the importance of family; the latter does so by establishing credibility through concrete evidence of transformation. Both strategies reinforce Skin Game as a relatable skincare companion.

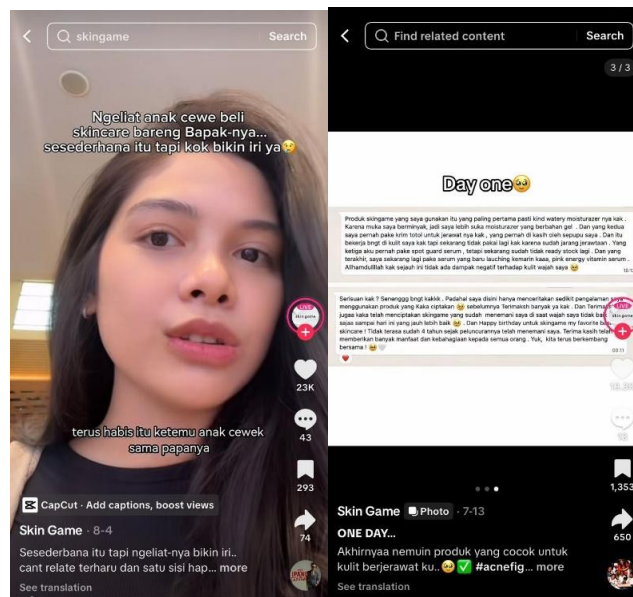


Figure 18. Content of skin game on Tik Tok Provides for more real emotional inputs from audience (Skin Game Official,2025) Retrieved on September 12, 2025)

More concretely, the takeaway is that emotional engagement is best navigated at the intersection of empathy and authenticity. Instagram helps optimize social responsiveness toward cultural and community issues, while TikTok delivers more personal, emotionally resonant narratives. In conclusion, these strategies demonstrate that Skin Game not only cultivates loyal and steadfast customers by offering skincare solutions, but also integrates its brand into the emotionally and pragmatically grounded experiences of everyday life.

Discussion

These findings suggest that Skin Game conceptualizes its communication strategy as a form of narrative practice. According to Narrative Theory, “narratives represent a fundamental human mechanism for engaging with time, processes, and transformations” (Herman et al., 2012). Skin Game immerses itself in the daily realities of Indonesian society through narratives centered on acne treatment, addressing issues such as the presence of mercury in skincare products and the associated risks. This narrative coherence is maintained through a persistent emphasis on empathy and authenticity, while its credibility is rooted in fidelity to local cultural and dermatological contexts.

The narrative dimension is further reinforced through the adaptation of stories across various media platforms. On Instagram, the conversational tone and inclusion of light administrative details exemplify the tenets of Narrative Theory, which posits that narrative exists “as an intimate relation of a shared language and context” (Herman et al., 2012). Brief testimonials and narratives aligned with current trends underscore the enduring effectiveness of storytelling, particularly when presented in concise and emotionally engaging formats on TikTok. These patterns affirm that impactful narratives are not only internally constructed, but also carefully contextualized for their audiences.

While Narrative Theory elucidates how Skin Game’s narratives generate meaning and resonance, Rhetorical Theory addresses the mechanisms through which those stories exert persuasive influence. In the realm of persuasion, the most effective approach typically involves a judicious balance of ethos, pathos, and logos, as posited by Aristotle’s classical framework. The values cultivated by Skin Game exemplify ethos through the trustworthiness associated with local brands; pathos through emotionally evocative campaigns such as “Dicari 150 Orang Berjerawat”; and logos through educational content that reinforces expert endorsements with rational arguments. This dynamic interplay creates a balanced rhetorical relationship that strengthens both credibility and emotional intimacy.

Furthermore, although Skin Game portrays a participatory essence within its campaigns, it simultaneously underscores the role of communication in shaping public discourse. Within

Rhetorical Theory, rhetoric is understood to transcend mere message transmission by functioning as a dialogue with publics. Skin Game modernizes this concept for the 21st century by integrating audience narratives and experiences into its consumer-generated platform. In doing so, consumers become active participants rather than passive recipients, while the campaign itself becomes increasingly community-oriented and brand-centered rather than solely product-centric.

Ultimately, this analysis leads to the conclusion that the true efficacy of Skin Game's strategic initiatives resides in the interstitial space between narrative and rhetoric. Narrative Theory explains how authenticity, coherence, and cultural relevance resonate with audiences, while Rhetorical Theory demonstrates how credibility, emotion, and logic can be harmonized to enhance persuasive impact. These findings indicate that storytelling transcends a temporary marketing tactic; rather, it constitutes a communicative practice encompassing both meaning-making (narrative) and persuasion (rhetoric), thereby shaping the foundational elements of Skin Game's pursuit of long-term credibility and brand identity.

Scientific Contribution

These findings make a dual theoretical contribution. First, they extend Narrative Theory and the Narrative Paradigm to the underexplored domain of functional skincare branding in an emerging market, demonstrating that coherence and fidelity remain operative even in short-form, platform-adapted brand content. Second, they expand the application of Rhetorical Theory beyond political and public discourse into digital brand communication, revealing that ethos, pathos, and logos are simultaneously embedded within social media storytelling strategies. Together, these contributions affirm that the triadic intersection of narrative coherence, emotional resonance, and rhetorical persuasion constitutes a powerful and replicable model for local brand communication in competitive digital markets.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study extends narrative and rhetorical frameworks to functional branding within the context of an emerging economy, enriching existing models through platform-specific insights. Practically, local skincare brands should: (1) anchor storytelling in culturally grounded and locally relevant narratives; (2) develop platform-native content strategies that maintain brand voice consistency while adapting tone and format; and (3) leverage participatory campaigns to transform consumers into active brand advocates.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

This study is subject to several limitations. First, as a holistic single-case study, the findings are bounded by the specific context of Skin Game and may not be directly transferable to other local skincare brands. Second, the content analysis covers a limited time frame (February 2024–August 2025) and focuses exclusively on Instagram and TikTok, thereby excluding other digital platforms. Third, consumer reception data were not collected directly. Future research should employ multi-case comparative designs, incorporate direct consumer response data, and examine the longitudinal evolution of brand storytelling strategies as platforms and algorithms continue to evolve.

CONCLUSION

Finally, this paper closes a research gap on storytelling in functional branding by examining storytelling not merely as a selling tool. This study demonstrates that Skin Game strategically employs brand storytelling as a core communication practice to construct its brand image and reputation as a Basic Skincare Expert for Indonesian skin. The integration of locally relevant narratives, light educational content, emotional intimacy, and participatory campaigns collectively positions the brand as both an authoritative skincare guide and an empathetic consumer companion. The findings confirm that authenticity, emotional resonance, and audience participation are key drivers of trust-building and long-term brand reputation in the local skincare sector.

Practically, this research demonstrates how a combination of narrative and rhetorical perspectives offers a richer understanding of brand storytelling. Theoretically, this research

extends existing scholarship by simultaneously applying Narrative Theory, the Narrative Paradigm, and Rhetorical Theory to a single functional branding case—not merely confirming these frameworks, but demonstrating how their integration generates a more comprehensive explanatory model of brand storytelling than any single framework could produce alone. This constitutes a genuine theoretical extension, particularly within the emerging-market and local brand communication literature. This study also provides practical implications for local brands operating in competitive markets. When storytelling functions as a sustainable strategic model that balances emotional and rational appeals while motivating audiences to take action, brands can deepen consumer connection, socialization, and longevity.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Nirwasita Fathinah Maharani contributed to conceptualisation, theoretical framework development, data collection (interview design and execution), data analysis, and manuscript writing. Muhammad Aras contributed to methodology design, content analysis, data interpretation, and revision. Both authors from Bina Nusantara University approved the final version of the manuscript.

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