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How Instagram Social Media Marketing Activities Shape Perceived Value, Perceived Quality, and Trust to Drive Booking Intention: A Design Thinking Case Study of Gradbyaunee in Bandung

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Abstract: The use of Instagram in discovery, evaluation, and initiating WhatsApp inquiries is becoming the primary way of outdoor graduation photography in Indonesia. Gradbyaunee is based in multiple cities, although Bandung performance declined in 2024-2025, which suggests a local conversion problem to the conversion process. this research is based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework and investigates the effect of Instagram social media marketing activities (SMMAs) on perceived value, quality, and trust and the connection of these perceptions to satisfaction and booking intention. Semi-structured interviews and prototype testing of the Bandung potential and new clients were done with the help of feasibility checks on internal operations and freelance photographers. The thematic analysis was conducted on the Instagram-WhatsApp journey, in order to determine the persistent troughs and decision points. Instagram evaluation friction is the biggest limiting factor to booking intention. The price to apparent deliverables, schedule, and procedure cannot be easily linked; the account is too spicy to be a decision guide, and trust is not always formed at a glance, while WhatsApp clearing up and Bandung-specific popularity on Instagram are not as evident. Perceived quality is the most important driver of satisfaction after the service, whereas trust and perceived value are the most important decision gates prior to making a booking. Three Instagram prototypes were created and tested, which were a pinned start here/booking flow carousels, a Bandung Spot Guide, and evidence-of-process BTS reels. Feedback We focused more on more explicit terms of commitment, better Bandung relevance, and more visible evidence to the people to increase the inquiry-to-booking conversion.

Keywords: Social Media, Marketing Activities, Perceived Value, Perceived Quality, Trust, Booking Intention, Design Thinking, Instagram.

INTRODUCTION

The graduation photography and creative content industry in Indonesia is being reshaped by the rise of the gig economy and the dominance of social media as the main channel for discovery, evaluation, and booking of services. For small and medium-sized photography vendors, managing a multi city operation while staying visible and relevant in highly

competitive digital platforms has become both a strategic and operational challenge. Gradbyaunee is an outdoor graduation photography brand that relies heavily on Instagram to attract, inform, and convert potential clients across Jakarta, Bandung, and Semarang. However, despite operating under one brand and service concept, the company faces a sharp decline in bookings and conversion specifically in Bandung, where low-price viral competitors and weak local social-media presence appear to undermine perceived value, perceived quality, and trust. This thesis aims to investigate how Gradbyaunee's current social media marketing activities shape Bandung audiences' perceptions and intentions, and how a more structured, design-driven approach could be used to rebuild a stronger, locally resonant customer journey. The sections that follow provide the background and context of the study, the profile of the company, the key business issues identified, the research questions and objectives, as well as the scope and limitations of the research.

In recent years, graduation photography in Indonesia has gone through a noticeable shift. Instead of relying solely on formal studio portraits or institution-organised photo sessions, many graduates now prefer outdoor graduation photography that feels more personal, aesthetic, and aligned with their lifestyle. For them, a photoshoot is not only about documenting a milestone, but also about expressing identity, style, and social status especially on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

Several studies show that this behaviour is closely related to the rise of "flexing culture" in the digital era, where people use social media to display possessions, experiences, and achievements in order to gain recognition, build self-branding, and experience self-satisfaction (Rosida et al., 2023). In this context, photographs are no longer just memory-keeping artefacts, but strategic tools for managing how others see us and for constructing an idealised digital self (Lee et al., 2015; Widjajanta et al., 2018). Outdoor graduation photoshoots thereby become a way for young graduates to flex academic achievements, personal taste, and social belonging in a more creative and relatable format than traditional studio photos.

This trend has created a growing market for outdoor graduation photography services in Indonesia. Vendors and freelancers such as photographers, videographers, editors, and stylists benefit from increasing demand from graduates and their families who are willing to invest in more curated and story driven visual content. Outdoor sessions offer location variety, natural lighting, and flexible concepts that are highly suitable for social media, which makes the service attractive for both clients and creative workers in the gig-based creative economy (Maitri et al., 2023). At the same time, the industry is characterised by short-term project work and intense competition among small vendors who heavily depend on digital platforms to attract and convert clients.

In this environment, social media marketing activities (SMMAs) play a central role in shaping how potential clients perceive a brand's value and quality. Prior research shows that dimensions such as informativeness, interactivity, personalization, trendiness, entertainment, and electronic word of mouth can significantly influence perceived quality, perceived value, and trust, which then drive customer satisfaction and purchase or booking intention in various service settings (Kim & Ko, 2012; Wibowo et al., 2021; Ngo et al., 2025). For outdoor graduation photography, where prospective clients rarely experience the service before purchase, these perceptions are largely formed through what they see and feel on social media content and interactions.

Gradbyaunee is an outdoor graduation photography brand that operates mainly in Jakarta, Bandung, and Semarang and relies heavily on Instagram to showcase portfolios, communicate packages, and handle inquiries. While the brand has managed to grow its bookings in Jakarta and Semarang, its performance in Bandung has declined sharply in recent years. Internal data show that Bandung bookings dropped even as other cities continued to increase, and Instagram insights reveal that Bandung accounts for only a small fraction of the

brand's digital audience. At the same time, the Bandung market has been flooded by viral low-price competitors on TikTok, pushing a "cheap is enough" mindset among some graduates.

These patterns suggest that Gradbyaunee's challenge in Bandung is not only about operational execution, but also about how its current social media marketing activities build or fail to build perceived value, perceived quality, and trust among local audiences. Understanding how Bandung graduates perceive Gradbyaunee's social media presence, and how those perceptions influence their satisfaction and intention to book, is therefore critical for designing more effective, locally resonant digital marketing strategies for the brand

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative single-case study method combined with a Design Thinking approach to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of how Gradbyaunee's social-media marketing activities influence audience perceptions and booking intention in Bandung. The population of the study consists of Gradbyaunee's Bandung-based social-media audiences, particularly final-year university students and fresh graduates who are exposed to or interact with Gradbyaunee's Instagram and TikTok content. The sample is selected using purposive sampling and includes two groups: potential clients who have considered using outdoor graduation photography services in Bandung and past Gradbyaunee clients who used the service between 2024 and October 2025. Data are collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and prototype testing sessions as primary data, supported by secondary data from Gradbyaunee's internal operational records, Instagram Insights, existing marketing materials, and desk research on competitors. The collected data are analysed using qualitative thematic analysis guided by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, involving data preparation, open coding, theme development, mapping of themes to social-media marketing activities, perceived value, perceived quality, trust, satisfaction, and booking intention, as well as comparison of audience responses before and after prototype testing to synthesise findings and formulate practical strategic recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative research and discusses them in relation to the conceptual framework developed in Chapter II. The analysis follows the design thinking flow adopted in the research design, starting with the Empathize phase and continuing to the Define phase before moving to solution development and testing. The focus of this section is to understand how Bandung audiences perceive Gradbyaunee's social-media marketing activities, how they evaluate value, quality, and trust, and where the customer journey between Instagram and booking starts to break.

Primary Data

Primary data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and prototype testing involving stakeholders related to Gradbyaunee's Instagram-to-WhatsApp journey in the Bandung context, including customers (potential and recent clients) as well as operational stakeholders (internal team and photographers/FG). The semi-structured format enabled open-ended exploration while keeping discussions aligned with the research questions and the SMMAs-based S-O-R logic. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research purpose and to obtain information-rich perspectives.

Participants include:

1. Clients
    a. Potential clients (Bandung-based)

        Potential clients are Bandung graduation students who fit the target segment but have never booked GradByAunee. Potential clients were selected among active Instagram users who frequently use Instagram to search, compare,

and assess graduation photography vendors, making them suitable to evaluate clarity and credibility cues before initiating WhatsApp inquiry.

b. Past/Recent clients (Bandung-based, 2024-2025)

Past/recent clients are Bandung customers who booked Gradbyaunee during the 2024-2025 period. They provide reflections on the end-to-end experience, from initial evaluation on Instagram to booking and service delivery.

c. During the empathy/interview phase, client respondents are asked about:

How they discover and evaluate outdoor graduation photography services through Instagram

d. What cues shape trust and perceived service value/quality before contacting via WhatsApp
e. What triggers inquiry and what causes hesitation or drop-off
f. For past/recent clients: reflections on satisfaction, expectation gaps, and key moments during the service journey

2. Internal

a. Admin

Admin represents the WhatsApp inquiry handling process and provides insights on repeated questions, follow-up patterns, and common friction points that occur between Instagram and booking.

b. Editor

Editor represents post-production workflow and delivery constraints, including editing dependencies and timeline considerations that may influence what can be communicated through Instagram content.

c. Founder

Founder represents service policy and decision-making, ensuring that recommended content interventions align with brand direction and operational capacity.

Internal stakeholders were selected to validate feasibility and operational guardrails, since they manage inquiry handling, policy decisions, and delivery workflow that directly influence the booking process.

During the interview / testing phase, internal respondents are asked about:

a. Operational accuracy of the prototypes and whether the information is safe to communicate publicly
b. Typical constraints that frequently trigger misunderstandings (payment milestones, editing timeline)
c. Practicality and effort required to execute the proposed content consistently
d. Guardrails needed to keep expectations aligned with actual delivery

3. FG (Photographers / Freelancers

FG respondents were selected because they represent the service delivery and field execution perspective, which directly shapes the consistency between what is communicated on Instagram and what is experienced during the photoshoot. A senior photographer with long-term collaboration and cross-city exposure was included to provide an implementation view informed by repeated execution across different project contexts. In addition, the Bandung lead freelance role was included to represent coordination decisions (e.g., scheduling and resource allocation) beyond on-field execution, ensuring the feasibility review reflects both execution and coordination realities.

During the interview / testing phase, FG respondents are asked about:

a. Field constraints that affect service delivery (location permits, weather, time buffer, crowd condition)
b. Feasibility of process-related content and required effort on-field

c. Consent/privacy considerations for process-related content
d. Execution guardrails to ensure consistency between communicated process and on-field realities

All interviews were conducted online via voice calls. During each call, the researcher completed the interview guideline in real time and took detailed written notes. Immediately after each session, the notes were refined to ensure key statements were captured as accurately as possible. The interview guide is built from the SMMA dimensions and S-O-R constructs to ensure each research question is covered.

In the testing phase, a subset of Bandung audiences (both potential and past clients) participant in sessions where they review the developed prototypes. Using a semi-structured discussion guide, they are invited to comment on whether the prototypes make Gradbyaunee's value, quality, and trust cues clearer, and whether it changes their satisfaction and intention to book. Their qualitative feedback becomes the primary input for answering RQ3.

To strengthen implementation realism, additional feasibility reviews are conducted with internal stakeholders (Founder, Admin, and Editor) and photographers/FG. These sessions focus on validating whether the prototypes can be executed consistently, identifying operational constraints, and defining guardrails to prevent miscommunication or overpromising. Inputs from internal and FG stakeholders are used to complement customer testing, rather than replace customer-based evaluation.

In this Empathize phase, the interview findings are organised using an empathy-map perspective, describing each participant's goals, pains, and gains when interacting with Gradbyaunee's Instagram and booking process. The Empathize phase aims to capture how Bandung stakeholders experience Gradbyaunee from their own point of view, including both customer perspectives and operational perspectives. Four stakeholder groups were interviewed:

a. Internal management

Internal stakeholders who are directly involved in managing inquiries, service delivery workflow, and policy decisions. This group consists of the Admin, Editor, and Founder of GradByAunee.

b. Photographers / freelancers (FG)

Stakeholders who represent the field execution perspective and coordination of Bandung projects. This group consists of a senior photographer/FG and the Bandung lead freelance who coordinates FG execution for Bandung clients.

All participants are active Instagram users and have relevant experience evaluating or executing outdoor graduation photography services in Bandung. Their stories reveal not only functional aspects such as information clarity, booking flow, and price but also factors related to perceived value, trust, and the fit between Gradbyaunee's style and Bandung audience expectations. This section summarises key insights from each stakeholder group, followed by a cross-case reflection on what they imply for Gradbyaunee's social-media marketing activities and perceived value, quality, and trust.

Internal Management

This section presents the Empathize findings from Gradbyaunee's internal stakeholders who manage key operational touchpoints that shape conversion and customer experience in the Instagram-to-WhatsApp journey. Internal stakeholders consist of the Founder (operations and decision-making), the Admin (WhatsApp inquiry handling), and the Editor (post-production workflow). Their perspectives are summarised through empathy maps (Figure 4.7-Figure 4.9),

capturing what each stakeholder says, thinks, does, and feels in relation to recurring frictions and expectation management.

Admin

The admin represents the front-line experience of handling WhatsApp inquiries, follow-ups, reminders, and direct messages. A recurring pattern observed by the admin is that many prospects disappear after receiving the pricelist, indicating that price exposure without sufficient context can trigger drop-offs (Figure 4.7). The admin also notes that prospects often express doubts about whether they will be guided on poses or whether the final results will match their reference, showing that reassurance and process clarity are critical to move audiences forward

From an operational standpoint, the admin believes key information should be easy to access before prospects ask repeatedly (e.g., pricelist, terms and conditions, deliverables), because unclear information increases repeated questions and slows down conversion (Figure 4.7). The admin also feels pressure during peak hours because delayed replies may result in lost leads, and feels frustrated when the same questions are asked repeatedly (Figure 4.7). As a result, the admin emphasises the need for ready-to-send, standardised materials especially those that clarify deliverables, editing timelines, and other commitment-related details to close leads faster and reduce repeated clarification loops (Figure 4.8).

Editor

The Editor represents post-production workflow and delivery constraints that influence what can realistically be communicated as commitments. The Editor highlights that editing turnaround depends heavily on when the client selects their photos; late selection pushes the queue and can disrupt delivery expectations (Figure 4.8). This suggests that timeline concerns are not purely an "editing speed" issue, but a process dependency issue that should be framed clearly.

The Editor also notes that some requests are not always feasible (e.g., certain object removal requests), and therefore expectations should be framed as dependent on complexity to avoid unrealistic demands (Figure 4.8). The Editor's feelings and operational stance indicate the need for clearer upfront communication about tone/style expectations, revision boundaries, and feasibility constraints, because ambiguity increases back-and-forth, delays, and potential complaints (Figure 4.8). In short, the Editor's empathy map reinforces that perceived reliability is strengthened when the process is communicated with clear rules, deadlines, and realistic boundaries.

The breakdown occurs mainly at the front-end evaluation stage on Instagram, where audiences decide whether the brand feels locally fitting, easy to evaluate, and safe to trust before moving to WhatsApp inquiry and booking.

People drop after the pricelist because the "worth it" logic is not instantly clear. A key bottleneck occurs right after prospects receive the pricelist. Even when the portfolio looks professional, the price moment becomes a "pause point" because audiences still cannot quickly justify what they get vs what they pay without further explanation. Salwa's case illustrates this clearly: she acknowledges the pricelist is accessible, but she describes it as "dense", and implies it would be easier to evaluate if structured more simply. This shows the issue is not only pricing level, but how value is made scannable and comparable at the moment of decision.

This is consistent with the admin's operational perspective that "Most prospects disappear after receiving the pricelist." When value justification is not immediately legible on Instagram (and supporting materials), prospects hesitate and drop especially in Bandung where cheaper competitors make the price comparison unavoidable. So, perceived value remains moderate because audiences still feel uncertain whether it is truly "worth it" to commit.

The booking journey is not easy to understand on Instagram, so "evaluation" becomes extra effort Bandung potential clients repeatedly signal that Instagram works mainly as a gallery, not a step-by-step guide. Shifa shows the strongest evidence: because process information is not clearly visible upfront, she hesitates to initiate WhatsApp inquiry just to ask "simple" questions and ends up choosing another vendor whose Instagram explains the flow more transparently. This friction is amplified by a psychological barrier: one respondent explicitly mentions feeling "malu" to WhatsApp and worries it will be awkward if she ends up not buying meaning information that should be evaluated on Instagram becomes a conversion blocker.

This pattern also aligns with internal experience: the Admin states she handles repeated questions and follow-ups, indicating that key decision info is still not easy to scan before chat. In short, the problem is not that information does not exist, but that it is not structured to reduce effort and awkwardness for first-time evaluators. So, perceived value and trust do not strengthen early enough because audiences must "work harder" to understand the journey.

3. Trust is built privately in WhatsApp, not publicly on Instagram.

Recent clients confirm that trust is reinforced mainly through WhatsApp, not Instagram. Linda's case shows this explicitly: initial doubts triggered by surface Instagram signals (e.g., low follower count / inconsistent posting) fade after WhatsApp clarification, where the admin responds fast and explains packages, timelines, and technical details clearly. This indicates that Gradbyaunee's strongest trust mechanism is still interpersonal reassurance, not public proof.

However, the same trust is not consistently translated into credible Instagram signals. Potential clients without referrals therefore rely on heuristic cues such as follower count, posting consistency, and visible eWOM as shortcuts to decide whether the brand feels "alive" and safe. Importantly, credibility depends not only on having proof, but also on how it is displayed: one potential client critiques testimonial highlights as potentially "gimmick" and prefers stronger evidence formats such as video and Q&A-style proof. So, Instagram does not consistently provide strong, believable public trust cues for Bandung audiences who do not have personal referrals, making conversion harder before WhatsApp begins.I nstagram content builds basic professionalism but not a strong sense of "this is for me as a Bandung student."

Bandung audiences generally see Gradbyaunee's feed as neat, bright, and technically strong creating baseline perceived quality. However, several potential clients do not see a clear Bandung "fit" in the content. Salwa explicitly prefers campus scenery and spontaneous moments and does not fully see her own "story" in the framing. Zulfa expects Bandung-specific storytelling campus locations, familiar spots, and fun BTS reflecting student life but perceives the feed as relatively static and not strongly "Bandung-focused." In addition, locations are not always clearly recognisable as Bandung, and explicit Bandung "campus-life" cues are limited. This aligns with the Founder's perspective that "Our Instagram content is mostly portfolio," and that Bandung audiences need clearer local cues (Bandung spots/campus ambience) to feel the brand is relevant to them. Therefore, perceived quality is acknowledged, but the content does not strongly signal "this matches my Bandung graduation narrative," weakening emotional pull and reducing urgency to book.

Important "what to expect" details aren't clear upfront, creating expectation risk. A final issue is expectation alignment. Several "what to expect" details that strongly affect satisfaction and perceived quality are not consistently framed early, even though they frequently shape real service outcomes. Internal and FG perspectives show this is not a minor detail: FG1 explicitly says "The biggest risks are timing, crowd, and weather," while FG2 reinforces that "On-site conditions can change fast campus rules, crowd, and weather." This indicates that client confidence and perceived quality are highly influenced by situational constraints, not only by final photo results.

From the post-production side, the Editor highlights structural dependencies: “I can only start editing after the client chooses the photos,” and not all special requests are feasible (“Not all ‘remove object’ requests are possible.”). When these constraints are not framed as upfront guardrails, prospects may imagine an “ideal” delivery and later interpret constraint-driven outcomes as service failure. So, perceived quality and trust become fragile because expectations are not anchored early to realistic operational conditions.

Business Solution

Building on the Define findings (IV.2.1) and the identification of the most influential SMMA “gatekeepers” in Bandung audiences’ Instagram evaluation stage (IV.2.2), this section develops solution ideas that directly address the early-stage conversion breakdown before WhatsApp inquiry and booking. The Define phase indicates that Gradbyaunee’s main issues occur at the front-end evaluation stage on Instagram:

1. content signals professionalism but does not consistently feel “Bandung student-relevant,”
2. the journey and package value remain difficult to evaluate quickly, and
3. trust cues are not consistently visible publicly, especially for audiences without personal referrals.

To translate these issues into actionable directions, the ideation was guided by three simplified “How might we…” questions:

1. How might we make the booking journey easy to understand on Instagram so audiences do not need to ask basic questions via WhatsApp first?
2. How might we strengthen Bandung relevance through clearer campus/location cues and more relatable graduation storytelling?
3. How might we strengthen believable public trust cues so audiences feel safe to proceed even without a friend’s referral?

A set of ideas was generated from these directions and then prioritised using an Effort-Impact Matrix (see Figure 4.7). In this matrix, effort reflects time, design workload, and coordination complexity required by the team, while impact reflects expected improvements at the Instagram evaluation stage specifically, clearer perceived value, stronger Bandung fit cues, and stronger public trust cues.

Prioritisation and selected prototypes

Prototype 3 - BTS Proof-of-Process Reels

This prototype tests process informativeness by making the shooting workflow observable, so audiences can evaluate quality with less uncertainty. Prototype 3 was a BTS Proof-of-Process Reels concept designed to reduce evaluation friction by showing how Gradbyaunee works in real sessions from guiding poses, directing movements, to demonstrating effort and professionalism on-site. Rather than relying on static claims, this prototype aimed to provide visible proof that the service is guided, intentional, and not “random shoot,” so audiences can feel more confident before initiating a WhatsApp inquiry.

Shifa (Potential Client) felt reassured and more confident because the BTS format demonstrates that the photographer actively guides and directs clients during the shoot. For her, this reduces the risk of awkwardness and signals that Gradbyaunee delivers a structured experience rather than leaving clients to pose by themselves.

Salwa (Potential Client) responded similarly and said the BTS made the service feel more “real,” because it shows the team’s involvement and the on-site process. Her feedback suggests that process visibility helps reduce uncertainty, especially for first-timers who fear the shoot will feel confusing or uncomfortable.

Zulfa (Potential Client) emphasized that BTS content creates a stronger sense of professionalism because it shows the team working and managing the session actively.

However, her reaction also implies that the BTS should be edited as a clear narrative of guidance and transformation otherwise it risks looking like generic behind-the-scenes footage.

Alyfa (Recent Client) viewed BTS as a useful "proof cue" that makes the service easier to trust, especially for audiences who have never booked Gradbyaunee before. She highlighted that BTS helps audiences visualize what happens on the day of the shoot, which makes the service feel more credible and controlled.

Linda (Recent Client) said BTS would be particularly useful not only for convincing herself, but also for reassuring her family, because it proves the service quality and shows that the team puts in effort and guidance. This suggests BTS is a strong trust signal in contexts where booking decisions are socially influenced by parents or peers.

Rahel (Recent Client) mentioned that she trusted the service more because the template looked polished and the BTS clips showed effort and seriousness. She explicitly said that what made her confident was the quality of the video template and the impression that "they really prepared and put effort," while she had no major doubts after seeing it.

Table 1. Feedback Summary Prototype 3

Quadrant	Feedback Summary
Likes	- Strong trust cue through visible process - Signals professionalism and effort - Reduces awkwardness anxiety (shows guidance) - Strengthens perceived quality inference
Criticisms	- Can look generic if unstructured - Proof is weak without transformation/results - Still needs linkage to deliverables
Questions	- What exactly happens during the shoot (direction)? - What are the deliverables and timeline? - How consistent is quality across packages/locations?
Ideas	- Use a fixed BTS proof narrative (problem, direction, transformation, final) - Add quick overlay on deliverables - Use trend audio/editing as supporting layer

Table indicates that the BTS Proof-of-Process Reels produced the clearest trust and perceived quality cues in this test, because it makes the shooting workflow visible by showing effort, professionalism, and active direction during the session. However, the feedback also highlights a condition for effectiveness: the BTS should be edited as a structured proof narrative that demonstrates clear guidance and a visible transformation into final outcomes; otherwise, it may be perceived as generic behind-the-scenes footage. To fully convert this heightened trust into confident WhatsApp inquiry, the BTS should be paired with concise deliverables cues (what customers receive and when), so audiences can connect process evidence to concrete results. The implications of these testing results are consolidated in Chapter V to derive conclusions and prioritised recommendations for the next iteration.

CONCLUSION

Gradbyaunee's Instagram communicates attractive outputs, but it does not consistently build the level of decision confidence needed for Bandung audiences to move from evaluation to WhatsApp inquiry. There were three primary frictions that explain the low conversion. Informativeness gap (the journey is not fully scannable at the Instagram stage). Content works mainly as a portfolio, while decision-critical information is not consistently visible in a structured and easy-to-scan format. As a result, audiences still struggle to understand what happens next and how the booking process actually works.

Commitment clarity gap (uncertainty peaks at DP, payment timing, and deliverables). Even when audiences understand the general flow, hesitation increases when commitment rules remain unclear particularly DP versus full payment timing, delivery timeline, output scope, and

revision rules. This weakens perceived value (trade-off cannot be assessed quickly) and trust (service rules feel less transparent). Bandung-fit and public trust visibility gap (local relevance and proof cues are not strong enough for first-time evaluators) Audiences look for Bandung-coded cues that signal fit (local context, campus-style expectations, Bandung spots). Meanwhile, trust is often built privately via WhatsApp rather than publicly on Instagram, making non-referral evaluators rely on weaker credibility heuristics and delaying inquiry. Collectively, these frictions show that the conversion problem is primarily a pre-inquiry decision barrier: audiences are not rejecting output quality, but they postpone commitment because Instagram does not yet reduce uncertainty and strengthen confidence in a locally relevant and trustworthy way.

The study finds that audiences do not weigh all SMMA elements equally. There were three primary gatekeeper elements shaping evaluation at the Instagram stage.The strongest driver because it reduces uncertainty about steps, deliverables, and commitment rules. When informativeness increases, perceived value and trust become easier to form because the service becomes easier to evaluate. Decisive because audiences need cues that the service fits their Bandung graduation context. Strong personalisation strengthens perceived value by improving perceived fit and reducing the “generic brand” impression. A critical trust gatekeeper for first-time evaluators, especially for those without referrals. eWOM provides third-party credibility that cannot be replaced by portfolio claims alone. Supporting elements such as trendiness/entertainment and interactivity mainly function as engagement enhancers. They increase attention and perceived liveliness, but they do not substitute for the three gatekeepers above.

Before inquiry and booking (Instagram stage): Trust and perceived value are the primary decision gates. Trust reduces perceived risk and increases willingness to initiate WhatsApp inquiry. Perceived value reduces hesitation by making the trade-off clear (what customers receive, how the process works, and what commitment is required). When these two are weak, booking intention stalls even if the portfolio looks good. After service delivery: Perceived quality becomes the strongest driver of satisfaction. Satisfaction is shaped by outcomes and the guided experience during the shoot. However, perceived value can still be affected by process efficiency and clarity (e.g., post-shoot coordination). Therefore, improving Instagram-stage informativeness and fit cues is essential to unlock inquiry, while maintaining quality protects satisfaction and future recommendation. Overall, booking intention in Bandung is primarily constrained at the Instagram-to-WhatsApp transition, where trust and perceived value must be formed fast and with minimal uncertainty.

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