

ATTENTION ECONOMY IN DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION: HOW AUTHENTIC AND HUMOROUS SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT DRIVES AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT IN FOOD-SECTOR SMES

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how attention economy strategies are enacted in digital marketing communication through the Instagram content of a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) in Indonesia's food sector, Aldi's Burger. **Design/methodology/approach:** A descriptive qualitative design employing reflexive thematic content analysis was used to examine promotional texts, visual content, and audience engagement patterns on the Instagram account @aldis.burger, following the six-phase analytic procedure of Braun and Clarke (2021). **Findings:** The analysis identified three interrelated attention economy strategies that jointly generate stopping power and audience engagement: (1) unique, absurd, and humorous promotional messages; (2) authentic and spontaneous visual content that favors authenticity over commercial polish; and (3) entertainment-oriented viral content that stimulates organic sharing and reach. **Research limitations/implications:** As a single-case qualitative study relying on publicly observable Instagram content, the findings are analytically rather than statistically generalizable and would benefit from cross-platform and multi-case replication. **Practical implications:** SME practitioners can strengthen brand awareness, engagement, and consumer trust by prioritizing authentic, entertaining, and culturally distinctive content over conventional polished promotion. **Originality/value:** The study extends attention economy theory beyond large corporations and influencer marketing by demonstrating how an SME strategically converts humor, authenticity, and culturally embedded religious expression exemplified by the tagline "all burgers belong to Allah" into a scroll-stopping communication mechanism, contributing novel empirical evidence on attention capture in resource-constrained digital marketing contexts.

Keywords: attention economy; digital marketing communication; social media marketing; authenticity; audience engagement

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In a crowded social media environment, businesses compete not only on product quality but on their ability to capture and hold audience attention. This study shows how Aldi's Burger, a small Indonesian food business, uses humor, unpolished authentic footage, and entertaining viral moments rather than conventional advertising to stand out on Instagram, build engagement, and expand its reach. The findings offer practical, low-cost guidance for entrepreneurs and marketing

practitioners seeking effective social media strategies, while contributing new evidence to the growing scholarship on attention economy and digital marketing communication in the SME context.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has fundamentally reconfigured contemporary marketing communication. As information volumes generated on social media continue to grow exponentially, businesses increasingly compete not primarily through product quality but through their capacity to capture and sustain consumer attention (Davenport & Beck, 2001). Within this landscape, the attention economy has become an influential theoretical lens, framing human attention as a scarce, allocable, and economically valuable resource that digital platforms and brands actively compete to acquire (Pedersen, Albris, & Seaver, 2021). The proliferation of short-form video, infinite-scroll interfaces, and algorithmically curated feeds has intensified this competition, transforming attention itself into what Heitmayer (2025) describes as a universal symbolic currency exchanged across social media ecosystems. Consequently, the ability of a brand to interrupt habitual scrolling behavior—commonly referred to as generating stopping power has become a critical determinant of marketing communication effectiveness in saturated digital environments.

A growing body of research has examined how individuals and organizations manage attention within this economy. Studies on social media influencers show that attention is neither uniformly desirable nor straightforwardly monetizable, with practitioners actively developing strategies to both capture and mitigate audience attention as their online personas evolve (Kubler, 2023). Parallel research in the sport and entertainment industries demonstrates that attention itself can be econometrically modeled as a driver of platform revenue and viewership (Watanabe, Xue, Newman, & Yan, 2021), while person-brand scholarship shows how individuals strategically build recognizable identities within organized online attention markets (Smith & Fischer, 2021). At the same time, critical scholarship cautions that the systematic extraction of user attention raises ethical concerns regarding manipulation and digital well-being (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021). Collectively, this literature establishes attention economy as a robust and multi-disciplinary framework, yet it has been developed largely with reference to large platforms, celebrity influencers, and Western corporate contexts.

Despite these advances, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which typically operate with constrained marketing budgets and limited production capacity strategically implement attention economy principles through culturally distinctive communication practices. Existing SME-focused research has predominantly examined social media adoption, customer engagement metrics, and return-on-investment considerations at a broad, bibliometric level (Pellegrino & Abe, 2023), without closely investigating the specific communicative mechanisms such as humor, deliberate imperfection, or culturally embedded narrative through which resource-constrained businesses generate stopping power. Within the food and beverage sector specifically, research has begun to link visual and platform-level content characteristics to engagement outcomes (Philp, Jacobson, & Pancer, 2022; Park & Namkung, 2022) and to document how digital engagement shapes customer responsiveness in food businesses more broadly (Sarkis, Jabbour Al Maalouf, & Al Geitany, 2025), yet this evidence remains largely quantitative and content-feature oriented rather than

explanatory of the underlying communicative strategy. Moreover, while recent studies have begun to interrogate the tension between curated authenticity and the pressures of the attention economy on individual platform users (Goode, Rodner, & Lawlor, 2023), few studies have examined how these same dynamics operate at the level of an SME brand account combining humor, authenticity, and entertainment-oriented virality as an integrated strategic bundle rather than as isolated tactics.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how Aldi's Burger, an Indonesian food-sector SME, employs attention economy strategies in its digital marketing communication through Instagram content. Specifically, the study investigates how unconventional promotional narratives, authentic visual communication, and entertainment-oriented viral content function as mechanisms for capturing audience attention, stimulating engagement, and expanding organic reach. In addressing these questions, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) how does @aldis.burger construct humorous and unconventional promotional messages to generate stopping power; (2) how does authentic, spontaneous visual content shape audience trust and engagement; and (3) how does entertainment-oriented viral content extend the account's organic reach and brand awareness.

The originality of this study lies in its focus on the application of attention economy strategies within SME social media marketing, particularly through the integration of humor, authenticity, and culturally distinctive narratives. Its novelty is demonstrated by an explicit examination of unconventional religious-humorous expression exemplified by the tagline "all burgers belong to Allah" as a culturally embedded form of stopping power that has not been previously documented in the digital marketing communication literature. Theoretically, the study extends attention economy scholarship (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Heitmayer, 2025) beyond influencer and platform-level analysis toward SME brand communication. Empirically, it contributes qualitative evidence, grounded in reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), on how authenticity, humor, and entertainment jointly operate as an integrated engagement mechanism (cf. Chen, Yan, & Smith, 2023; Kulikovskaja, Hubert, Grunert, & Zhao, 2023). Methodologically, it demonstrates how qualitative content analysis of naturally occurring social media data can illuminate mechanisms that survey-based engagement studies are less well positioned to capture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on the attention economy, first systematically articulated by Davenport and Beck (2001), who argued that in an information-saturated world, human attention rather than information itself constitutes the scarcest and most valuable organizational resource. Building on this premise, Pedersen, Albris, and Seaver (2021) reconceptualize attention as a politically and economically contested field in which platforms, advertisers, and users continuously negotiate the terms of visibility and extraction. More recently, Heitmayer (2025) proposes that social media has ushered in a "second wave" of attention economics, in which attention functions as a symbolic currency that can be accumulated, converted, and exchanged across platforms. Within digital marketing communication, this scarcity principle implies that content must generate stopping power—the capacity to interrupt habitual scrolling behavior before any persuasive or informational value can be realized (Kubler,

2023).

Within social media environments, audience attention is shaped by several interacting communicative elements, including message creativity, visual authenticity, and entertainment value. Content that departs from conventional promotional patterns tends to be more effective at capturing attention because it introduces novelty and provokes curiosity (Gerrath & Biraglia, 2021). A parallel and increasingly influential concept is authenticity over perfection: contemporary digital audiences, particularly younger cohorts, tend to value natural, spontaneous, and unpolished content over highly produced commercial advertising (Kreling, Meier, & Reinecke, 2022). Goode, Rodner, and Lawlor (2023) further show that platform users actively negotiate an “authenticity bind” between curated, monetizable personas and unfiltered self-presentation, using less-polished content as a strategic escape from the pressures of the attention economy. Authentic communication of this kind enhances perceived credibility, strengthens emotional connection between brands and consumers, and encourages voluntary audience participation (Chen, Yan, & Smith, 2023).

Attention acquisition also constitutes the initial stage of a broader social media engagement process. Once attention is captured, audiences are more likely to engage through likes, comments, shares, and discussion, thereby increasing organic reach and reinforcing brand awareness (Santos, Cheung, Coelho, & Rita, 2022; Lim & Rasul, 2022). The strength of this attention-to-engagement conversion is not uniform across platforms or content formats: comparative evidence indicates that engagement responds differently to platform-specific content strategies, underscoring the importance of tailoring communication tactics to the affordances of the platform in question (Shen, 2023). Humor plays a particularly important role in this process: aggressive or playful brand-to-brand humor, and meme-based communication more broadly, has been shown to increase consumer engagement behavioral intention when perceived as benign rather than offensive (Ning, Hu, Tu, & Li, 2022; Razzaq, Shao, & Quach, 2023), although humor that is perceived as harsh, culturally inappropriate, or poorly targeted can just as readily generate negative affective responses and damage brand image (Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2023). From this perspective, attention economy strategies extend beyond simply attracting viewers; they facilitate sustained engagement and relationship-building within digital communities (Kulikovskaja, Hubert, Grunert, & Zhao, 2023). Based on these theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes attention economy strategy as comprising three interrelated dimensions: (1) unique and humorous promotional messages, (2) authentic visual communication, and (3) entertainment-oriented viral content that stimulates audience engagement.

Development of Research Propositions

Prior studies consistently demonstrate that effective digital marketing communication depends on an organization’s ability to attract and sustain audience attention. Authentic visual communication strengthens the emotional relationship between brands and consumers, particularly among digitally native audiences who generally prefer natural, relatable content over formal advertising (Kreling et al., 2022; Krishen, Dwivedi, Bindu, & Kumar, 2021). Likewise, creative and unconventional content has been found to interrupt scrolling behavior more effectively, thereby increasing opportunities for engagement (Gerrath & Biraglia, 2021).

The literature further indicates that humor is an important driver of content virality. Entertaining and mildly transgressive content generates positive emotional responses that

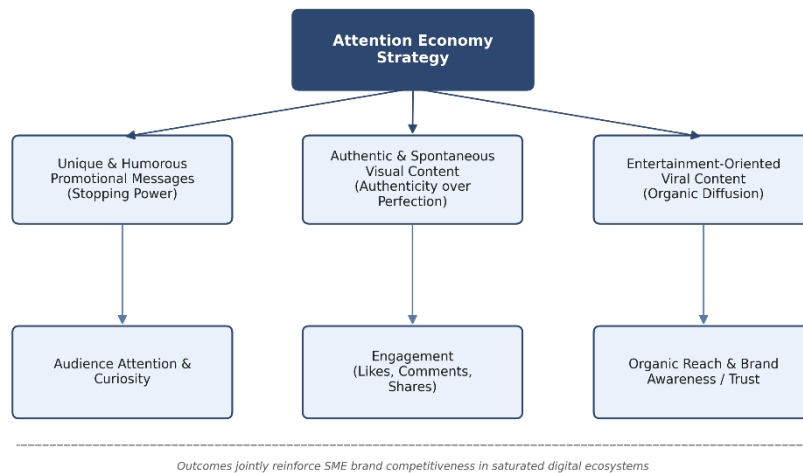
encourage voluntary sharing, thereby expanding organic distribution across social networks (Razzaq et al., 2023; Ning et al., 2022). In parallel, user-generated and firm-generated content that appears authentic rather than commercially engineered enhances consumer trust by reducing the perception of excessive commercialization, which in turn positively shapes purchase-related behavioral intention (Duan, 2021; Ebrahimi, Khajeheian, Soleimani, Gholampour, & Fekete-Farkas, 2022). Higher levels of social media engagement subsequently contribute to stronger brand loyalty and repeat interaction between brands and consumers (Goyal & Verma, 2022; Sanches & Ramos, 2025).

Despite these findings, existing research has predominantly examined authenticity, humor, and engagement as separate constructs, typically tested through quantitative, survey-based designs at the level of large or multinational brands. Comparatively limited qualitative research has investigated how these communicative elements operate jointly, as an integrated attention economy strategy, within SMEs employing culturally distinctive branding practices. This study addresses that gap by examining how unconventional promotional narratives, authentic visual content, and viral entertainment function simultaneously to capture audience attention and stimulate engagement on Instagram. Based on the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed above, this study advances the following research propositions, which structure the subsequent thematic analysis: P1. Unique, humorous, and unconventional promotional messages enhance audience attention by increasing the stopping power of social media content. P2. Authentic and spontaneous visual content strengthens consumer trust and increases audience engagement with the brand. P3. Entertainment-oriented viral content expands the organic reach of digital marketing communication by encouraging user interaction and content sharing.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model of this study (Figure 1) positions attention economy strategy as the central construct shaping the effectiveness of digital marketing communication. This construct is operationalized through three complementary dimensions unique and humorous promotional messages, authentic visual content, and entertainment-oriented viral content which are theorized to jointly generate audience attention and curiosity, stimulate measurable engagement (likes, comments, and shares), and expand organic reach and brand awareness (Santos et al., 2022; Sanches & Ramos, 2025). Consistent with the propositions above, the model illustrates how distinctive, culturally embedded communication strategies enable resource-constrained SMEs to compete effectively within increasingly saturated digital ecosystems by converting scarce audience attention into meaningful consumer engagement and, ultimately, brand competitiveness.

Figure 1
Conceptual Model of Attention Economy Strategy in SME
Digital Marketing Communication.



Source: Developed by the authors, based on Davenport and Beck (2001), Santos et al. (2022), and Sanches and Ramos (2025).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using qualitative content analysis to examine the implementation of attention economy strategies in digital marketing communication. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand how communication practices, visual representations, and promotional narratives were constructed and interpreted within their natural digital context, rather than to test causal relationships statistically; qualitative inquiry is particularly well suited to dissecting such complex, socially embedded marketing phenomena and offering contextual, human-centered insight that purely quantitative designs are less able to provide (Lim, 2024). Qualitative content analysis enables researchers to systematically identify recurring themes, communication patterns, and symbolic meanings embedded in social media content (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The research focused on the Instagram account @aldis.burger, which represents Aldi's Burger, an Indonesian small and medium-sized enterprise operating in the food and beverage sector. The account was selected through purposive sampling because it exhibits distinctive communication characteristics, including humorous promotional narratives, authentic visual presentation, and highly engaging content that has attracted substantial public attention. This single-case design is consistent with prior qualitative SME social media research, which similarly relies on information-rich, theoretically relevant cases rather than statistical representativeness (Pellegrino & Abe, 2023).

The primary data consisted of publicly accessible Instagram content, including feed posts, captions, reels, photographs, videos, and profile information. Audience interaction indicators, such as comments, likes, and observable engagement patterns, were also considered to support

contextual interpretation. Because all data were obtained from publicly available sources, no direct interaction with human participants was involved. Data were collected through non-participant digital observation of the Instagram account over the study period. All relevant posts representing communication strategies associated with attention economy were documented through screenshots, field notes, and content categorization. The selection of content was guided by three predefined analytical dimensions derived from the literature: (1) unique and humorous promotional messages, (2) authentic visual content, and (3) entertainment-oriented viral content.

The collected data were analyzed using reflexive thematic content analysis, following the six-phase procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2021) and operationalized in applied qualitative research by Campbell et al. (2021): (1) data familiarization, involving repeated observation and review of Instagram content; (2) initial coding, identifying textual, visual, and interactional elements related to audience attention; (3) theme generation, grouping similar codes into broader analytical categories; (4) theme review, examining consistency and coherence across emerging themes; (5) theme definition and interpretation, connecting empirical findings with attention economy and digital marketing communication theory; and (6) report production, synthesizing findings into an integrated explanation of Aldi's Burger's communication strategies. Unlike coding-reliability approaches that treat researcher subjectivity as a source of bias to be minimized, reflexive thematic analysis treats the analysts' interpretive engagement with the data as an analytic resource, provided it is made transparent and consistently applied (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis was guided deductively by the conceptual framework in Figure 1 while remaining open to themes emerging inductively from the empirical data.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed methodological triangulation, comparing textual content, visual representations, and audience engagement indicators across multiple Instagram posts. The researchers conducted iterative coding and repeated comparison among themes to ensure analytical consistency, and interpretation was continuously linked to established theoretical perspectives on attention economy, authenticity, and social media engagement to strengthen theoretical validity. This study exclusively analyzed publicly accessible digital content available on Instagram and did not involve interviews, surveys, or other forms of direct interaction with human participants; formal ethical approval and informed consent were therefore not required. Nevertheless, the researchers adhered to ethical principles for internet-mediated research by reporting findings objectively, maintaining contextual integrity, and avoiding disclosure of personal information beyond what was already publicly available on the account.

RESULT

Profile of the Research Context

As of the observation period, the Instagram account @aldis.burger had approximately 25,300 followers, 154 posts, and followed only six other accounts, indicating a deliberately curated and asymmetric follower relationship typical of brand accounts. The profile provides operational information, including a pre-order system requiring at least one day's advance notice, walk-in service hours (5:00–9:00 p.m.), and the business location in Cempaka Putih, Central Jakarta. The account also uses Instagram Story Highlights to archive customer queues, customer reviews, and collaborations with food vloggers, indicating that Instagram functions not only as a promotional channel but as the primary communication interface between the business and its

customers. Table 1 summarizes the account's key profile characteristics.

Table 1
Profile of the Instagram Account @aldis.burger

Attribute	Value / Description
Followers	≈ 25,300
Posts	154
Accounts followed	6
Order system	Pre-order (minimum 1 day in advance); walk-in service 5:00–9:00 p.m.
Location	Cempaka Putih, Central Jakarta, Indonesia
Story Highlights	Customer queues, customer reviews, food-vlogger collaborations
Primary content types	Feed photos, short videos/reels, captions, customer-tagged content

Source: Non-participant observation of @aldis.burger, compiled by the authors.

Qualitative content analysis identified three dominant themes representing Aldi's Burger's attention economy strategy: (1) unique and humorous promotional messages, (2) authentic and spontaneous visual content, and (3) entertainment-oriented viral content. Table 2 summarizes these themes together with illustrative evidence and their corresponding theoretical linkage, before each theme is discussed narratively below.

Table 2
Thematic Summary of Attention Economy Strategies
Identified in @aldis.burger Content

Theme	Illustrative Evidence	Attention Economy Function	Related Literature
Unique and humorous promotional messages	Tagline “all burgers belong to Allah”; deliberately unpunctuated, run-on captions	Generates stopping power through cognitive interruption and novelty	Razzaq et al. (2023); Ning et al. (2022)
Authentic and spontaneous visual content	Founder-led videos, unedited queue footage, day-to-day operational scenes	Builds perceived authenticity and consumer trust	Kreling et al. (2022); Goode et al. (2023)
Entertainment-oriented viral content	Humorous netizen narrative shared widely beyond the account's follower base	Expands organic reach and brand awareness through sharing behavior	Duan (2021); Sanches & Ramos (2025)

Source: Reflexive thematic analysis of @aldis.burger Instagram content, compiled by the authors.

Theme 1: Unique and Humorous Promotional Messages

The first theme concerns the use of unconventional promotional language characterized by humor, absurdity, and cultural specificity. The analysis revealed that Aldi's Burger consistently employs distinctive slogans and captions that diverge from conventional food-marketing communication. Prominent examples include the tagline "all burgers belong to Allah" and deliberately fragmented, run-on captions that read as a single unpunctuated stream of colloquial text. Unlike conventional promotional messages that emphasize product quality through persuasive, polished language, these captions are intentionally informal and playful. Their distinctive linguistic style creates novelty and differentiates the brand from competing food businesses on Instagram, indicating that textual uniqueness constitutes a dominant characteristic of the account's communication strategy and, consistent with Theme 1's function in Table 2, a principal source of stopping power.

Theme 2: Authentic and Spontaneous Visual Content

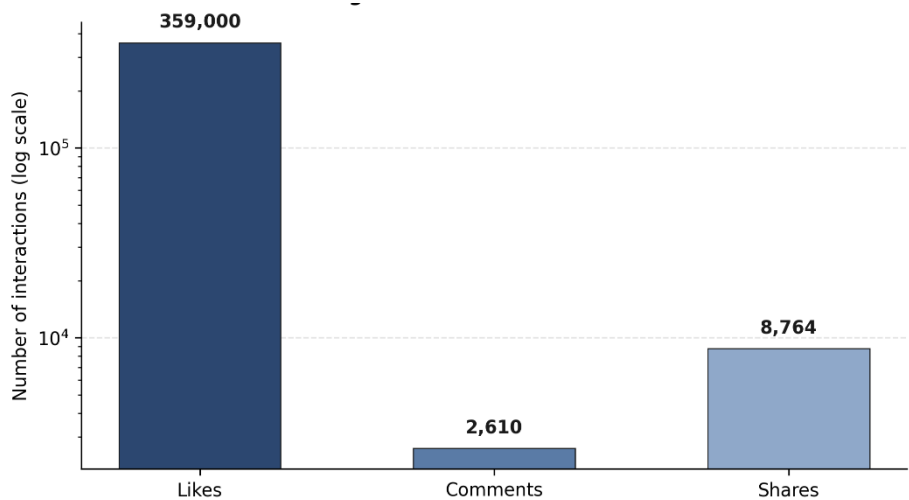
The second theme relates to the use of authentic visual communication. Most observed posts document real business activity, including food preparation, customer queues, store atmosphere, and direct founder participation in promotional videos. Rather than presenting highly edited commercial advertisements, the visual content emphasizes spontaneity and everyday operations, with frequent interaction between staff and customers visible within the footage. The recurring presence of the founder personalizes the brand: audiences see not only the product but the people behind the business, which is consistent with prior evidence that direct founder involvement helps establish an authentic relationship with consumers through digital media. Documentation of genuine customer queues and a busy store atmosphere further signals social proof and popularity, indirectly stimulating audience curiosity, while unedited sales footage offers a more realistic, immersive view of preparation and service that has been shown to increase digital audience interaction and engagement (Kreling et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2023). Rather than pursuing highly polished visuals, Aldi's Burger foregrounds a deliberately unrefined presentation style consistent with the broader authenticity-over-perfection orientation documented among contemporary digital brands (Goode et al., 2023).

Theme 3: Entertainment-Oriented Viral Content

The third theme concerns the strategic role of entertaining, viral content in expanding audience reach. Several posts generated substantial interaction by presenting unusual, lighthearted narratives that encouraged users to comment, like, and share. One prominent example involved a netizen who was unable to purchase from Aldi's Burger and, in a widely circulated clip, was humorously redirected elsewhere with the explanation that "all burgers belong to Allah." As shown in Figure 2, this single post generated approximately 359,000 likes, 2,610 comments, and 8,764 shares, indicating a scale of interaction that substantially exceeds the account's existing follower base and points to organic, cross-network diffusion. Such disproportionate sharing activity is consistent with prior findings that humor and unexpected, spontaneous content are key drivers of voluntary content diffusion (Razzaq et al., 2023; Duan, 2021). The findings indicate that entertainment-oriented content constitutes an important characteristic of the account's digital communication strategy, facilitating extensive audience engagement and increasing organic reach

across the wider social media network beyond @aldis.burger’s immediate audience.

Figure 2
Audience Interaction on The Entertainment-Oriented Viral Post (Log Scale).



Source: Publicly observable engagement metrics for the relevant @aldis.burger post, compiled by the authors.

Taken together, the three themes provide converging evidence for propositions P1 through P3: humorous, unconventional messaging generated cognitive interruption and stopping power (P1); authentic, spontaneous visual content strengthened perceived trust and closeness between the brand and its audience (P2); and entertainment-oriented viral content translated attention into measurable engagement and organic reach beyond the existing follower base (P3). The presentation of findings above intentionally emphasizes description over interpretation; the theoretical and practical significance of these patterns is developed in the Discussion section that follows.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Aldi’s Burger’s use of unique and humorous promotional messages represents more than a source of entertainment; it constitutes a deliberate application of attention economy principles. From an attention economy perspective, these findings underscore the importance of stopping power in digital marketing communication: within highly saturated social media environments, users are continuously exposed to competing information, and content capable of interrupting habitual scrolling behavior has a materially greater opportunity to be noticed, read, and engaged with (Kubler, 2023; Heitmayer, 2025). The distinctive linguistic style employed by Aldi’s Burger functions as an effective mechanism for cognitive interruption, increasing the likelihood that users will pause on, process, and subsequently engage with the promotional message rather than scrolling past it.

These findings are consistent with prior research suggesting that contemporary digital branding increasingly privileges authentic and relatable communication over highly formal

promotional approaches (Kreling et al., 2022). Authentic communication allows brands to establish stronger emotional connections with consumers because it appears more natural and less commercially engineered, a pattern also documented in studies of platform users' own negotiation of the "authenticity bind" imposed by the attention economy (Goode et al., 2023). Similarly, concise, creative, and visually distinctive content has been shown to be more effective at capturing attention within fast-paced digital environments by encouraging users to interrupt their scrolling behavior and interact with marketing messages (Gerrath & Biraglia, 2021; Krishen et al., 2021). The humorous character of Aldi's Burger's promotional language further contributes to the potential virality of its content: humor generates positive emotional responses that motivate voluntary sharing, extending organic distribution beyond the brand's existing follower base, a pattern that supports prior evidence that entertainment is among the primary drivers of viral digital content (Razzaq et al., 2023; Ning et al., 2022).

Beyond capturing immediate attention, the distinctive communication style also contributes to the development of a recognizable brand identity. Because the account's promotional messages consistently diverge from conventional culinary advertising, audiences can readily associate this unique communication style with Aldi's Burger specifically, strengthening brand awareness and memorability within a highly competitive social media environment. This dynamic aligns with evidence that sustained, distinctive engagement patterns—rather than isolated viral moments alone—are what translate into durable brand recognition and loyalty over time (Goyal & Verma, 2022; Sanches & Ramos, 2025; Santos et al., 2022).

The theoretical contribution of these findings lies in extending attention economy theory beyond its predominant application to large corporations, platform algorithms, and celebrity influencers (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Watanabe et al., 2021; Smith & Fischer, 2021) toward the SME context. Whereas prior scholarship has tended to treat authenticity, humor, and engagement as separate constructs, typically examined through quantitative designs (Chen et al., 2023; Kulikovskaja et al., 2023), the present findings show how these elements operate as a mutually reinforcing bundle for a resource-constrained business: humor creates the initial interruption, authenticity converts that interruption into trust, and entertainment-oriented virality converts trust and curiosity into organic, cross-network reach. In this respect, the study also extends recent work on curated authenticity and the attention economy at the level of individual influencers (Goode et al., 2023) to the level of an SME brand account, suggesting that the tension between polish and authenticity documented for individual creators applies analogously—and may be strategically exploited by small businesses.

In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest that SMEs operating with limited marketing budgets can compete effectively against larger, better-resourced brands by prioritizing distinctive, authentic, and entertaining content over costly, highly produced advertising. Practitioners can strengthen brand awareness, audience engagement, and consumer trust by deliberately incorporating humor and unpolished, spontaneous visual storytelling into routine content production, rather than relying solely on conventional promotional messaging (cf. Kulikovskaja et al., 2023; Ebrahimi et al., 2022). This is consistent with evidence from the food and beverage sector specifically, where Instagram-based marketing activities and visually distinctive content have been directly linked to stronger customer-based brand equity and engagement (Park & Namkung, 2022; Philp et al., 2022; Sarkis et al., 2025). Marketing managers should nonetheless calibrate humor carefully: prior research indicates that low-aggressive, benign

humor is more consistently associated with positive engagement outcomes than high-aggressive or potentially offensive forms (Ning et al., 2022), and that poorly calibrated humor can generate negative rather than positive brand associations (Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2023), suggesting that Aldi's Burger's playful, self-deprecating tone rather than humor directed against competitors or customers is a contextually appropriate strategic choice.

Finally, the discussion situates these findings within their specific cultural and religious context. The tagline "all burgers belong to Allah" integrates a culturally and religiously resonant expression into commercial communication in a manner that is simultaneously humorous, memorable, and locally meaningful for a predominantly Muslim Indonesian audience. This culturally embedded narrative differentiates the brand from competitors operating in the same food-and-beverage category and illustrates how attention economy strategies are not culturally neutral: what functions as effective, benign, and engaging stopping power in one cultural and religious context may not transfer directly to another. This contextual specificity extends the international attention economy and digital marketing communication literature (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021) by demonstrating that religiously and culturally embedded humor can function as an authentic, locally resonant mechanism for attention capture, rather than as an incidental or purely coincidental feature of the brand's communication style.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Aldi's Burger, an Indonesian food-sector SME, implements attention economy strategies in its digital marketing communication through Instagram. The findings show that the brand's success in capturing and sustaining audience attention rests on three interrelated strategies: unique, absurd, and humorous promotional messaging that generates stopping power; authentic, spontaneous visual content that favors authenticity over commercial polish and thereby builds consumer trust; and entertainment-oriented viral content that converts attention into measurable engagement and organic, cross-network reach. These strategies directly address the study's research questions and confirm the three research propositions developed from the attention economy and digital marketing communication literature. The study contributes to the development of knowledge in digital marketing communication in three ways. Theoretically, it extends attention economy theory (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Heitmayer, 2025) from its predominant focus on platforms, corporations, and influencers toward the previously underexamined context of culturally distinctive SME branding. Empirically, it provides qualitative evidence, grounded in reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), that authenticity, humor, and entertainment function as an integrated rather than isolated engagement mechanism, complementing prior quantitative evidence on these constructs individually (Chen et al., 2023; Kulikovskaja et al., 2023; Razzaq et al., 2023). Practically, the findings offer actionable guidance for SME practitioners and marketing communicators seeking low-cost, high-impact strategies to strengthen brand awareness, engagement, and consumer trust within saturated digital environments.

This study is not without limitations. As a single-case qualitative study relying on publicly observable Instagram content, its findings are analytically rather than statistically generalizable, and the absence of direct informant interviews limits insight into the brand's internal strategic intent. Future research could extend this work through comparative multi-case designs across different SME sectors and cultural contexts, through mixed-methods designs that combine

qualitative content analysis with quantitative engagement modeling (cf. Sanches & Ramos, 2025), or through longitudinal designs that track how attention economy strategies and their effectiveness evolve as an SME account grows. Future studies might also examine audience-side perceptions directly, through surveys or interviews with followers, to complement the content-centered perspective adopted here.

Declarations

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.A.F., J., A., and D.N.F.; methodology (literature review), M.A.F., J., A., and D.N.F.; validation, B.H. and F.; formal analysis, B.H. and F.; investigation (literature search), M.A.F., J., A., and D.N.F.; data curation (article selection), B.H. and F.; writing—original draft preparation, M.A.F., J., A., D.N.F., B.H., and F.; writing—review and editing, M.A.F., J., A., D.N.F., B.H., and F.; project administration, M.A.F. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable. This study analyzed publicly available secondary data and Instagram content and did not involve direct interaction with human or animal subjects; formal ethical review was therefore not required.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable. This study relied on publicly accessible social media content and did not involve direct interaction with human participants requiring informed consent.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used an AI language model to assist with structuring the text, refining academic language, and formatting the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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