Narrative Branding Strategies on TikTok for Digital Culinary Heritage Sustainability: A Case Study of a Yogyakarta-Based MSME

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Abstract

Few studies have examined how strategic communication on TikTok can promote Indonesia's culinary heritage amid the dominance of global food trends. The entry of various foreign foods into Indonesia, driven by globalization, has shifted local gastronomy. This study examines the role of TikTok in promoting sustainable local gastronomy, using the @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id account as a case study. This account actively markets bakpia products as part of Yogyakarta's culinary heritage. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative case study approach. Data collection techniques include observing TikTok content, conducting semi-structured interviews with the account manager, and analyzing user interactions to understand the communication strategies in place. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in visual storytelling, audience interaction, and brand collaboration. The study results show that the @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id account demonstrates how TikTok features can be strategically used through visuals, live broadcasts, and platform trends. The main conclusion offers strategic insight into how local culinary brands can leverage social media to strengthen cultural identity and market presence amid global competition. This study provides a theoretical contribution by offering new insights into the use of social media as a tool for sustainability diplomacy in promoting local cuisine. Practically, the findings can guide culinary MSMEs and academics in developing digital communication strategies to preserve sustainable gastronomy and raise awareness of local culinary potential and cultural heritage in shaping Indonesia's food future.

Keywords: *TikTok; Strategic Communication; Culinary Heritage Promotion; Sustainable Gastronomy; Local Food Identity*

1. Introduction

Globalization has a significant influence on consumption patterns and food preferences worldwide. Today, people are increasingly exposed to different types of food from abroad, which often distracts from local food (Putri et al., 2023). At the same time, digital platforms increasingly mediate how food is represented, circulated, and valued, turning culinary practices into part of broader struggles over cultural identity and economic survival. However, previous research has not explicitly linked strategic, platform-specific communication and culinary sustainability through TikTok, even though this medium has become a key channel for constructing cultural narratives and culinary marketing. The absence of such a linkage in existing studies creates a research gap, particularly regarding how digital communication strategies on short-form video platforms can support the preservation of local gastronomy amid the pressures of globalization and changing consumption preferences. This research gap simultaneously reflects a broader structural challenge to maintain local gastronomy with economic, cultural, and sustainability value in an increasingly platformized media environment.

For this study, sustainable local gastronomy is conceptually defined as local food practices that are maintained not only for economic viability but also for cultural continuity and intergenerational transmission. In line with broader sustainability frameworks, this definition resonates with the Food and Agriculture Organization's emphasis on sustainable food systems that protect cultural and ecological resources, as well as UNESCO's recognition of culinary traditions as part of intangible cultural heritage that must be safeguarded across generations. One potential way to sustain such practices is through social media, which has become a dominant means of communication in the digital age (Ingrassia et al., 2022). However, the existing literature tends to discuss social media in general, without adequately highlighting the peculiarities of TikTok as a short-form video platform with unique algorithms, a dynamic audience base, and highly visual and participatory interaction patterns. Communication ethics must also be considered so that messages conveyed on social media remain wise, responsible, and sensitive to cultural meanings (Anggraeni & Adiprabowo, 2023).

Local gastronomy plays an important role in preserving a community's cultural identity. It encompasses the art of cooking, food culture, culinary history, and the philosophy underlying food practices (Krisnadi, 2018). In this context, local food such as bakpia is not only a commercial product but also a cultural symbol and a medium through which a community's collective identity is formed and negotiated. Food is

often present in important celebrations, rituals, and traditions, thereby strengthening social bonds and shaping how communities imagine themselves (Batat, 2021). However, research on Indonesian cuisine still tends to focus on tourism promotion and product uniqueness, rather than on communication strategies that sustain the relevance of local gastronomy in the digital era and within postcolonial debates about cultural authenticity, hybridity, and heritage.

Yogyakarta, as a cultural city, has a variety of typical foods, including bakpia, which has become an icon of traditional souvenirs (Dwi Puspita, 2025). The origin of bakpia began as a Chinese pastry, adapted since the 1940s and acculturated with local tastes until it became a product accepted by various social groups. Bakpia thus represents a symbol of cultural fusion that illustrates the historical layering and sustainability of traditional culinary practices. However, amid the onslaught of modern food products, global brands, and aggressive cross-platform promotion, its position needs to be strengthened among the younger generation (Novitasari & Adiprabowo, 2024). Bakpia Juwara Satoe, as one of the MSMEs that has produced dry and wet bakpia since 2018 (Indraswari & Sarahswati, 2024), faces similar challenges in maintaining its relevance in an increasingly competitive and algorithm-driven market. Therefore, a contextually grounded digital communication strategy through social media is not merely an optional promotional tool, but a strategic necessity to safeguard both market position and cultural meaning.

The use of social media in Indonesia continues to increase every year (Abdillah et al., 2024). Platforms like TikTok offer food producers the opportunity to creatively introduce their products through short-form video content, participatory trends, and direct consumer interactions. Nonetheless, academic research that examines TikTok's role in shaping perceptions of local cuisine remains limited, especially compared to studies focusing on platforms such as Instagram or Facebook. The lack of systematic scholarly attention to TikTok in this context constitutes a research gap that this study aims to address. Through engaging visual content and narrative formats such as behind-the-scenes stories, recipe demonstrations, and user-generated responses, social media can expand the global visibility of local culinary traditions and contribute to digital cultural preservation (Hernandez-Rojas et al., 2021).

This research also offers novelty compared to previous studies, such as Manah & Yudhawasthi (2024), which emphasize culinary destination branding through social media without adequately addressing the cultural sustainability dimension and the specific affordances of short-form video platforms. In this context, the present study proposes a more theoretically

grounded perspective by exploring in depth how TikTok features such as sounds, trends, duets, stitches, and algorithmic recommendations are used to build narratives of local gastronomic sustainability through a strategic approach to digital communication.
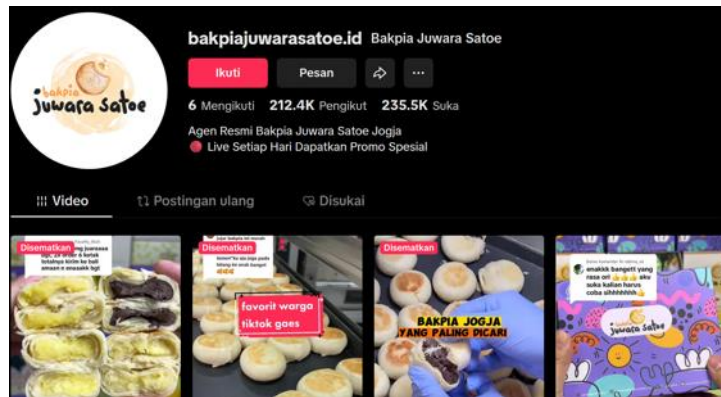

Figure 1. Screenshot of @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id TikTok
Source: TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id

As seen in Figure 1, TikTok, as a trend-based and algorithm-driven platform, has high virality and features that can be leveraged to build strong visual and affective stories. The @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id account is an example of how a local MSME uses TikTok to introduce the production process, strengthen its product image, and embed sustainability values such as respect for tradition, local sourcing, and intergenerational transmission into its narrative (Wulandari et al., 2025). Thus, this study seeks to analyze how communication strategies on TikTok contribute to promoting sustainable local gastronomy, using the @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id account as a single case study situated in Yogyakarta's culinary landscape.

This study aims to explore the role of strategic, platform-specific communication in promoting local culinary practices through the TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id and its impact on people's perceptions and experiences of local gastronomy. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research will analyze how TikTok content shapes consumers' interest in and preferences for local food, especially bakpia, and how it articulates narratives of cultural continuity and sustainability. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How does the @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id. Could a TikTok account employ narrative branding and visual storytelling strategies to promote sustainable local gastronomy? (2) How do audiences interpret and engage with these narratives in relation to their perceptions of local culinary heritage and

identity? (3) What tensions and challenges emerge regarding authenticity, commercialization, and cultural sustainability in the use of TikTok as a medium for local gastronomy promotion?

This research contributes to digital communication and gastronomic studies by linking platform-specific communication strategies on TikTok with cultural sustainability discourses in local gastronomy. The main focus is to understand the contextual meaning of strategic digital communication for local tourism and culinary ecosystems, and how such practices can contribute simultaneously to gastronomic preservation and to the local economy. The study also attends to key challenges in promoting local gastronomy in the digital age, including issues of authenticity, the influence of online reviews, and the risk of reducing complex food cultures to easily consumable content.

Although several studies have discussed culinary promotion through social media, previous research has not explicitly linked strategic communication with culinary sustainability on TikTok as the primary platform for circulating local gastronomy narratives. In fact, TikTok's distinctive combination of visual communication, trend-based algorithms, and virality enables local culinary actors to reach wide and diverse audiences rapidly. This research gap provides an important basis for this study to deepen our understanding of how communication strategies on TikTok can serve as an instrument for sustaining local culinary culture, rather than merely boosting short-term sales or tourist visits.

Compared to the research by Manah & Yudhawasthi (2024), which focuses on culinary destination branding through social media, this research offers further novelty by connecting platform-based digital communication strategies with the sustainability dimension of local gastronomy and with digital cultural preservation more broadly. This approach supports a more contextual analysis of communication practices that are not only promotional but also oriented towards cultural diplomacy and the safeguarding of traditional cuisines in a rapidly globalizing media ecosystem. Thus, this study seeks to systematically examine how communication strategies on TikTok promote sustainable local gastronomy, using the @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id account as a theoretically informed and contextually grounded single case study.
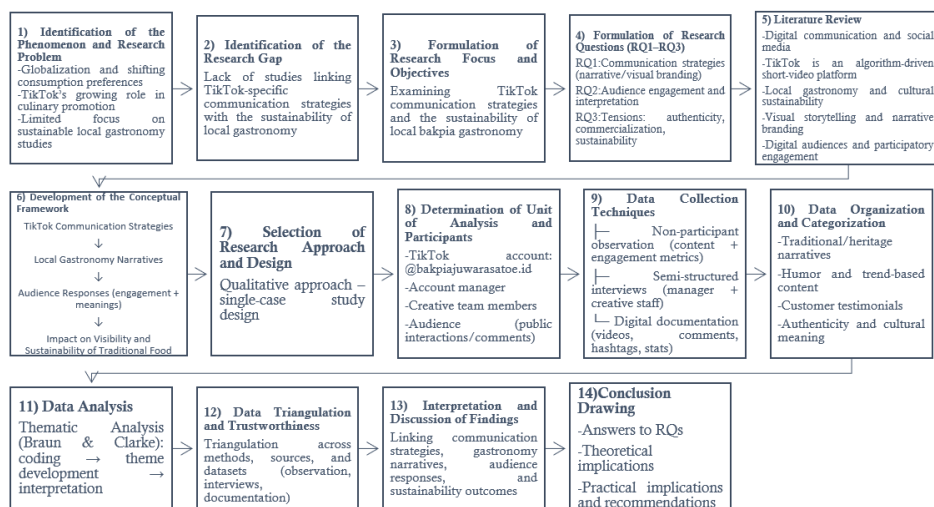
2. Method

This research uses a qualitative single-case study approach. This design is appropriate for examining meaning, strategy, and communication context in depth, particularly in relation to the promotion of local gastronomy on social media. Qualitative research encourages

researchers to understand phenomena holistically and contextually; it describes social realities based on in-depth interpretation of ongoing relationships, activities, or situations (Schreier, 2012). The case study design was chosen because the unit of analysis is one TikTok account, @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id, allowing the researcher to explore communication practices and their contextual meanings in detail. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the study pursues analytical generalization, using a theoretically informed, information-rich case to illuminate broader patterns relevant to MSMEs in similar contexts.

To provide a clear overview of the research process, a research flow diagram is presented (Figure X). The diagram summarizes the stages of this study from problem formulation and research gap identification to data collection, thematic analysis, triangulation, and conclusion drawing.

Table 1. Research Flow Diagram of the Study

1) Identification of the Phenomenon and Research Problem	2) Identification of the Research Gap	3) Formulation of Research Focus and Objectives	4) Formulation of Research Questions (RQ1-RQ3)	5) Literature Review
-Globalization and shifting consumption preferences -TikTok's growing role in culinary promotion -Limited focus on sustainable local gastronomy studies	Lack of studies linking TikTok-specific communication strategies with the sustainability of local gastronomy	Examining TikTok communication strategies and the sustainability of local bakpia gastronomy	RQ1:Communication strategies (narrative/visual branding) RQ2:Audience engagement and interpretation RQ3:Tensions: authenticity, commercialization, sustainability	-Digital communication and social media -TikTok is an algorithm-driven short-video platform -Local gastronomy and cultural sustainability -Visual storytelling and narrative branding -Digital audiences and participatory engagement

6) Development of the Conceptual Framework	7) Selection of Research Approach and Design	8) Determination of Unit of Analysis and Participants	9) Data Collection Techniques	10) Data Organization and Categorization
TikTok Communication Strategies ↓ Local Gastronomy Narratives ↓ Audience Responses (engagement + meanings) ↓ Impact on Visibility and Sustainability of Traditional Food	Qualitative approach – single-case study design	-TikTok account: @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id -Account manager -Creative team members -Audience (public interactions/comments)	├─ Non-participant observation (content + engagement metrics) ├─ Semi-structured interviews (manager + creative staff) └─ Digital documentation (videos, comments, hashtags, stats)	-Traditional/heritage narratives -Humor and trend-based content -Customer testimonials -Authenticity and cultural meaning

11) Data Analysis	12) Data Triangulation and Trustworthiness	13) Interpretation and Discussion of Findings	14)Conclusion Drawing
Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke): coding → theme development → interpretation	Triangulation across methods, sources, and datasets (observation, interviews, documentation)	Linking communication strategies, gastronomy narratives, audience responses, and sustainability outcomes	-Answers to RQs -Theoretical implications -Practical implications and recommendations

The selection of @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id was based on purposive sampling. This account was chosen because (1) it consistently uses TikTok as a primary platform to promote local food (bakpia), (2) it explicitly incorporates narratives related to local identity and tradition, (3) it exhibits stable and measurable engagement (likes, comments, shares, and views) across different content types, and (4) its owner is an MSME located in Yogyakarta, a city widely recognized for its strong culinary heritage. These criteria make the account theoretically relevant for a study on strategic communication and sustainable local gastronomy. At the same time, the representation of this single case is limited; the findings are not intended to be generalized to all culinary TikTok accounts but to provide in-depth,

context-specific insights that can inform further comparative and multi-case research.

The entire research process was carried out online, as the object of research is digital media accessible primarily through internet platforms. Data collection took place over two months, from March to April 2024, focusing on how communication strategies were deployed to promote traditional Indonesian food, especially bakpia. During this period, the researcher systematically observed all video content and live broadcasts uploaded by the account, as well as audience interactions (likes, comments, shares, and, where visible, view counts). The observation window was chosen to capture routine upload patterns and several cycles of emerging and declining trends on TikTok. However, this relatively short period constitutes a limitation of the study, as it may not fully represent seasonal variations (e.g., holiday periods) or long-term shifts in content performance (Hutchinson et al., 2023).

The subjects of this study include (1) video content and live broadcasts, (2) captions, hashtags, and other paratextual elements, and (3) audience interaction with the account (comments, likes, and shares). The researcher aimed to understand how digital communication shapes narratives of sustainable local gastronomy and how these narratives, in turn, shape audience perceptions. Accordingly, data were collected through three main techniques: non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital documentation.

The researchers conducted systematic non-participant observation of video content and live broadcasts uploaded during the two-month period. An observation protocol was developed to record (a) posting frequency and timing, (b) thematic categories (e.g., product introduction, behind-the-scenes production, heritage narratives, humor/trend-based content, testimonials), (c) stylistic elements (e.g., use of music, text overlays, voice-over, transitions), and (d) audience engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares, and visible view counts). These observations aimed to identify communication styles, narrative structures, and interaction patterns that emerge between the account and its audience, and to compare how different content categories perform in terms of engagement.

The researchers conducted three online semi-structured interviews via Zoom, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes: one with the account manager and two with creative staff members responsible for content planning and production. Semi-structured interviews, as a form of in-depth interview, offer greater flexibility than structured interviews because they allow the researcher to explore issues more openly and in more depth. The interview protocol covered themes such as (1) content planning and

strategy (e.g., choice of themes, posting schedule, and target audience), (2) positioning of local gastronomy and cultural values in the content, (3) use of TikTok features (sounds, trends, hashtags, duets, and stitches) to build narratives, and (4) perceived challenges and opportunities in promoting traditional foods in a crowded digital environment. Follow-up questions were added to probe unexpected or particularly rich responses and to strengthen the validity of the data.

Digital documentation was carried out on visual and textual elements, including archived videos, screenshots of comment sections, descriptive statistics of impressions (e.g., likes, comments, shares), and the hashtags used. Public comments that were directly quoted in the analysis were anonymized; usernames were removed or replaced with pseudonyms, and identifying details were omitted or paraphrased. This documentation was used both as a primary data source (for example, to examine recurring audience reactions) and as a supporting verification tool for observation and interview data, thereby reinforcing the credibility of the analysis.

Table 2. Categories of Communication Strategy and Average Likes/Comments per Post Type

Category Strategy	Strategy Description	Sample Content	Audience Response (Quantitative)
Traditional Narrative	Featuring the story of the origin of bakpia	Video about the origin of bakpia	Average 120 likes, 15 comments
Humor & Entertainment	Using TikTok trends	Parody video of durian-flavored bakpia	3.500 likes, 250 comments, 80 shares
Customer Testimonials	Show customer reviews	Video of customers buying bakpia	980 likes, 30 comments

To clarify the structure of the findings, the researchers compiled Table 1, which compares various communication strategies used by the account with audience responses. This table summarizes how different content types receive varying reactions from the public and informs the subsequent thematic interpretation of platform-specific communication strategies.

Figure 2. Visualization of Findings and Relationships Between Themes
Source: researcher documentation

The researcher developed a diagram of the research findings (Figure 2) to illustrate the relationships among communication strategies, local gastronomic narratives, and audience responses. The figure visualizes how different strategic choices (e.g., traditional narrative, humor/trends, testimonials) connect to emergent themes such as cultural identity, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention. It also shows how digital communication can shape awareness and interest in traditional foods, making the causal and interpretive flow in local food promotion strategies on social media more transparent (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

To ensure data validity, this study employed methodological and data source triangulation by combining observations, interviews, and digital documentation. Triangulation was operationalized by (1) comparing patterns observed in content categories and engagement metrics with explanations provided by informants during interviews, and (2) cross-checking audience reactions (e.g., recurring comment themes) with the narratives claimed by the account manager and creative staff. Preliminary themes emerging from one data source (e.g., "heritage as differentiation" from interview data) were checked against other sources (e.g., how often heritage is explicitly mentioned in captions or comments). This process aimed to increase the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. All interview participants were provided with an information sheet explaining the research aims, procedures, potential risks, and their rights (including the right to withdraw). Informed consent was obtained before each interview, and all interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission. Organizational and individual identifiers were anonymized in the transcript and analysis, except for the TikTok account name, which is publicly accessible and central to the research context. For user-generated content, only public comments were considered; usernames and identifiable details were removed or altered, and comments were paraphrased when necessary to reduce traceability. The use of public

content adhered to TikTok's terms of service and institutional research ethics guidelines.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The analytic process followed six main stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and observation notes and repeated viewing of selected videos; (2) generation of initial codes, conducted manually and supported by basic qualitative data management software (e.g., NVivo), to label segments related to communication strategies, narratives, and audience responses; (3) searching for themes by clustering related codes into broader candidate themes (e.g., "heritage storytelling", "relatable humor", "social proof through testimonials"); (4) reviewing themes by checking their coherence across the entire dataset and refining their boundaries; (5) defining and naming themes by formulating clear thematic descriptions and specifying how each theme relates to the research questions; and (6) producing the analytic narrative, in which themes were illustrated with representative excerpts from interviews, observations, and digital documentation. To enhance dependability, a second researcher independently coded a subset of the data and discussed coding discrepancies with the primary researcher until consensus was reached; this process functioned as a form of peer debriefing and informal inter-coder reliability check.

Through this in-depth qualitative analysis and single-case study design, the research aims to uncover contextually meaningful communication strategies for promoting local gastronomy via social media. The findings are expected to offer both theoretical insights into platform-specific digital communication and practical guidance for culinary MSMEs seeking to increase the visibility and appeal of traditional food products in the digital era, while remaining sensitive to issues of cultural sustainability and authenticity.

3. Results

The TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id is an official affiliate account for MSME Bakpia Juwara Satoe, based in Yogyakarta. Since 2023, the account has actively promoted its products through short videos and live broadcasts, building thousands of followers with relatively high engagement. The content includes the process of making bakpia, packaging, customer testimonials, and storytelling that position bakpia as a typical culinary icon of Yogyakarta. To avoid merely descriptive reporting, the presentation of findings is organized into four interrelated themes that emerged from the data, context, communication, collaboration, and connection (4C). Each theme is first presented

10

empirically and then interpreted in light of relevant communication and marketing theories in the discussion section.

Digital communication is characterized by interactivity, speed, and global reach, which provide strategic advantages for building relationships between producers and consumers (Hongcharu, 2024). In this study, these characteristics are visible in how the account combines cultural narratives, participatory content, and ongoing interaction with followers. The 4C structure is used as a heuristic to clarify how contextual narratives (Context), dialogical practices (Communication), cross-actor synergies (Collaboration), and emotional/relational bonds (Connection) are articulated in the promotion of local gastronomy on TikTok.
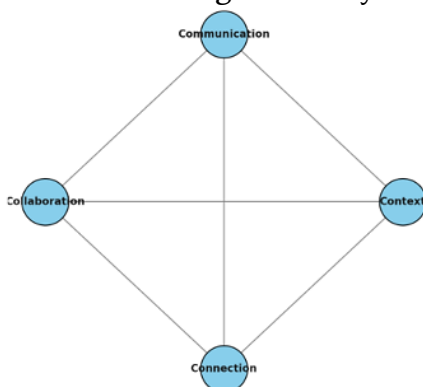
Figure 3. Strategy Relationship Diagram 4C (Context–Communication–
Collaboration–Connection)
Source: researcher documentation

Figure 3 visualizes the causal and relational flow identified in the data: contextual storytelling enables dialogical communication, which is amplified through collaboration and culminates in affective and social connections with audiences. Rather than imposing an external model, the 4C labels are used to organize patterns that emerged inductively in the coding process and to make explicit how different strands of practice reinforce one another in the promotion of bakpia as a sustainable local food.

As an analytical lens, this study draws on Media Equation Theory, Social Interaction Theory, and Brand Storytelling to examine how TikTok content functions not only as a promotional tool but also as an arena for constructing local culinary identity through digital interaction. To maintain analytical clarity, the presentation below follows a "Finding → Interpretation → Implication" logic, separating empirical observations from theoretical interpretation as far as possible. Unlike prior studies that

apply predefined marketing models deductively, the 4C framework in this study emerged inductively from thematic coding, ensuring that the model reflects actual practices rather than externally imposed categories.

3.1 *Context of cultural narratives and digital transparency*

The @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id account provides informative, interactive, and engaging content for its audience. The posts highlight the products, the stories behind bakpia, the production process, and the values the brand embodies. This integration of informational and narrative content creates a rich context for viewers, positioning bakpia not only as a snack but as part of Yogyakarta's culinary heritage.

Compared with Manah & Yudhawasthi (2024), this study finds that contextual storytelling operates more at the level of cultural education and heritage transmission than place promotion. The bakpia narrative enhances product appeal while strengthening emotional connections with consumers. This narrative-driven approach aligns with studies showing that storytelling fosters consumer trust and shapes brand preferences.

"For example, live streaming or content, there are people who ask for product spills and then we show the details of the bakpia product or for example on video content that shows the manufacturing process in the factory, then later the contents of the bakpia will be displayed, revealing and telling the ingredients for making bakpia so that people know what the texture is so that they are interested in trying the product." (R account manager @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id)

This quote illustrates how TikTok's features support transparency in food production. Live streams and behind-the-scenes videos are not only entertaining but also reinforce consumers' perception of product quality. Such openness is central to consumer trust, especially in the context of sustainable gastronomy.

Food stories also differentiate the product from competitors. In an increasingly saturated market, a unique narrative can be decisive in purchasing decisions. By sharing compelling stories, food producers create more immersive experiences for consumers, potentially increasing loyalty and prompting repeat purchases. In this sense, consumers purchase not only the product but also the experience and values attached to the brand (Jerez, 2023). However, this study extends prior work by showing that storytelling on TikTok also functions as a transparency mechanism, especially through live streams and behind-the-scenes videos.

Figure 4. The Story Behind Bakpia: Traditions, Processes, and Inherited Love

Source: TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id

As shown in Figure 4, stories behind the food also function as a meaningful educational tool. By explaining the manufacturing process and the origin of materials, producers can increase consumer awareness of sustainability-related issues (Lin et al., 2022). This enriches the culinary experience and may encourage more conscious and responsible consumption. From an applied perspective, this suggests that MSMEs can leverage TikTok not only for promotion but also for consumer education and trust-building in sustainable food practices.

3.2 *Dialogical communication and emotional engagement*

Social media, including TikTok, enables two-way communication between brands and consumers (Khasanah et al., 2020). On @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id, one of the main strengths of communication lies in the consistent use of interactive features such as comments, video replies, and live streams.

In contrast to earlier studies that treat engagement primarily as quantitative metrics (likes or views), this study emphasizes qualitative engagement, how audiences express satisfaction, loyalty, and trust through comments. This aligns with Sihura (2025) but adds nuance by linking engagement explicitly to local cultural narratives, not merely entertainment value.

Figure 5. Interaction with followers on the TikTok account
@bakpiajuwarasatoe.id
Source: TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id

The account frequently replies to comments via short videos and responds in real time during live streams. This practice constitutes a shift from conventional, one-way promotional communication to more dialogical and participatory communication. Such interactions help construct a sense of belonging, making audiences feel valued and included in the brand's narrative, which in turn can strengthen loyalty and extend the message's reach organically through shares and comments (Sulistyani et al., 2023).

Interaction data (likes, shares, comments) show consistently strong user responses, especially among younger users who dominate TikTok. Within the context of the account's follower base, posts that combine strong narratives with local values tend to generate higher engagement than more generic promotional posts. Engagement here is not analyzed statistically but used descriptively to compare relative performance between content categories, as illustrated earlier in Table 1.

"Creating engaging video content, implementing hooks, problems, and solutions, and using live streaming features with image quality and engaging word selection to engage with followers can increase engagement from marketing. And I have to interact and respond to comments with followers a lot to build relationships, especially during live streams, so I'm interested in buying products that don't scroll right away when they enter my live space." (R account manager @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id)

This quote shows how communicative practices are deliberately oriented toward engagement and purchase intention. From an empirical standpoint, it demonstrates the centrality of dialogical communication

responding to comments, staying present in live streams, and using hooks within the account's strategy.
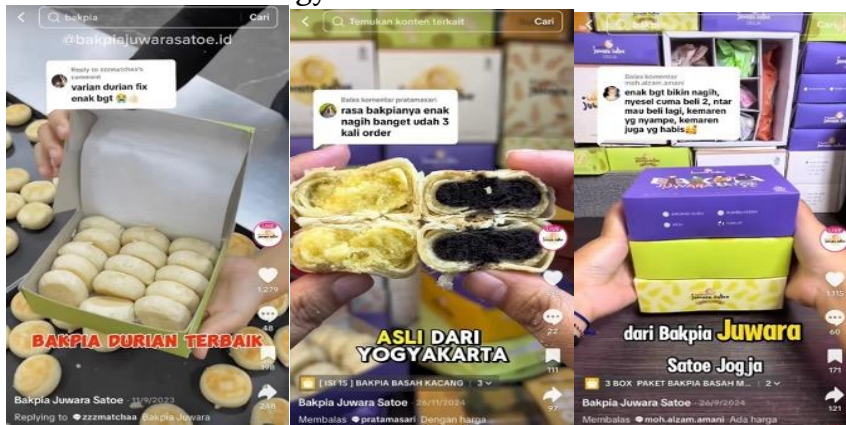

Figure 6. Comments from viewers show appreciation for the TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id
Source: TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id

Viewer comments further illustrate affective responses and emerging loyalty. For example, the @zzzmatchaa comment, "durian variant fix is delicious bgt," reflects recognition of distinctive taste and perceived product quality. The phrase "fix…delicious" suggests strong satisfaction. Another comment, "The taste of the bakpia is really good, I've ordered it 3 times," indicates repeat purchase and satisfaction over time. Comments such as "it's good to make nagih, nyesel just buy 2" highlight intense enthusiasm and regret at having bought too little, implying that expectations were exceeded. These comments function as qualitative indicators of trust and attachment rather than as statistically representative measures.

Overall, the findings support the view that TikTok's communicative affordances can be leveraged to arouse interest in local cuisine through visual, emotional, and interactive content (Sihura, 2025; Harahap & Akil, 2025; Yoel et al., 2021). At the same time, they underscore the importance of consistent, responsive interaction in sustaining engagement. In practice, this finding implies that MSMEs should not rely solely on trends but strategically embed cultural narratives within interactive communication to sustain engagement.

3.3   *Collaboration as cultural and market strategy*

@bakpiajuwarasatoe.id has built its brand image not only through internal content but also through collaborations with TikTok affiliates, influencers, and other brands. These collaborations expand the account's

audience reach and consumer base. Previous research (Marpung et al., 2025) frames collaboration mainly as a market-expansion strategy. This study adds a cultural dimension, showing that collaboration is also discursively framed by actors as a tool for sustaining local identity.

Figure 7. Collaboration with the Kitkat brand on the TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id
Source: TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id

One notable collaboration is with global brand KitKat. On June 23, 2023, Bakpia Juwara Satoe launched a new variant: Bakpia Juwara Satoe with KITKAT Spread filling. This product uses premium KitKat chocolate, adding a modern twist to a traditional Yogyakarta food. The product targets young people and tourists looking for souvenirs that are both distinctive and contemporary.

This collaboration enriches the variety of bakpia flavors and potentially broadens market reach. Bakpia Juwara Satoe utilizes multiple digital platforms (TikTok Shop, Shopee, Tokopedia, GrabMart) and works with influencers and TikTok affiliates to strengthen visibility and perceived credibility among younger consumers. Empirically, such collaborations reflect a hybridization of local and global values in product design and promotion (Marpung et al., 2025).

"It is important to introduce the typical food of a region so that the sustainability of local identity is maintained, not replaced by food from outside, which is trending in Indonesia, and is preferred by young people today. With digital technology, it is easier to introduce products in an area. For example, Sumatrans can buy/taste typical souvenirs without going to Yogyakarta and vice versa." (R account manager @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id).

This finding partially contrasts with critical literature on cultural commodification, which often assumes that global collaboration dilutes authenticity. The difference may stem from the actor's perspective versus

16

the audience's perception: this study captures how producers justify collaboration, not how all audiences interpret it. This points to a limitation and a direction for future research. In operational terms, collaboration can be a double-edged strategy: it enhances visibility but requires careful narrative framing to prevent perceived loss of authenticity.

3.4 Emotional connection and consumer co-creation

The final theme concerns how the account builds and maintains emotional and social connections with consumers. @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id strives to connect personally with its audience through openness, transparency, and the display of a "human" side of the brand. These practices help create a participatory space in which consumers are not only receivers of information but co-participants in shaping narratives and gastronomic experiences.
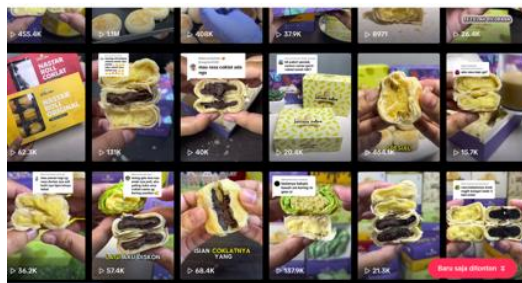
Figure 8. Screenshot of consumers' active participation on the TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id
Source: TikTok account @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id

As illustrated in Figure 8, consumers share experiences, provide feedback, and influence others' purchasing decisions through comments and UGC. This pattern resonates with the idea that gastronomic meaning is co-constructed in interaction rather than fixed in the product alone (Nadeem et al., 2021; Satriya & Indrayani, 2022).

"The strategy is to create video content, live streaming, advertisements about bakpia, and often interact with buyers to buy back bakpia products. There are times when content is adjusted to align with the TikTok promos running. For example, the event of a twin date (7.7). Or existing events such as Eid and payday sale, etc." (R account manager @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id).

Consistent with Nadeem et al. (2021), the findings show that gastronomic meaning is co-constructed through interaction. However, this study extends that argument by demonstrating how co-construction occurs in real time through TikTok features such as live chats and video replies, rather than only through reviews.

Unlike Riefler (2020), who focuses on review credibility, this study highlights emotional expressions ("nagih," "ordered three times") as indicators of affective attachment. This difference is likely due to methodological variation: qualitative thematic analysis allows deeper interpretation of emotional language than survey-based studies.

Empirically, this statement shows that communication strategies are adapted to platform-specific moments (e.g., 7.7 sale, Eid, and payday sales), combining periodic campaigns with sustained interaction to keep consumers engaged over time.

Previous studies suggest that reviews and recommendations can significantly impact a brand's reputation and the appeal of local food (Riefler, 2020). In this case, consumer participation helps form a community that is not geographically bound but extends to a broader audience interested in Yogyakarta's culinary offerings (García-León & Teichert, 2024). From a practical standpoint, fostering connection requires continuous engagement management, especially to mitigate risks of misinformation or negative reviews (Kaur & Kaur, 2024). The need for continuous communication management in an interactive and open environment, therefore, becomes apparent.

4. Discussion

The findings confirm that TikTok functions not only as a marketing channel but as a cultural communication arena, supporting (Marceleno et al., 2025). However, this study contributes new insight by showing how platform-specific affordances shape sustainability narratives differently from other social media platforms. The use of narrative content in @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id supports the argument that storytelling is central to brand differentiation in digital food promotion (Manah & Yudhawasthi, 2024; Jerez, 2023). The account's consistent use of heritage narratives and process transparency aligns with Brand Storytelling literature, which emphasizes authenticity, coherence, and emotional resonance (Satriya & Indrayani, 2022; Huang et al., 2022; Kaharudin, 2025). The data suggest that when stories foreground local identity and tradition, audiences respond with comments indicating trust, satisfaction, and repeat purchases. This extends prior work by showing how such narratives can be operationalized within a short-form video platform characterized by trends and rapid content cycles.

The communication practices observed, especially the use of video replies and live interactions, resonate with Media Equation Theory and Social Interaction Theory (Peng et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2022). Audiences engage with the account as if interacting with a social actor: they address

the brand in the second person, express emotions, and expect timely responses. The high engagement on posts with strong narrative and interactive elements supports the idea that audiences attribute social presence to the brand and that this perceived presence can strengthen trust. However, the single-case design and absence of a control group mean that this study cannot causally prove that dialogical communication alone drives purchase intent; instead, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of plausible associations consistent with theoretical expectations.

Collaboration with KitKat illustrates both opportunities and tensions in hybrid local-global branding. On the one hand, such collaboration can increase visibility, attract younger audiences, and position traditional products within contemporary taste trends (Marpung et al., 2025). On the other hand, critical perspectives on cultural sustainability would caution that intense integration with global brands risks diluting the perceived "localness" of bakpia or shifting focus from heritage to novelty. The current data suggest that the brand frames collaboration as a means to sustain local identity through wider distribution, but future research should examine whether audiences also perceive this collaboration positively or whether some see it as commercialization that erodes authenticity.

The role of connection and participatory culture supports arguments that social media enables co-construction of meaning around food (Nadeem et al., 2021; García-León & Teichert, 2024). Consumer comments and UGC demonstrate that local gastronomy is narrated collectively; users "testify" to taste, quality, and experience, which functions as social proof (Riefler, 2020). Yet, as Kaur & Kaur (2024) warn, the same dynamics that empower community-building can amplify negative reviews or misinformation. The findings, therefore, underscore the importance of online reputation management and transparent, responsive communication (Peco-Torres et al., 2023; Syafira & Rohman, 2024).

In relation to cultural sustainability, the study supports the argument that digital platforms can contribute to the preservation and re-actualization of culinary heritage by making local foods visible and narratively meaningful to dispersed audiences (Lin et al., 2022; Adiprabowo & Sanofi, 2023; García-León & Teichert, 2024). However, claims about "cultural sustainability" must be made cautiously. The two-month observation window, single platform, and single case limit the extent to which long-term cultural impacts can be inferred. The evidence here is strongest at the level of symbolic representation (how bakpia is narrated) and short-term engagement (comments, likes, repeat orders), not at the level of structural cultural change.

The limitations of this study need to be acknowledged explicitly. The reliance on a single case, short observation period, and absence of comparative accounts means that overgeneralization must be avoided. The study cannot rule out alternative explanations, for instance, that product quality or offline reputation drives engagement independently of TikTok communication strategies. Nonetheless, by integrating thematic analysis of content, interaction metrics, and interviews with account managers and creative staff, the study provides a theoretically informed, context-specific account of how one MSME uses TikTok to negotiate between commercial objectives and cultural positioning. In sum, the findings confirm that TikTok can serve as a strategic medium for promoting local gastronomy, but also highlight the need for critical reflection on authenticity, cultural hybridization, and the structural limitations of platform-based sustainability claims.

This study affirms that TikTok's platform-specific communication strategies are not merely promotional tools but serve as cultural instruments to support the sustainability of local gastronomy amid the pressures of globalization and shifting digital consumption patterns. By using the @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id account as a case study, the research fills a significant gap in the literature that had not explicitly linked culinary sustainability with strategic communication on short-form video platforms. The findings demonstrate that a combination of cultural storytelling, participatory interaction, and targeted collaborations can strengthen audience perceptions of local food identity while enhancing consumer engagement. Thus, this study not only fulfills its objective of exploring the role of strategic communication in promoting local gastronomy through TikTok but also offers theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of digital communication and cultural preservation in platform-driven culinary ecosystems.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored how TikTok, through the case of @bakpiajuwarasatoe.id, functions not only as a marketing medium but also as a cultural communication space where local gastronomy is represented, negotiated, and made visible to digital audiences. Three strategic patterns, heritage-based narrative storytelling, dialogical audience engagement, and platform-adaptive content, emerged as key mechanisms that support the symbolic continuity of bakpia as a culinary icon of Yogyakarta. While the study cannot claim long-term cultural preservation, it demonstrates how digital narratives and participatory interactions can contribute to sustaining the visibility and desirability of traditional food

within everyday media consumption. Theoretically, the findings offer an exploratory contribution to digital communication and gastronomic studies by linking platform-specific practices with established frameworks such as Social Interaction Theory, Media Equation, and Brand Storytelling. These frameworks help explain the observed associations between transparency, emotional resonance, and audience trust within a platform-driven environment. The study thus introduces the concept of digital cultural sustainability as a modest, interaction-based form of cultural relevance maintenance rather than structural heritage preservation. From an applied perspective, the research highlights several implications for MSMEs and stakeholders in local culinary promotion. Content strategies that integrate cultural narratives with process transparency can enhance differentiation; consistent two-way interaction fosters emotional connection and loyalty; and collaborations with global brands offer visibility but require narrative care to protect perceived authenticity. However, these insights are context-specific and should be approached as adaptive considerations rather than universal prescriptions. Given the study's limitations, including its single-case scope, short observation period, and lack of audience-side data, its findings should be interpreted as analytically suggestive rather than statistically generalizable. Future research should expand upon this work through comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-method studies that capture broader patterns and deeper audience interpretations across platforms and culinary contexts. Only through such expanded inquiry can we more fully understand the potential and limitations of digital communication in sustaining local gastronomic cultures in the face of globalization and algorithmic media dynamics.

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