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The Study of Instagram Account of PCU Visual Communication Design Study Program and Its Competitor

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to get a general content overview from the Instagram account of Petra Christian University (PCU) Visual Communication Design (VCD) Study Program, and its competitor. The content of the Instagram accounts is analyzed with content analysis then compared. Instagram is seen as one of the media that can influence and reach greater target audiences. Nowadays, Instagram also closely relates to teenagers. The covid-19 pandemic has been hitting hard for every sector, including the educational sector. During the height of the pandemic, traditional marketing tools such as billboards and print ads became obsolete because people stayed at home and used their digital devices more than usual. The result of this research is meant to be a benchmark and strategy guide for the PCU VCD Study Program to manage their Instagram account.

INTRODUCTION

In the most fundamental way, communication depends on our ability to understand one another (West & Turner, 2010, p. 3). Caused by the rise of communication technologies such as radio, television, satellites, and computer networking. Communication is an everyday activity that has assumed immense importance in our time (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 2). Communication happens in a process. The communication process consists of several elements, such as sender, encoding, message, media, decoding, receiver, response, and feedback (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, pp. 41-47). Communication process involves people, who act as a sender and receiver (West & Turner, 2010, p. 5).

Communication is the way to get across messages with the help of computer networking and the internet, it can be utilized by companies to reach and engage greater audiences. Communication is also the key to market products. Communication informs potential customers and makes them aware of the company's offerings. Communication influences customers as well as potential customers (Rosari, 2020). This type of communication is called marketing communications.

Nowadays, there are a lot of companies that need to market their product/services to their respective audiences. Moreover, competition has increased drastically. A lot of companies are competing in the same market with the same target audiences. Marketing communications has become increasingly popular for this purpose. The basic level of marketing communications, or originally called 'promotion', is used to convey the elements of an organization's offerings to target audiences (Fill & Turnbull, 2016).

A planned marketing communications incorporates three key elements: tools, media, and content (messages) (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Companies can use many tools of marketing communications, such as advertising, sales promotion, public relation, direct marketing, personal selling, and many more. The content can be both informative and emotional but usually a subtle blend of both dimensions (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). These three key elements work together to help a company reach its goals.

In early 2020 Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, started in China and spread to many countries after. By the mid-year of 2020, more countries tried to curb the infection by limiting mobility of their citizens. This act forces people to stay at home. People then work from home, studying from home, and spend most of their time at home. One hard truth of the pandemic was that, in order to someday be together safely, we had to be apart in the meantime. For many, this meant that social media has become one of the only ways to be with friends and family (Molla, 2021). This sudden change affected how they used social media.

One of the growing media during this pandemic time is Instagram. Instagram saw a 43% increase in monthly visits in 2020 compared to 2019 (Molla, 2021). There are 2 billion active monthly users on Instagram in 2021, having crossed the 2 billion marks in 2021, only 3 years after it crossed the 1 billion marks. This brings it to the super-league club of other social platforms like Facebook and YouTube (Omnicore Agency, 2022). As of January 2022, Indonesia is in the top 4 of leading countries based on Instagram audience size with 99,15 million audiences (Statista, 2022). Now that social media has become more embedded in our lives than ever, an increased reliance we've developed in the last year is likely to stay (Molla, 2021). This also becomes a chance for companies to talk more about themselves through social media, especially Instagram.

Visual Communication Design (VCD) Study Program of Petra Christian University (PCU), established in 1998 in Surabaya (2nd largest city in Indonesia). It is one of the earliest VCD Study Program in eastern Indonesia. For more than 20 years, VCD Study Program has taught many students and has more than 4000 graduates. During the pandemic, the leadership saw an opportunity to increase its presence in social media and it is increasingly important to utilize social media as one of its marketing tools.
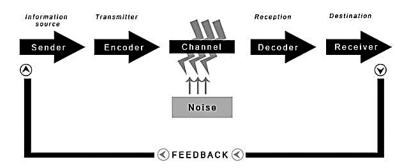
Instagram was chosen by the PCU VCD Study Program for its main social media. Team was assembled to manage the Instagram. Team was tasked to develop the social media design and manage its content. During the pandemic until now, the team created content for PCU VCD Study Program's Instagram. It has been 2 years since the pandemic, so it is time to step back for a while and see what our competitors did with their Instagram. The competitor chosen in this study is a direct competitor of the PCU VCD Study Program. The name of the competitor will be named as X Study Program. This study aims to understand the kinds of message that the competitor produces from 2021 and compare it with content produced by PCU VCD Study Program during the same period.

The Communication Model

The standard communication model used by Shannon & Weaver, called the linear model. This approach comprises several key elements. A source or transmitter of a message sends a message to a receiver, the recipient of the message. All this communication takes place in a channel, which is the pathway of communication. Channel frequently corresponds to the visual, tactile, olfactory, and auditory senses (West & Turner, 2010, p. 11). In this type of communication model, communication also involves noise. A noise is anything that is not intended by the sender, disrupts messages, and has an impact on the receiver.

Earlier Shannon & Weaver models didn't address the importance of feedback, but later the concept of feedback was found to be useful. Feedback is the transmission of the receiver's reaction back to the sender. In the

communication model, feedback allows the communicator to adjust his/her message to the needs and responses of the receiver (Fiske, 1990, p. 21). The study aims to analyze the message that is produced by the sender of the message. For this study, the sender identified the PCU VCD Study Program's competitor. Message is the contents that were posted in a channel called Instagram.

Figure 1. Shannon-Weaver's Model of Communication
Source: https://www.communicationtheory.org/shannon-and-weaver-model-of-communication/

Marketing Communications

Marketing Communications is anything your organization does that affects the behavior or perception of your customer (Callen, 2010, p. 2). This type of engagement happens when an organization or company starts sending messages to their customers. 'Engagement' refers to the nature of the communication that can occur between people, and between people and technology (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, p. 13). The word 'engagement' is very relevant to marketing communications. Engagement can last seconds or may be protracted and last hours, days, weeks, months, even years (p. 33).

Communication on marketing communications, have 4 key tasks (pp. 16-17): (1) Communication can inform and make potential customers aware of companies and its product/services through giving knowledge about product/services. (2) Communication attempts to persuade audiences. (3) Communication reinforces experiences. (4) Communication acts as a differentiator, particularly in markets where there is little to separate competing products/services. Therefore, communication can inform, persuade, reinforce, and build images to differentiate products or services. This is also known as DRIP.

Companies used a variety of marketing communications tools to engage with their audiences. The audiences are affected by messages sent through various channels of marketing communications. One of the marketing communications tools is interactive media. Interactive media allows participation and interaction with audiences. Internet and digital technologies enable new forms of interactive communication. For example, media facilitated by the internet such as websites and social media; this media allows users to be more participative (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, p. 25). Characteristics of interactive media from user perspective are speed and efficiency, interactivity, independence, personalization, and enhanced relationship (pp. 604-606).

Technological development has made a difference in our everyday life. Social media has changed the way people get information and changed our perception of what it means to run a brand (Callen, 2010, p. 218). Social media empowers individuals as traditional media has historically done (p. 218). This means that, when someone posts on social media, they have the same or better reach than traditional media such as television or radio.

Instagram as social media can be categorized as a "paid" and "free" online marketing channel. Creating an account and posting content on Instagram (story and feed) can be categorized as "free" because the account

owner doesn't need to spend money in order to get the message to audiences. On the other side, Instagram also provided a way for account owners to "pay" for certain features such as advertising (ads) posts and more sophisticated analytics tools. This flexibility is very important for companies or brands because they can adjust the budget accordingly.

METHOD

Subject of the research is the Instagram account of PCU VCD Study Program and its main competitor. The object of the research is the content of Instagram from both Study Program. Data gathered from January 2021 – December 2021. The data gathered then is coded. To analyze the message, 4 key tasks of marketing communications by Fill & Turnbull are used as indicators; they are: differentiate, reinforce, inform, and persuade. One message can be indicated for a few indicators, for example: a post about a webinar from a study program's course can be used to inform, persuade the audience, reinforce experience, or to differentiate. This is a descriptive quantitative research/ study. Quantitative research can be used to research and analyze quantitative data or statistical data. Content analysis used for this quantitative research. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given quantitative data (or text) (Columbia University, 2022). Content analysis is designed to produce an objective, measurable, veryfiable account of the manifest content of messages (Fiske, 1990, p. 136).

A considered set is the small group of competing alternatives that customers consider when making a decision, either for purchase or use of a service (Callen, 2010, p. 5). In this study that mindset was set early in the study. Main competitors choose to fit these categories: offer the same service, private university, located in the same city, and have similar target audiences. There is not much study program that fits that criterion, there is only one. Let's call it, VCD X Study Program for this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Summary of the data

Summary	PCU VCD Study Program	VCD X Study Program
Total Post	24	138
Post Based on Month		
January – March	0	25
April - June	2	43
July - September	10	27
October - December	12	42
Post Based on Image		
Photo	24	116
Video	0	17
Combination	0	3
Type of Post		
Single Post	10	75
Carousel Post	14	63
Messages		
Differentiate	16	53
Reinforce	12	32
Inform	15	67
Persuade	15	45
Response		
Likes 1-30	4	47
Likes 31-60	13	67
Likes 61-90	6	18
Likes >90	1	6

The Sender

The sender of this research is Instagram's PCU VCD Study Program and its competitor. Senders can be identified from their Instagram profile. At the time of this research, the Instagram of PCU VCD Study Program had roughly 2200 followers. During 2021, PCU VCD Study Program posted 25 contents on Instagram: averaging 2,08 contents per month. While VCD X Study Program posted 137 contents on Instagram, averaging 11,42 contents per month. Details of the content posted can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Detailed content posted

Month	PCU VCD Study Program	VCD X Study Program
January	0	1
February	0	13
March	0	11
April	2	14
May	0	17
June	0	12
July	1	16
August	6	7
September	3	4
October	2	11
November	0	10
December	10	21

Based on the Table 2, we can see a similar pattern between the two accounts. Early semesters in January and August, the sum of the content posted is relatively low. But at the end of the year, both accounts posted the highest number of contents. PCU VCD Study Program posted 10 contents and VCD X Study Program posted 21 contents. There are missed opportunities for PCU VCD Study Program because they are not posted regularly enough in January, February, March, May, June, and November. Posting regularly helps brands to be recognized or remembered by its target audiences. Posting regularly also shows "what's happening" on the study program such as webinars about digital marketing, creating illustrated brands, and others, or about offline classes announcements.

The Message

The message that is most often found on the PCU VCD Study Program is the message 'to differentiate.' According to Fill and Turnbull (2016, p. 17) 'to differentiate' is a form of marketing communications that differentiate one brand from another and help consumer's purchasing confidence and positive attitudes are developed. To be different is one of the most important things for a brand. As of PCU VCD, messages about unique offering shows on webinar/ exhibition held by the study program, final project exhibition, and job vacancy. By sharing these kinds of messages, PCU VCD Study Program wants to show its unique offering and invite target audience and make them feel 'the product' of the study program. Hoping that audiences who came to the event would develop positive attitudes towards PCU VCD Study Program. As of the VCD X Study Program, the message about 'to differentiate' is the second highest message. VCD X Study Program this 'to differentiate' messages are about free webinar/final project exhibition held by the study program, support for their student, student work in a certain course, student activity & association, and collaboration opportunities. There is more variation of "to differentiate" messages.

Meanwhile, the message that is most often found on VCD X Study Program is message "to inform." Communication informs potential customers and makes them aware of the company's offering (p. 16). Post

with the message "to inform" has a goal to enhance knowledge and understanding about its brand. This "inform" message is about thematic knowledge, FAQ about choosing cameras, courses on study program, event on study program, and competition information. PCU VCD tried to do a similar post, there was a post about tips and tricks for students, events on the study program, student achievement, and admission information. PCU VCD is lacking content that gives thematic knowledge to its audiences.

One of the key tasks on Fill and Turnbull (2016, p. 16) is 'to persuade,' the act persuasion came as a useful act for brands to make the audience buy/use their product. The act of persuasion on messages came in as offering rewards with small effort. The VCD X Study Program did various persuasions to keep users engaged with their Instagram. Few persuasions they've used were free webinars to get knowledge, student's activity, playful giveaway with prizes, inform competition and its prizes, job prospect, donation & charity act, also promote alumni/students work. Meanwhile, PCU VCD Study Program content rarely involves persuasion. The only persuasion is to come and join their event to get knowledge and more information about the study program.

The last key task discussed is reinforce. 'To reinforce' is to remind and strengthen previous messages or experiences (p. 17). Both study programs are lacking in this type of message. PCU VCD only had 12 posts in this type of message, while VCD X Study Program only had 32 posts. They both showed similar types of posts, usually there is only followed-up content for events. Although the VCD X Study Program showed more varied content, for example there are few posts that contain a teaser video of lectures or events.

From the discussion above we can learn that PCU VCD Study Program is lacking in quantity and variations of post but they are excellent at delivering the study program unique selling proposition by giving target audiences opportunity to be involved or attend their events. The PCU VCD Study Program stays true to 'differentiate' messages and manages to balance the other messages as well (see table 2.1). They have relatively balanced messages based on Fill & Turnbull (2016) 4 key tasks of marketing communications. Meanwhile the VCD X Study Program has a lot of diversities in their message and substantially more posts than PCU VCD Study Program. The VCD X Study Program approach is to 'sell' through soft selling by giving education/knowledge through their posts on Instagram.

The Media

Instagram allows three ways to publish on its platform. Users can Feed, Stories, and IGTV. Feeds is the original photo and video sharing. Stories are ephemeral content; it will go away in 24 hours. IGTV is a feature focusing on watching short vertical video (Miles, 2019, pp. 37-38). In 2020, Instagram added Reels as a new feature.

Based on the data gathered, PCU VCD Study Program loves to post still images or photos. On the other hand, VCD X Study program posted 116 photos, 17 videos, and 3 combinations of photo and video. Posting content as a photo or still image, this is the easiest way to produce content. Video or combination posts take more time to produce. Hence, there's only 20 posts from the 162 posts observed that used video or combination of photo and video. By percentage, it is only 12,34% of the total post observed.

Based on the type of post, PCU VCD Study Program likes to use a carousel post. There are 14 posts that use carousel posts, that count as 58,3% of their posts. Carousel post is a type of post in Instagram feeds that utilizes few images (photos or videos) in the same post. Users can swipe to view each image to see the content. Carousel posts are ideal to contain longer information instead of a single post. The way the PCU VCD Study Program uses carousel posts is by making a cover with a headline for each of its carousel posts. By doing something like this, users can read headlines and if they are interested, they can swipe to read more. This type

of post is also helpful to manage longer information and chunk it into smaller parts for the user to read. It is interesting to see how PCU VCD uses cover in their carousel posts. Their cover carousel post contains a headline and CTA word to slide. This way, each post can be managed visually according to the brand guidelines.

Both single posts and carousel posts can be utilized to deliver content on Instagram. Depending on the length of your content, using carousel posts can be beneficial if there is a long content. Based on data, there is no evidence that target audiences love image or video content. However, as a creator, it is recommended to create various types of posts (both image, video, and combination).

The Response

The recipient's reaction after seeing, hearing, or reading messages is called a response (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, p. 44). In this research, response was measured with likes on the PCU VCD's Instagram post and its competitor. While the research doesn't measure feedback, in this kind of study; feedback can be seen from comments that Instagram users left on certain posts.

Both study programs never get 0 (zero) like on their post. PCU VCD Study Program has 1 post that has more than 90 likes, this translates as 4,17% of total content posted. While VCD X Study Program has 6 posts that have more than 90 likes, this translates as 4,38% of total content posted. The most liked content on PCU VCD Study Program is an educational content about shortcut use on Adobe software. In contrast with VCD X Study Program, their topmost liked contents are support for one of the students competing in regional competition, lectured achievement, their mascot introduction, challenge from the study program partner, final project exhibition information, and student work review. Contents liked were vastly diverse. PCU VCD Study Program viewers like educational posts, while VCD X Study Program viewers like posts about their peers, lectures, and the study program itself.

CONCLUSION

This research has shed insights about how both study programs tailored their message and managed their Instagram account. PCU VCD Study Program is lacking quantity in terms of number post compared to its competitor. Competitors have more diverse posts in their Instagram. Generally, PCU VCD Study Program is more consistent to apply 4 key tasks of marketing communications compared to its competitor. On PCU VCD Study Program's Instagram message, all key tasks of marketing communications are relatively balanced (see table 1). This research can be developed/ continued in the future, there are still a lot of areas that can be covered with this type of research. For example, research about the visual aspect of the Instagram post; or a continuation of this research that will measure feedback from target audiences.

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