From Screen to Tongue: Nex Carlos's Role in Popularizing Local Cuisine in the Digital Era

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Keywords:
food vlogger, local culinary, YouTube, netnography, digital promotion

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Abstract: The digital era has encouraged people to utilize social media as a primary means of promoting and preserving culture, including introducing local cuisine. This study analyzes how food vlogger Nex Carlos popularizes Indonesian cuisine through content on his YouTube channel. Researchers employed a qualitative approach through netnography to observe Nex Carlos's culinary videos and audience interactions in the comments section to understand his communication strategies and their impact on the popularity of local cuisine. The results show that Nex Carlos builds emotional connection and audience trust through storytelling techniques, authentic expression, and collaborations with local figures. The positive response from netizens confirms that this content has successfully increased interest in exploring Indonesian cuisine, formed positive perceptions of traditional foods, and strengthened Indonesia's cultural identity in the digital space. The novelty of this study lies in analyzing the role of food vloggers as cultural actors, functioning not only as food reviewers but also as drivers of cultural diplomacy through social media. The findings of this study emphasize the active role of food vloggers as cultural agents supporting the promotion of culinary tourism through social media.

INTRODUCTION

The interconnected digital era encourages people to utilize social media as a primary space for interaction, constructing meaning, and introducing various aspects of life, including culinary arts (Tranggono et al., 2021). The transformation of digital communication due to advances in information technology has changed the way individuals access, produce, and distribute information (Arviani et al., 2025; Norsely et al., 2023). The internet offers communication efficiency while expanding the space for cultural representation and the creative economy. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok enable users to act as both producers and consumers of information (prosumers), actively shaping social perceptions and trends (Mas'uda et al., 2022; Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2023). Social media functions not only as a means of entertainment but also as a strategic cultural promotion tool,

including efforts to introduce local cuisine to a wider audience (Niqotaini et al., 2024).

Changes in the communication ecosystem have influenced how people interpret culinary arts. Eating is now understood not merely as fulfilling biological needs but also as a representation of identity, lifestyle, and cultural expression. Culinary arts serve as a communication medium that connects people with their social and cultural environments. Food reflects the values, history, and customs of a particular society, which can be interpreted as meaningful cultural texts (Dewa & Safitri, 2021). Digital media re-presents these values in a popular, engaging, and easily understood format for the younger generation.

The YouTube platform plays a strategic role in this process. DataReportal's Digital 2024 Indonesia Report shows that YouTube is the most widely used social media platform in Indonesia, accessed by over 94% of internet users (Kemp, 2024). This data underscores the immense potential for content creators to disseminate information and shape public opinion. YouTube's long-form and short-form video features facilitate the presentation of engaging and persuasive visual narratives, making it an ideal medium for packaging culinary content as both entertainment and education (Aini et al., 2025; Basli & Achmad, 2024).

This new media landscape has given rise to the profession of food vloggers, individuals or groups who consistently produce video content featuring culinary reviews and gastronomic experiences from various regions. Food vloggers leverage the power of visual narratives to showcase the unique flavors, atmosphere, and cultural background behind the dishes they review. Their personal, authentic, and entertaining communication style helps them build an emotional connection with their audiences and influence their consumption preferences and behaviors (Donneli, 2023).

The food vlogging phenomenon reflects the concept of media convergence (Jenkins, 2006), which explains the blurring of boundaries between media producers and consumers. Content creators such as food vloggers optimize various digital channels to expand their message reach and strengthen engagement with their audiences. From the perspective of diffusion of innovation (Rogers et al.,

2019), food vloggers act as diffusion agents, introducing cultural innovations in the form of local culinary experiences to the wider public. Their storytelling approach and two-way interaction help accelerate the adoption of regional culinary culture among the younger generation.

Nex Carlos stands out as a representative of this practice. This food vlogger has over five million subscribers on YouTube through his *"Makan Keliling Indonesia"* concept, with the signature slogan *"Makan Kuy."* He consistently explores regional specialties, showcasing the preparation process, flavors, and stories behind each dish. His relaxed, humorous, and interactive communication style makes his content widely accepted. Each video serves not only as a taste review but also as a cultural narrative that combines elements of entertainment and education (Carlos, 2016).

Nex Carlos's success is rooted in his ability to implement communication strategies based on storytelling and collaboration. He frequently collaborates with local culinary figures, small business owners, and regional influencers to expand his audience reach. This strategy strengthens credibility and fosters a sense of shared ownership of local cuisine. Such interactions position Nex Carlos as a mediator between traditional culinary producers and modern consumers connected through digital media.

The challenge of preserving local culinary delights increases with globalization and the penetration of foreign cultures. The younger generation's preference for fast food and global culinary trends has the potential to divert attention from traditional foods steeped in cultural values (Zhang et al., 2019). Efforts to promote local culinary delights need to adapt to the characteristics of the digital native generation through interactive, visual, and experience-oriented content (Delliana & Pratiwi, 2022). The role of food vloggers like Nex Carlos is significant because they are able to package local culinary delights into narratives that arouse the interest and appreciation of the younger generation.

Previous research has highlighted the influence of food vloggers on consumption behavior. Suminar et al. (2024) demonstrated that food vlogger content influences consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions for food

products. Donneli (2023) demonstrated that exposure to digital culinary content increases interest in exploring and purchasing local culinary delights. Most of these studies focus on marketing aspects and consumer behavior, without addressing the cultural dimensions and social representations contained in food vlogger content.

This research fills this gap by positioning food vlogging as a cultural communication practice that plays a role in local culinary preservation. A qualitative approach using netnography was used to analyze Nex Carlos' communication strategy in introducing Indonesian culinary delights and interpret the cultural meanings that emerge through audience interactions. This method allows researchers to examine the social dynamics and construction of cultural meanings formed within the online community (Kozinets, 2020).

This research not only explores how Nex Carlos presents content but also assesses its impact on audience awareness and participation in local culinary preservation. This approach provides a theoretical contribution to the study of digital communication and popular culture while offering practical implications for developing social media-based culinary promotion strategies in Indonesia. A deep understanding of the role of food vloggers in articulating cultural values is expected to strengthen the position of local culinary as a national identity in the era of globalization.

RESEARCH METHODS

Researchers applied a qualitative research method through a netnographic approach developed by Kozinets (2020) as an adaptation of ethnography in a digital context. This approach is most relevant for research seeking to understand social practices, interactions, and the construction of meaning that emerge in online spaces. Netnography provides researchers with the opportunity to delve deeply into cultural representations formed through digital content and audience responses to them (Syahputri et al., 2023). The observation process was conducted systematically on videos, visual narratives, verbal expressions, and audience comments, which serve as public discourse in the virtual space.

This research is grounded in an interpretive paradigm that places meaning at the core of the analysis. The researcher acts as the primary instrument, exploring descriptive data in both text and visual forms (Kozinets, 2010). A qualitative approach provides flexibility in understanding the dynamics of digital communication contextually without emphasizing quantitative aspects. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) emphasize that qualitative research is oriented toward understanding phenomena in their natural context through the interpretation of meaning constructed by participants.

The research focused on the YouTube channel of Nex Carlos, an Indonesian food vlogger with over five million subscribers and whose concept is "Makan Keliling Indonesia." The channel was chosen because it consistently showcases explorations of local culinary delights imbued with cultural values. This study analyzes Nex Carlos's communication strategy in showcasing Indonesian cuisine and the social meanings emerging from audience interactions in the comments section. Videos were selected purposively based on three criteria: highlighting regional culinary specialties, presenting cultural narratives or food history, and receiving more than 1,000 comments.

Data sources were divided into primary and secondary. Primary data came from observations of Nex Carlos videos and comments from viewers interacting on the channel. Observations highlighted three main elements: narrative (storyline, communication style, delivery structure), visuals (food presentation, expressions, cultural symbols), and text (audience responses, opinions, recommendations, and narratives). Secondary data included academic literature, scientific journals, and previous research articles on food vlogging, digital communication, and culinary culture promotion.

The data collection technique used passive participant observation. Researchers did not interact directly with the online community or creators but instead observed interactions as they occurred naturally (Kinanti & Achmad, 2025). The observation process was accompanied by systematic documentation that recorded communication patterns, forms of participation, and dominant themes in audience comments. Each piece of data was transcribed, classified, and grouped

based on topics such as communication strategies, cultural representations, culinary promotions, and audience perceptions.

Data analysis followed the stages of netnographic analysis according to Kozinets (2020), including data collection, coding, interpretation, and representation. The coding stage identified relevant data segments, which were then grouped into thematic categories. The interpretation stage explored patterns of meaning emerging from content and comments, while the representation stage presented the analysis results in narrative form, illustrating the relationship between Nex Carlos's communication strategies, culinary cultural representations, and audience responses. The analysis process was inductive, using field findings as the basis for developing concepts and conclusions.

The entire research process adhered to the ethical principles of online research as outlined in the Association of Internet Researchers guidelines (Franzke et al., 2020). The data used were public and did not involve sensitive personal information. Audience comments were quoted without account names to maintain anonymity. The analysis was conducted transparently and accurately while respecting the rights of digital users as cultural subjects in virtual spaces.

Netnographic methods have been widely used in studies of digital cultural communication in Indonesia, including by Maulana and Achmad (2025), who examined the construction of cultural identity in online communities through a netnographic approach. This method is relevant in the context of social media research because it allows for a deeper understanding of communication practices and meaning-making in virtual spaces. Therefore, this approach is considered most appropriate for analyzing how food vloggers like Nex Carlos construct local culinary narratives and influence audience perceptions in the era of media convergence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Content creator Nex Carlos launched his YouTube channel on November 11, 2016, and has successfully grown it into one of Indonesia's largest culinary channels, with over five million subscribers. His *"Makan Keliling Indonesia"*

concept and signature slogan *"Makan Kuy!"* serve as a communicative identity that distinguishes him from other food vloggers. His relaxed, humorous, and relatable style make his content easily accessible to all ages, especially young people (Figure 1).
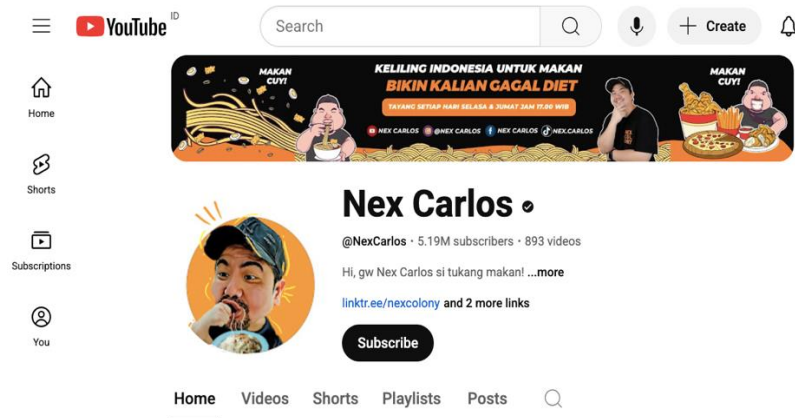

Figure 1. Nex Carlos' YouTube account
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/@NexCarlos)

The context of media convergence theory (Jenkins, 2006) shows that Nex Carlos utilizes various digital media such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to expand his audience reach. He combines documentary video formats, entertainment, and personal narratives, creating an interactive experience between content producers and consumers. Each post showcases a dish while explaining its cultural background, culinary history, and provides direct testimonials from the business owner. This strategy reinforces the concept of cultural proximity, or the closeness between the viewer and the object being represented (Straubhaar et al., 2017).

Nex Carlos's channel emphasizes authenticity through natural and spontaneous visuals. The filming process takes place live without a studio set, allowing for an authentic capture of the social atmosphere of the dining venue. This approach enhances the perception of honesty, which forms the basis of audience trust in the influencer (Audrezet et al., 2020). Close-ups reveal details of food textures, market atmospheres, and even vendors' expressions, creating an evocative audio-visual experience. These visual aspects demonstrate that documentary

aesthetics can be an effective communication strategy for representing culinary culture.

Personal narratives emerge as a key element of his communication style. Nex Carlos recounts food tasting experiences, expressing emotional reactions, and conveying spontaneous impressions. This strategy builds a parasocial relationship that makes the audience feel emotionally involved (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Consistent uploads and active comments foster the formation of an online community that enjoys sharing culinary recommendations and supporting local businesses.

A cultural communication approach explains the Nex Carlos channel as a meeting place between local culinary traditions and global digital culture. Food representation serves a dual function: promoting and documenting a vibrant culture. The channel's success demonstrates how content creators play a strategic role in preserving local culinary traditions through participatory and interactive new media.

Communication Strategy and Storytelling in Culinary Content

One of Nex Carlos's main strengths lies in his communication strategy, which combines informative narratives, entertainment, and emotional connection. He doesn't simply describe the taste of food but also shares the origins, history, and cultural values behind each dish. For example, in a video titled *"Cuma di Sini Makanan Ini Dijual, Satu-Satunya di Dunia,"* Nex Carlos visits a traditional Padang restaurant that sells the legendary *Soto Padang* (Figure 2). Through a hyperbolic and provocative title, he piques the viewer's curiosity, while the video content provides detailed information about the ingredients, cooking process, and the owner's story.

Figure 2. A Nex Carlos' content, "Cuma disini Makanan Ini Dijual, Satu-Satunya di Dunia".
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7svIGTKcb04)

The choice of such a title demonstrates a deep understanding of the YouTube algorithm and digital audience behavior. Informative clickbait increases engagement without misleading viewers (Rahman et al., 2023). The lighthearted and humorous language creates familiarity, strengthening his communicative identity. A reflective analysis of language style shows that humor functions not simply as entertainment but as a rhetorical strategy that reduces the social distance between creator and audience, making interactions more inclusive.

The concept of storytelling serves as an effective persuasive tool in narrative communication theory, as it connects facts with emotions (Fisher, 1984). Nex Carlos utilizes personal narratives to build credibility and trust. Spontaneous reactions, expressions of satisfaction, and direct interactions with sellers convey an authenticity rarely found in commercial advertising. Audiences then view him as a friend offering honest recommendations, rather than simply a professional reviewer. Analysis shows that narrative credibility is created through a balance between spontaneity and consistency of communication style.

Collaboration is also an important strategy because it broadens the impact of communication. Several videos involve local figures or regional culinary influencers, such as *"Dapat Ide dari Video Nex Carlos, Akhirnya Sukses Bikin Usaha Kuliner di Sorong Papua!!!"* (Figure 3).

Figure 3. A Nex Carlos's content, *"Dapat Ide dari Video Nex Carlos, Akhirnya Sukses Bikin Usaha Kuliner di Sorong Papua!!!"*
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=245hVAaz6oc).

Collaborative strategies strengthen credibility while expanding the reach of the audience community. The co-creation process between creators and the community results in a dynamic exchange of culinary knowledge. Reflective analysis shows that this kind of collaboration not only increases content exposure, but also strengthens the creator's social legitimacy as a public figure who plays a role in empowering the local economy.

This communication strategy reflects a deep understanding of the logic of social media. Credibility is built not only through expertise but also through emotional connection and community participation. The combination of informative narratives and humanistic communication authentically positions local culinary delights within the digital public discourse. The success of cultural promotion depends on the creator's ability to craft meaningful and relevant narratives.

Cultural Representation and Local Culinary Identity

Nex Carlos' content highlights not only taste but also the cultural values behind the cuisine. The video *"Laku 1 Juta Porsi?? Kuliner Satu Ini Sudah Langka Sekali"* features Dawet Sambel from Kulon Progo as an example of a unique food that is on the verge of extinction (Figure 4).
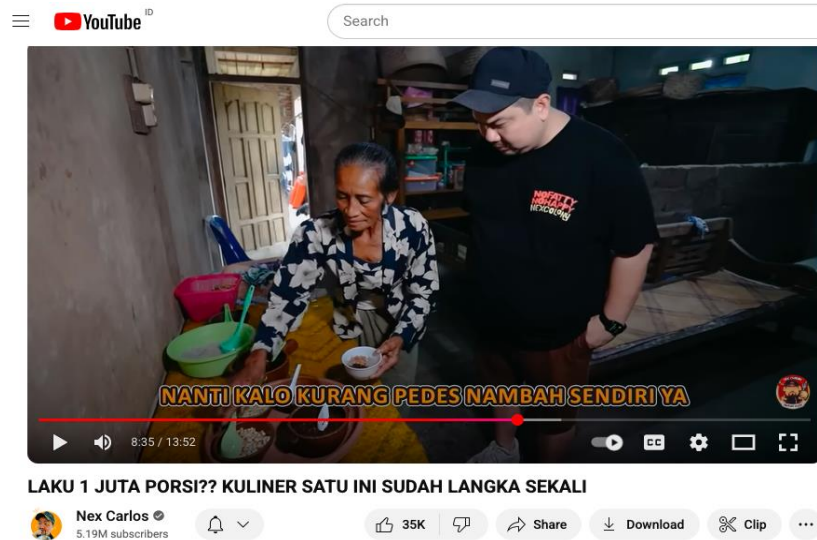
Figure 4. A Nex Carlos's content, *"Laku 1 Juta Porsi?? Kuliner Satu Ini Sudah Langka Sekali"* (Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YEMak-fjYg).

This video conveys two important cultural messages: first, about the diversity of Indonesian flavors; second, about the urgency of preserving rare culinary delights threatened by modernization. Through educational presentation and captivating visuals, Nex Carlos transforms local cuisine into a symbol of regional pride and identity. A cross-cultural communication perspective views food as a cultural text that represents social values (Utami, 2018). Every ingredient, cooking technique, and presentation method embodies the collective history of a community. When Nex Carlos recounts the origins of a dish, he plays the role of cultural mediator, bridging understanding between local culture and a global audience.

Visualizations of traditional markets, rice fields, and simple food stalls reinforce the cultural context. For example, in the video *"Nemu Makanan Enak di Tengah-Tengah Sawah"* the rural setting of Solo serves as a narrative backdrop, highlighting the authenticity and simplicity of local life (Figure 5). The combination of narrative, visuals, and direct interaction with residents creates a strong sense of ethnographic documentary.
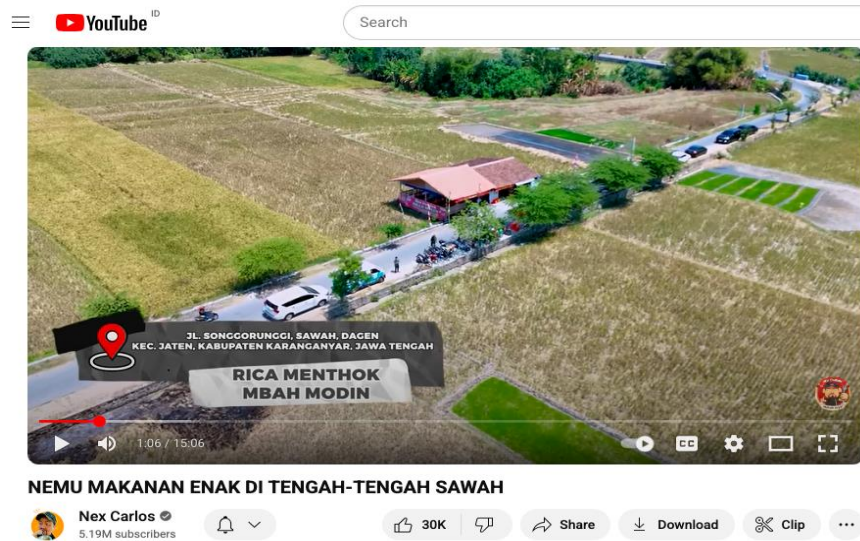
Figure 5. Nex Carlos content *"Nemu Makanan Enak di Tengah-Tengah Sawah"* (Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzcxodcOMSY)

The video features rural Solo as a backdrop, highlighting the simplicity of local life. The combination of narrative, visuals, and community interaction creates a strong ethnographic feel. This representation demonstrates the potential of food vlogging as a medium for cultural diplomacy, supporting the strengthening of national identity in the digital age. In-depth analysis shows that this content not only represents culinary objects but also negotiates the identities and social values inherent in local cultural spaces.

Audience Response and Digital Participation

Viewer comments on the Nex Carlos channel demonstrate high emotional and cognitive engagement. Many viewers expressed a desire to try the dishes reviewed, such as this comment on the Soto Padang video: *"MasyaAllah, mantap! Soto terenak di dunia, sering nyoba ini, tambuah ciek!"* (Figure 6). This kind of response demonstrates that the content not only informs but also motivates action.

Figure 6. Example of a capture of audience comments on Nex Carlos content (Source: https://www.youtube.com/@NexCarlos)

This feedback indicates that the content encourages real action, not just information consumption. Audiences also contribute culinary recommendations from various regions, enriching the content organically (user-generated suggestions). This type of participation forms a digital community based on shared interests. The uses and gratifications theory explains that audiences derive informational, affective, and social satisfaction from active engagement (Ruggiero, 2000).

Positive comments also demonstrate a high level of trust in Nex Carlos's credibility (Figure 7). Audiences view him as an authentic, honest, and consistent figure, not simply a paid promoter. This factor is crucial because credibility is a key prerequisite for influencers to influence public opinion (Freberg et al., 2011).

International Conference Proceedings 2025 - Universitas Islam Balitar Blitar,
Vol. 1 (2025), Achmad, Z. A., & Adzra, L.*, From Screen to Tongue: Nex Carlos's
Role in Popularizing Local Cuisine in the Digital Era*.)

Figure 7. Example of netizen comments showing appreciation and culinary recommendations
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/@NexCarlos)

In addition to positive responses, some comments also contained cultural reflections, such as admiration for the diversity of Indonesian food and the importance of supporting local MSMEs. This type of discourse demonstrates that culinary content can spark cultural awareness and community economic solidarity.

Audience participation on the Nex Carlos channel highlights the shift from one-way to dialogic communication in the new media era. The comments section is not simply a space for reaction, but a discursive arena where cultural identities, values, and aspirations are negotiated. This phenomenon reinforces the view that preserving local culinary arts in the digital age is not solely the work of creators, but also the collaboration of online communities actively involved in the production of meaning.

Social Impact and Implications

A consistent and collaborative content strategy increases the visibility of local culinary arts and strengthens the regional creative economy. Several businesses reported increased sales after appearing on the Nex Carlos channel, as seen in the video "Getting an Idea from a Nex Carlos Video, Finally Successfully Starting a Culinary Business in Sorong, Papua!!!" These findings confirm the tangible economic impact of community-based digital promotion. Reflective

analysis shows that creators' social credibility plays a significant role in building trust between consumers and local businesses.

Nex Carlos' content broadens the culinary horizons of the younger generation. Amidst the dominance of global products and fast food trends, this channel presents an educational alternative that fosters an appreciation for Indonesian gastronomy. Food vloggers act as cultural educators and tourism promotion agents. Academic reflection on these findings indicates that social media has the potential to be an effective non-formal educational space for strengthening cultural literacy.

Food vlogging demonstrates that social media not only shapes consumption trends but also empowers local cultural and economic values. Authentic representation, community collaboration, and humanistic narratives make culinary content an effective means of building cultural awareness and national pride in the digital age.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found that the Nex Carlos YouTube channel plays a crucial role as a convergence medium, combining entertainment, education, and the preservation of local culinary culture. Through a personal narrative approach, an inclusive communication style, and the use of storytelling that connects sensory experiences with cultural values, Nex Carlos is able to present an authentic and engaging representation of Indonesian cuisine for audiences of all ages. Its content not only promotes food products but also showcases the social and historical context inherent in each dish, thereby strengthening regional cultural identity. Furthermore, active audience engagement in the comments section demonstrates that food vlogging can create a new discursive space where culinary knowledge is collectively exchanged and reinterpreted. These findings confirm that narrative-based communication strategies and digital interactions have a significant impact on promoting local culinary arts, strengthening the creative economy, and fostering cultural awareness in the online public sphere.

While providing in-depth insights, this study is limited by its data coverage, focusing on a single YouTube channel and a specific time period. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the entire food vlogging phenomenon in Indonesia. Furthermore, analysis based on online observation is limited in directly capturing the emotional and motivational dimensions of audiences. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of study by comparing several food vloggers with different cultural backgrounds or communication strategies, and complementing netnographic methods with in-depth interviews and multimodal discourse analysis. This approach will enrich understanding of how culinary representations in digital media contribute to cultural diplomacy, national identity formation, and local wisdom-based tourism strategies in the era of media convergence.

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