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## NAVIGATING ISLAMIC LAW PARADOX IN DIGITAL JOURNALISM: INDONESIAN ULEMA COUNCIL (MUI) POLICIES AND NETIZEN REACTIONS

### MENAVIGASI PARADOKS HUKUM ISLAM DALAM JURNALISME DIGITAL: KEBIJAKAN MAJELIS ULAMA INDONESIA (MUI) DAN REAKSI WARGANET

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study was motivated by the increasing role of TikTok as a medium for promoting local culinary tourism through participatory content and the use of hashtags. The focus of the study was directed at the strategy of the @bekicotmagetan account in utilizing the hashtag #bekicotmagetan to introduce Magetan's signature dish, rica-rica bekicot, while also building a culture-based tourism image. The research questions include how the hashtag is used and how TikTok users interact with and respond to the culinary content produced. The purpose of this study is to explain the role of digital communication and audience participation in shaping the image of local cuisine in the digital space. The methodology used is a qualitative approach with a netnography method through online observation of 25 videos and 33 comments uploaded during 1–31 August 2024, when the digital activity of the #bekicotmagetan hashtag peaked. The analysis was conducted using the Representation, Participatory Culture, Diffusion of Innovations, and Uses and Gratifications theories. The results of the study show that the hashtag #bekicotmagetan functions as a multifunctional promotional tool that strengthens cultural identity, increases audience engagement, expands content reach, and fulfils information and entertainment needs. In conclusion, TikTok is effective as a medium for cultural communication and local culinary promotion. It is recommended that businesses and local governments develop creative content strategies based on public participation to strengthen the image of culinary destinations in a sustainable manner.

**Keywords:** Communication strategies, Local cuisine, TikTok,

#### **ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh meningkatnya peran TikTok sebagai media promosi wisata kuliner lokal melalui konten partisipatif dan penggunaan hashtag. Fokus kajian diarahkan pada strategi akun @bekicotmagetan dalam memanfaatkan tagar #bekicotmagetan untuk memperkenalkan kuliner khas Magetan, rica-rica bekicot, sekaligus membangun citra pariwisata berbasis budaya. Rumusan masalah mencakup bagaimana strategi penggunaan hashtag tersebut serta bagaimana bentuk interaksi dan respons pengguna TikTok terhadap konten kuliner yang dihasilkan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menjelaskan peran komunikasi digital dan partisipasi audiens dalam membentuk citra kuliner lokal di ruang digital. Metodologi yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode netnografi melalui observasi daring terhadap 25 video dan 33 komentar yang diunggah selama 1–31 Agustus 2024, saat aktivitas digital tagar #bekicotmagetan mencapai puncaknya. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan teori Representasi, Partisipatory Culture, Diffusion of Innovations, dan Uses and Gratifications. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tagar #bekicotmagetan berfungsi sebagai alat promosi multifungsi yang memperkuat identitas budaya, meningkatkan keterlibatan audiens, memperluas jangkauan konten, serta memenuhi kebutuhan informasi dan hiburan. Kesimpulannya, TikTok efektif sebagai media komunikasi budaya dan promosi kuliner lokal. Disarankan agar pelaku usaha dan pemerintah daerah mengembangkan strategi konten kreatif berbasis partisipasi publik untuk memperkuat citra destinasi kuliner secara berkelanjutan.

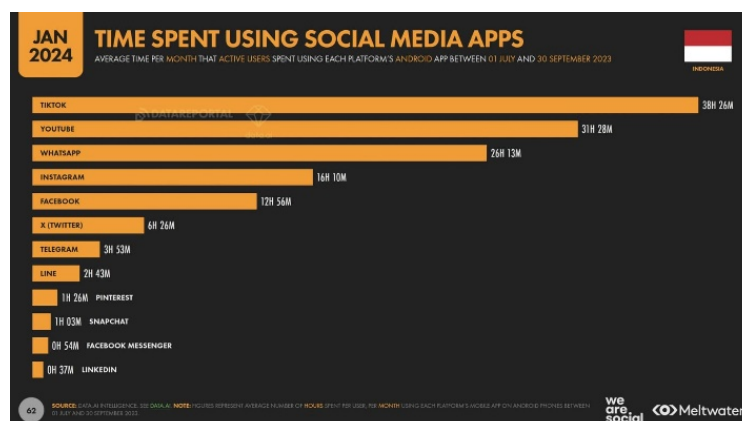
**Kata kunci:** Strategi komunikasi, Masakan lokal, TikTok

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has profoundly transformed multiple sectors, including tourism. Digital technologies, such as the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence, have influenced consumer attitudes and decision making processes (Sari et al., 2025). Social media now serves as a central medium for disseminating information, shaping public perception, and facilitating interaction between tourism stakeholders and a broader, more responsive audience (Singgalen, 2022). Digital communication refers to the interaction and transmission of information facilitated by information technology and the internet, encompassing platforms such as social media, instant messaging applications, and video-sharing services. Since its emergence in the early 1990s, digital communication has evolved into a global and interactive medium that enables the formation of extensive social networks (Kusumasanthi et al., 2023).

TikTok has emerged as one of the most rapidly expanding social media platforms in recent years. Since its global release in 2018, the platform has drawn millions of users across diverse age groups, with a particularly strong appeal among adolescents. Its wide range of features, including visual effects, background music, filters, and an intuitive interaction system, positions TikTok as an effective medium for creatively delivering a variety of messages (Mallick, 2023; Sulistiani & Syarifuddin, 2024).

Figure 1. Time Spent Using Sosmed



Source: Mallick, 2023

TikTok functions not only as an entertainment medium but also as an effective platform for shaping the image of local culinary destinations through creative and participatory visual storytelling. Its capacity to generate viral content, combined with interactive

features such as likes, comments, and shares, enables the establishment of strong emotional connections with audiences. Research has emphasized TikTok's role in facilitating participation-driven promotion, which encourages audiences to actively engage with the promotional content presented (Prasetyo et al., 2023). This dynamic creates opportunities for local communities, exemplified by the TikTok account @bekicotmagetan, to introduce Magetan's signature culinary product from East Java to a broader audience through the use of the hashtag #bekicotmagetan. *Hashtags* play an important role in grouping content and building digital identity.

A strong personal brand should reflect a person's true character, showcasing both strengths and weaknesses (Lestari & Farina, 2025). The @bekicotmagetan account presents Magetan's signature snail cuisine through engaging visuals that integrate elements of local culture. Its content highlights individuals associated with Magetan's snail stalls, who perform several silat movements before showcasing a serving of the snail dish. The promotion of these cultural assets demands a comprehensive approach that moves beyond conventional media platforms (Sufa et al., 2024). This presentation is accompanied by the song "Warung Bekicot Ning Magetan," combined with the hashtag #BekicotMagetan and promotional efforts through e-commerce platforms, thereby creating a distinctive and authentic digital branding strategy. These strategies not only preserve cultural heritage but also create more meaningful connections between visitors and the local culture (Sufa et al., 2024).

This type of content functions not only as a medium for delivering information but also as a mechanism for constructing a community-based collective narrative through User Generated Content (UGC), thereby fostering inclusive and dynamic two-way communication. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) posits that audiences actively choose and utilize media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs. Originating within communication studies and gaining prominence in the 1970s through the work of Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler, this theory redirects the analytical perspective from "what the media does to the audience" toward "what the audience does with the media" (Chen & Gu, 2024). Hashtags serve as instruments for establishing a recognizable and easily accessible online image of a destination. Audiences engage with hashtags not merely as

consumers of information but also as active contributors to the collective narrative surrounding tourist attractions (Aksoy & Yazici, 2023).

By incorporating hashtags accompanied by keywords, users can efficiently locate relevant content, thereby simplifying the search process and extending audience reach beyond direct followers (Djamaluddin et al., 2023).

In shaping destination branding, social media serves a strategic function as a promotional medium capable of reaching broad audiences while enabling direct interaction between destination managers and tourists (Anggraini & Sukartono, 2022; Sahabudin et al., 2023).

The use of creative content that incorporates visual elements such as logos, slogans, and compelling narratives fosters the development of a distinctive identity and reinforces the overall image of the destination (Bestari et al., 2024; Kallista & Ritonga, 2023).

This phenomenon reflects a transformation in the digital marketing landscape from a one-way, top-down model to a more inclusive and dynamic form of community-based participatory communication (Khatoon et al., 2024; Shiroshita et al., 2024). Nevertheless, scholarly investigations into the role of hashtags in constructing the image of local culinary tourism through TikTok remain limited. Existing research has predominantly concentrated on other social media platforms, such as Instagram and Twitter (Nautiyal et al., 2022). Netnography, as a qualitative method grounded in online observation, offers a framework for examining user interactions, visual narratives, and the transformation of meaning within digital content, which collectively construct a new image of a region's culinary identity. This approach enables researchers to assess how public perceptions emerge and how digital culture contributes to the formation of culinary identities, exemplified by the case of Magetan snails. The present study was carried out between August 1 and August 31, 2024, during a period when the hashtag #bekicotmagetan experienced a notable rise in user engagement.

Research on TikTok has largely focused on content popularity or the influence of key opinion leaders, without adequately examining the dynamics of hashtag usage as a mechanism for constructing the image of culinary destinations that incorporates community participation and broader cultural representation (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

Building on the preceding explanation, this study seeks to address several research

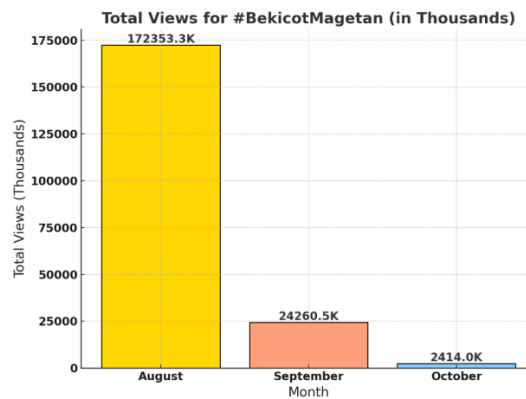
questions: How does the @bekicotmagetan account employ the hashtag #bekicotmagetan as a strategy for promoting local cuisine through TikTok content? What forms of engagement and responses do TikTok users demonstrate toward culinary content associated with this hashtag?

This study aims to broaden academic understanding of culinary tourism promotion in the digital age, focusing on TikTok as a platform for strategic cultural branding. Its findings offer practical insights for culinary entrepreneurs, local governments, and creative communities seeking to develop effective digital branding strategies that emphasize local culture and foster community participation. By exploring how social media especially TikTok and strategic elements like hashtags, digital engagement, and traditional foods such as Magetan snails contribute to shaping destination imagery, the research highlights how these components reinforce Indonesian culinary tourism identity.

This research is novel in its focus on TikTok, highlighting the platform's unique features selective algorithms, short-form videos, and participatory culture and examining how these intersect with Magetan's snail cuisine, a rarely explored symbol of local identity in digital tourism. By integrating four theoretical frameworks Representation Theory, Participatory Culture, Diffusion of Innovations, and Uses and Gratifications Theory into a single analytical model, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding than previous netnographic studies, which typically rely on one dominant theory. It maps the dynamic interactions between content, audiences, and algorithms in constructing the image of local culinary tourism.

The study also investigates the evolution of the hashtag #bekicotmagetan from a promotional tool to a digital cultural ecosystem, highlighting how content production, replication, and user engagement through comments and video remixes enable the diffusion of cultural identity. This demonstrates the survival and spread of local values in the digital realm through community collaboration. Distinct from earlier static content analyses, this study employed active online observation over one month (1–31 August 2024), using source and method triangulation to ensure data validity and gain a holistic view of the transformation of cultural symbols into representations of local culinary destinations.

Figure 2. Statistics on the Number of Video Viewers with the Hashtag #bekicotmagetan



Source: Researcher data processing results, 2025

The research was conducted from August 1 to August 31, 2024, because the hashtag #bekicotmagetan experienced a significant surge in digital activity, evidenced by a marked increase in videos, views, likes, and comments. This timeframe represents the peak period of Magetan's local culinary promotion cycle, during which the @bekicotmagetan account actively published promotional content and engaged audiences through interactive elements such as trending sounds, captions, and comment interactions.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study investigates TikTok's potential as a platform for promoting local tourism and cuisine, focusing on how @bekicotmagetan uses it to introduce Magetan's signature dish, bekicot, to a broader audience. TikTok's wide user base, rapid content dissemination through algorithms, and interactive features make it ideal for this purpose. The research follows several analytical stages using multiple theoretical frameworks to explore digital promotional strategies and audience engagement.

Through the lens of Diffusion of Innovations theory, the study examines how TikTok content, using the hashtag #bekicotmagetan and sound trends, spreads within digital social networks. Attention is given to strategies involving sound selection, visual aesthetics, and narrative construction aimed at attracting and encouraging content sharing.

Using Stuart Hall's Representation theory, the research analyzes how cultural symbols such as bekicot, local dialects, and visual elements are used to build narratives that blend cultural identity with promotional messaging, shaping audience perceptions.

Audience interaction is studied through the Uses and Gratifications theory to uncover user

motivations behind likes, views, comments, and shares. This reveals that users actively contribute to spreading content and reinforcing messages rather than being passive recipients.

Henry Jenkins' Participatory Culture theory frames the analysis of user engagement, showing how users remix content, comment meaningfully, or create response videos, thereby participating in a digital cultural ecosystem that deepens emotional connections with the cuisine.

Finally, referencing the Brand Image concept, the study explores how promotional efforts, user interaction, and content co-creation shape a collective perception of bekicot cuisine as a culinary tourism symbol of Magetan, reflecting both product quality and cultural richness to attract tourists.

### *Social Media Communication*

Social media functions as an internet-based medium that enables users to interact, exchange content, and establish digital social networks. Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as rooted in the ideology and technology of Web 2.0, which supports the creation and dissemination of user-generated content (Kurniasih & Khabibah, 2024).

### *TikTok Interactive Features: Hashtags and Trend Sounds*

Hashtags serve as digital identifiers that categorize content according to specific themes while enhancing its visibility on social media platforms. By placing the hash symbol (#) before a keyword, users can efficiently access related content, which simplifies searches and broadens audience reach beyond direct followers (Djamaluddin et al., 2023). In promotional contexts, employing popular or targeted hashtags captures public attention, fosters communities with shared interests, and stimulates collective conversations within digital environments. Similarly, trend sounds on TikTok function as a strategic mechanism to expand audience reach and engagement.

### *Tourism Image and Destination Branding*

Tourism image refers to the perceptions and impressions that tourists develop about a destination, shaped by diverse sources of information including media coverage,

promotional activities, and direct experiences (Ansyah et al., 2024). A favorable image enhances a destination's appeal while fostering tourist satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits (hakim et al., 2024; Shabrina et al., 2021). In constructing destination branding, social media assumes a strategic function as a promotional medium capable of reaching extensive audiences and facilitating direct interaction between destination managers and tourists (Sahabudin et al., 2023).

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative, netnographic approach to examine how TikTok users promote local culinary tourism in Magetan Regency, focusing on content about bekicot (snails). Rooted in the constructivist paradigm, it explores how social interaction and digital content shape public perceptions of Magetan's culinary identity. The main data come from TikTok videos on the account @bekicotmagetan and the hashtag #bekicotmagetan, analyzing user engagement through likes, comments, shares, and trend participation.

Online observation and content analysis were conducted on videos posted between August 1 and 31, 2024, evaluating audience responses and the construction of culinary narratives through elements like music, visuals, captions, and cultural symbols. This study uses 25 videos as the main unit of analysis and 33 comments as the unit of user interaction to describe communication strategies, forms of engagement, and the construction of Magetan's local culinary image on TikTok. Data were categorized by culinary types, visual elements, and user interactions, with irrelevant content filtered out.

Through thematic analysis, user interaction analysis, and interpretive analysis connected to cultural participation and digital communication theories, the study demonstrates how TikTok content under #bekicotmagetan influences collective perceptions and contributes to the digital portrayal of Magetan's culinary tourism.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The @bekicotmagetan account consistently uses distinctive visual and narrative elements to build its brand, incorporating local cultural features such as pencak silat movements, close-up visuals of snail dishes, and persuasive captions like *"ORDER RICA BEKICOT, CLICK*

*THE SHOPEE LINK IN THE PROFILE #bekicotmagetan.*” Incorporating pencak silat movements as visual elements generates a distinctive local character, reinforcing the cultural specificity of the content. Pencak silat functions not merely as a form of martial arts, but as a potent emblem of Javanese cultural identity. By integrating these movements into promotional videos, the account underscores the uniqueness of Magetan as its geographical origin, establishes a symbolic connection between traditional culinary practices and cultural pride, and appeals to audiences interested in local wisdom and cultural authenticity.

The deployment of close-up imagery of snail dishes operates as a sensory driven visual strategy. This technique enhances the aesthetic appeal of the food, stimulates curiosity, and increases consumers’ intention to try the product. The close up shots also convey a sense of quality and exclusivity by highlighting the texture and perceived tastiness of the dish, thereby improving the likelihood of converting viewers into actual buyers.

Captions such as “ORDER RICA BEKICOT, CLICK THE SHOPEE LINK IN THE #bekicotmagetan PROFILE” exemplify effective direct response copywriting. This strategy incorporates a clearly defined and easily actionable call to action (CTA), leverages platform-based funneling by redirecting users from TikTok to Shopee, and reinforces brand visibility through the inclusion of hashtags. The use of capitalized text and active verb structures fosters a sense of urgency and directive clarity, which is instrumental in prompting immediate user responses.

Moreover, the account maintains a coherent narrative structure across its content. Rather than publishing isolated or random posts, it consistently constructs brand storytelling that encompasses the product’s origin, preparation process, and consumer testimonials. This narrative continuity facilitates emotional and cognitive engagement, thereby strengthening user connection with the brand.

It also uses the local song “*Warung bekicot ning Magetan mlaku-mlaku neng Sarangan*” to reinforce its digital identity and enhance brand recognition. These strategies help audiences easily recognize the content, even when shared by others. Additionally, the account actively engages in two-way communication by responding to audience inquiries (e.g., questions about halal status or shipping) and interacting with humorous comments

and user testimonials, fostering participatory and community-oriented engagement.

*Strategy for Using the Hashtag #bekicotmagetan by the @BekicotMagetan Account*

An in-depth analysis of 25 posts uploaded by the @bekicotmagetan account reveals that consistent branding serves as the primary strategy in constructing the image of local cuisine. This approach is reflected in the repeated use of specific elements across posts, with the deliberate purpose of establishing a strong and easily recognizable identity for the audience. Research by Hamid et al (2024) explains that a positive image not only enhances the appeal of a destination, but also encourages satisfaction and repeat visits by tourists.

Table 1. TikTok comment coding for the @bekicotmagetan account

Content Code	Quotation	Code	Number of Quotations
1	"ORDER RICA BEKICOT, CLICK THE SHOPEE LINK IN THE PROFILE" @JCHO: already 10 times fyp	"Repetitive branding strategy" "Emphasis on exposure (FYP)"	2
2	"ORDER RICA BEKICOT, CLICK THE SHOPEE LINK IN THE PROFILE" @josuaaa: Now this is the song from back then, it's nostalgic to hear it	"Repetitive branding strategy" "Strengthening local identity through audio"	2
3	"ORDER RICA BEKICOT, CLICK THE SHOPEE LINK IN THE PROFILE" @Manusia: Keep this legendary sound alive	"Repetitive branding strategy" "Strengthening local identity through audio"	2
4	"ORDER RICA BEKICOT, CLICK THE SHOPEE LINK IN THE PROFILE" Content featuring an iconic muscular figure performing silat moves then eating a plate of bekicot.	"Repetitive branding strategy" "Theatrical visualization" "Emphasis on exposure"	4

	@dita927: FYP has reached 19x Magetan bekicot	(FYP)" "Strengthening local identity through audio"	
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Source: Nvivo, 2025

The table illustrates how the @bekicotmagetan account employs communication strategies to produce content with the hashtag #bekicotmagetan on TikTok. Through the use of repetitive branding, theatrical visuals, and locally themed audio, this content effectively generates substantial exposure on the feed (FYP). User comments confirm this pattern, noting that the content appeared repeatedly across their feeds. Although elements such as silat are not traditionally associated with Magetan's culture, they are creatively adapted as comedic visuals to enhance appeal and virality. Overall, the findings demonstrate that a distinctive and recognizable culinary image emerges from the strategic integration of digital techniques, local identity, and active user engagement.

By visually highlighting key concepts like "local," "voice," "FYP," and "theatrical," the document deepens understanding of @bekicotmagetan's communication strategy, emphasizing consistent branding and content identity. Terms such as "silat" and "legend," though not rooted in Magetan culture, are employed as theatrical and comedic visual devices to capture audience attention.

The strategies employed in this study align with Representation Theory, using symbols such as silat movements, local accents, and bekicot imagery as negotiable signs of meaning. The inclusion of non-local elements like "legends" provides visual contrast, while repeated captions and hashtags like "ORDER RICA BEKICOT" exemplify the Uses and Gratifications Theory demonstrating how the content entertains, informs, and encourages interaction. Local sounds function as sonic branding Cheng (2023), reinforcing cultural identity and emotional resonance. The replication of trends illustrates Participatory Culture, where users act as co-creators through their engagement.

Engagement with TikTok content tagged #bekicotmagetan follows a systematic communication pattern, supporting Kozinets' netnography, where user comments contribute to collective cultural narratives beyond personal opinion. Thematic analysis identifies dominant engagement themes, with "repetitive branding strategies" cited 24

times, followed by FYP (For You Page) exposure (17 citations), reinforcement of local identity through audio (13 citations), and theatrical visuals such as silat (11 citations). These findings support the Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers, 1962), showing how consistent captions and hashtags enhance content dissemination.

High engagement, as reflected in comments like “the song is addictive” and “it appears often,” underscores the Uses and Gratifications Theory, where content satisfies entertainment and identity needs while boosting algorithmic visibility. The integration of theatrical visuals and local narratives activates Representation Theory by reinforcing symbolic and repeatable elements of Magetan’s cultural identity. The success of the @bekicotmagetan account lies in its creative content and strategic application of innovation diffusion, participatory culture, and consistent cultural messaging. The hashtag #bekicotmagetan functions as a multifaceted tool that strengthens cultural identity, engages users, improves visibility on TikTok, and fulfills both informational and entertainment needs.

The hashtag #bekicotmagetan plays a key role in shaping Magetan’s identity through local culinary content, transforming *bekicot* into a cultural symbol rather than just food. Similar to hashtags like #rendangpadang or #sateklatak, it fosters digital cultural associations on TikTok. By encouraging user participation through comments, duets, and remixes, it creates a sense of community and amplifies engagement, reflecting Henry Jenkins’ concept of participatory culture, where audiences actively create and interpret content. Algorithmically, frequent hashtag use boosts visibility on the For You Page (FYP), enhancing exposure for Magetan and its culinary products without high promotional costs. Additionally, the hashtag acts as an informative resource, offering entertaining and accessible content about cooking methods, vendor locations, and taste experiences, appealing to users interested in authentic local cuisine.

The @bekicotmagetan account strategically uses the #bekicotmagetan hashtag with consistent captions and call-to-action tags to enhance brand recall and establish a recognizable communication pattern. It integrates local voice elements, including narration and Magetan-specific accents, to foster emotional ties and emphasize cultural identity. Theatrical visuals, such as martial arts and comedic performances, are used to

make the content more distinctive and easily replicable. By combining visual aesthetics, local audio, and trending hashtags, the account effectively utilizes TikTok’s For You Page algorithm to increase visibility. It also drives audience engagement through interactions like comments, likes, and shares, helping to build shared cultural narratives. This blend of product promotion with cultural representation not only reinforces the branding of snail cuisine but also portrays Magetan as an authentic cultural destination.

*Forms of Engagement and User Responses on TikTok to Content Tagged #bekicotmagetan*

Research by Hakim et al (2024) explains that the viral effect created through user interactions, such as comments, sharing, and challenge participation, further expands the reach of content and strengthens the image of the destination in the eyes of potential tourists. The recurrence of comments on content associated with the #bekicotmagetan hashtag reflects a high level of user engagement. Such interactions indicate not only consumer interest in the promoted culinary products but also active participation in shaping the narrative and digital environment surrounding the content.

Curiosity regarding taste, price, and product location, repeated exposure on users’ feeds (FYP), and creative responses through humor, jokes, and trend adaptations represent dominant patterns of engagement. These interactions demonstrate the capacity of the content to evoke both emotional and cognitive resonance, thereby enhancing its popularity and visibility within the TikTok platform.

Table 2. TikTok Comment Coding Theme: “Forms of User Response Engagement”

<b>Content Code</b>	<b>Content Account</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Number of Citations</b>
Content Code 1	@bekicotmagetan	@.: How much does it cost? @JCHO: Already 10 times fyp	“Curiosity about the product (taste, price, location)” “Algorithm repetition (FYP)”	2

Content Code 2	@bekicotmagetan	@Aceljoo: Old song and old artist from 2019	"Creative engagement (following trends, memes, jokes)"	1
Content Code 10	@bekicotmagetan	@cocolateeeeeee0: FYP 15 times a day	"Algorithm repetition (FYP)"	1
Content Code 11	@bekicotmagetan	@What?: Already passed 30 times on FYP	"Algorithm repetition (FYP)"	1

Source: Nvivo, 2025

The table of user comments on content tagged with #bekicotmagetan reveals key themes such as product curiosity, repeated exposure via TikTok's FYP algorithm, and audience creativity expressed through humor and trending formats. Comments like "fyp 15 times a day" or "already 30 times" reflect how users perceive the algorithm as a personalized experience. In this context, algorithms are no longer regarded as technical systems, but as social experiences that feel intimate and personal. Users feel a two-way relationship between themselves and algorithms.

Although remarks such as "you have to eat first" or "really while doing reog" are not authentic to Magetan's culture, they demonstrate the audience's role in generating humor and fostering interaction. Although not authentic to Magetan culture, this type of comment serves as *situational comedy* that stimulates emotional responses and creates light-hearted conversation. The audience here is not merely the recipient of the message, but the creator of meaning.

These comments demonstrate the principle of *participatory culture*, where users actively engage in expanding the meaning and atmosphere of a piece of content. Such interactions add a social dimension that strengthens engagement, creates a temporary community in the comment section, and enhances the content's virality. The thematic analysis highlights the participatory nature of TikTok culture, where active audience involvement and creative expression help transform local content into engaging and viral media.

Audience engagement with #bekicotmagetan content is influenced by factors such as pricing, FYP (For You Page) exposure, creativity, and curiosity, reflecting the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that users seek media to fulfill informational (e.g., price, location), entertainment (e.g., humor), and social interaction needs (e.g., memes or cultural challenges) (Katz et al., 1974). Frequent mentions of silat, reog, and lucu (funny) highlight user creativity and align with Participatory Culture, where audiences co-create meaning through humor and visual contributions (Jenkins, 2008). Discussions on taste, pricing, and halal status demonstrate ongoing reinterpretation of cultural symbols in line with Representation Theory (Hall, 1997).

Thematic coding reveals three dominant engagement categories: curiosity about the product (10 comments), algorithmic repetition via FYP mentions (9 comments), and creative engagement involving humor and cultural elements like martial arts and reog (8 comments). These patterns show that user interaction with the content is active and multifaceted ranging from product interest and price/location queries to cultural expression through collective humor and comment trends.

These interactions reflect authentic consumer interest, indicating a meaningful level of engagement that goes beyond superficial responses. Such behavior strengthens purchase intention and illustrates the content's effectiveness in guiding users from the awareness stage to the consideration phase within the customer journey. Furthermore, the presence of cultural expression and collective humour in the comment section suggests that users engage not only to inquire about the product but also to articulate cultural memories and participate in shared comedic discourse. This humour enhances the content's virality by motivating audiences to reply, remix, or redistribute the content across platforms. These interactions, therefore, are not merely reactive but are also deliberate and performative, strategically utilizing TikTok's algorithmic framework to amplify content dissemination. The integration of informational content (such as pricing and location), humorous elements, and trending comment formats fosters a favorable and unique brand image for the Magetan snail cuisine. This phenomenon supports the concept of community-driven digital branding, in which audiences function as co-creators who actively contribute to constructing the narrative and cultural identity of the product.

These insights support Social Media Engagement Theory, which frames engagement through cognitive (curiosity), emotional (entertainment, connection), and behavioral (commenting, sharing, imitating) aspects (Brodie et al., 2011). User remarks such as “15th FYP” and “want to try” reflect recurring emotional and behavioral involvement. Statements like “memorizing songs” and “must be able to do silat first” exemplify participatory reinterpretations of local culture, reinforcing both Participatory Culture and Representation Theory. Consequently, the @bekicotmagetan account operates as more than a platform for culinary promotion it cultivates a dynamic digital space where local identity, entertainment, and branding converge.

## CLOSING

The @bekicotmagetan account strategically uses the hashtag #bekicotmagetan as a digital branding tool to promote Magetan's local cuisine through consistent, repetitive, and recognisable TikTok content. Through a combination of theatrical visuals such as silat movements, local music ‘Warung Bekicot Ning Magetan,’ and promotional captions ‘ORDER RICA BEKICOT,’ this account has successfully built a strong culinary identity while strengthening the image of the local culture. The hashtag serves a dual purpose, both as a digital marker that increases visibility on the For You Page (FYP) algorithm and as a means of forming an actively interacting online community.

User interaction takes the form of humorous comments, curiosity about taste and price, and creative participation in video remixes and duets. Comments such as ‘FYP 15 times a day’ or ‘already 30 times’ illustrate how users interpret the algorithm as a personal experience and contribute to building social narratives in the digital space. This interaction reflects the principle of *participatory culture*, where the audience is not merely consumers but also co-creators of the content's meaning and atmosphere.

Overall, this study confirms that TikTok functions effectively as a culture-based promotional medium, which not only increases interest in local cuisine but also strengthens Magetan's cultural identity in a participatory and dynamic digital ecosystem.

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