

Coding Cultural Capital: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Indonesian Regional Dialects and Audience Engagement on TikTok

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Received: November 2, 2025

Accepted: January 4, 2026

Online Published: January 9, 2026

doi:10.11114/smc.v14i2.8125

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v14i2.8125>

Abstract

This study investigates how Indonesian regional dialects function as digital capital in the TikTok cultural communication ecosystem. Using a multi-case study approach with an exploratory design, we analyzed five TikTok videos from creators representing four major Indonesian dialects: Sundanese, Batak Medan, Minangkabau, and Javanese. Data collection included quantitative engagement metrics (views, likes, comments, shares, engagement rate) and qualitative linguistic analysis through full transcription and dialect coding. The research employed descriptive analysis, comparative cross-case analysis, qualitative content analysis, and digital ethnography. The results revealed significant findings: (1) dialect variation manifests strategically across lexical, phonological, syntactic, and pragmatic dimensions, with creators adapting usage for specific communicative purposes; (2) an exploratory correlation analysis ($r=0.64$) suggests a tentative positive trend between dialect intensity and engagement levels, although these findings are interpreted as indicative rather than confirmatory due to the limited sample size; (3) creators employ a variety of communication strategies—nostalgia, humor, education, promotion, and call-to-action—by integrating dialect variations to maximize cultural resonance; (4) cultural values dominate the lexical distribution (frequency=15, priority score=75), indicating the centrality of cultural themes in communication strategies. This study shows that regional dialects serve as symbolic capital in the digital space, enhancing emotional connection and cultural identity while creating an engagement paradox: authentic cultural content attracts higher levels of interaction despite its lower reach. The findings contribute to digital sociolinguistic theory and provide practical insights for language policy, content creation, and cultural preservation initiatives in the digital age.

Keywords: digital sociolinguistics, Indonesian dialect, TikTok engagement, cultural capital

1. Introduction

The digital age has revolutionized global linguistic communication practices, with short video-based social media platforms such as TikTok catalyzing unprecedented language transformation. TikTok is not just a medium of entertainment, but has evolved into a complex linguistic marketplace where cultural identities are constructed, negotiated, and disseminated through multimodal communication practices (Kulaga, 2024; Siraji, 2025). Recent research shows that these platforms facilitate users' creative participation, enrich lexical variety, reduce language anxiety, and provide a more productive linguistic learning experience by integrating audio, visual, and textual elements (Hongsa et al., 2023; Lee, 2024; Sukmayadi et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, TikTok's presence creates a unique phenomenon in which more than 700 regional languages find new expressive spaces that enable both the revitalization and modernization of traditional linguistic practices (Wongso et al., 2025; Zein, 2020). Major dialects such as Sundanese, Batak Medan, Minangkabau, and Javanese not only survive in the digital ecosystem but also undergo creative recontextualization, enabling them to reach younger generations who were previously more exposed to Indonesian or global languages (Darvin, 2022; Jaya & Lauder, 2021). These platforms enable local dialects to function as symbolic capital, strengthening emotional bonds and cultural identities in digital spaces previously dominated by mainstream languages (Kovács et al., 2022). Previously dominated by mainstream languages. This digital performance reflects complex translingual practices in which linguistic choices are not merely creative transgressions but normative strategies used to negotiate multiple identities and signal group affiliations in a transnational digital space (Darvin, 2022). Furthermore, these practices exemplify the rise of 'pop linguistics' in social media, where creators blend translanguaging with literacy-based edutainment to bridge the gap between traditional heritage and contemporary digital culture (Lee, 2025).

Although studies on TikTok and the use of local languages on social media have grown, critical gaps in the literature remain. First, the majority of TikTok research still focuses on the platform's socio-political functions (Lin, 2022; Sanchez-Montoya et al., 2024; Terradillos et al., 2025), such as digital campaigning, activism, and sentiment analysis, with little attention to in-depth sociolinguistic dimensions. Second, studies of Indonesian local languages on social media generally emphasize computational linguistic analysis, such as text mining and sentiment analysis (Pamungkas et al., 2023; Sa'Adillah Maylawati & Putri Saptawati, 2017), but ignore aspects of performativity and engagement metrics as indicators of linguistic vitality. While traditional text mining remains useful, modern social-media content analysis now benefits from more advanced methodological frameworks, such as neural topic modeling that utilizes latent hashtag representations to uncover thematic clusters (Cantini et al., 2025). Additionally, leveraging large language models (LLMs) to extract multi-stakeholder insights allows researchers to better understand how complex linguistic data resonates across diverse audience segments (Belcastro et al., 2025).

Third, no study systematically examines the relationship between dialectal variation in Nusantara dialects and digital engagement metrics (views, likes, shares, comments) as indicators of successful cultural communication on TikTok. Fourth, previous research has not examined how TikTok creators use dialects as a creative communication strategy that simultaneously combines linguistic, cultural, emotional, and commercial dimensions (Felix et al., 2024; Han et al., 2024). Fifth, no studies have investigated the lexical distribution patterns of dialect-based content and how they reflect users' communicative priorities in digital spaces. These gaps indicate an urgent need for interdisciplinary research that combines digital sociolinguistics approaches with computational analysis and cultural studies to understand the dynamics of regional languages in the TikTok era (Ballam-Cross, 2021; Cunliffe, 2025).

Based on the identification of gaps above, this study formulates the following problems:

RQ 1: How are the lectal variations of Sundanese, Batak Medan, Minangkabau, and Javanese dialects manifested in the digital representations of selected TikTok creators?

RQ 2: How do the characteristics of digital engagement vary among creators with diverse dialect usage intensity?

RQ 3: How do TikTok creators' communication strategies integrate lexical variation to maximize cultural resonance and audience interaction?

RQ 4: What are the dominant lexical distributions in a sample of dialect-based content, and how do they reflect users' communicative priorities?

This research is designed to provide an in-depth understanding of how Sundanese, Batak Medan, Minangkabau, and Javanese dialectal lexical variation manifests in Indonesian TikTok content through a dual case study that emphasizes interpretive quality. First, the study will uncover patterns of manifestation of regional languages as multimodal practices, exploring how audio, visual, and text elements combine to form authentic cultural identities. Next, the study will compare the characteristics of digital engagement, including views, likes, comments, and shares, among creators with different dialect usage intensities, to understand how lectal variation affects audience interactions. In addition, the study aims to explore the creative communication strategies creators use to cultivate dialect as cultural capital, including how they insert regional terms at the most resonant narrative moments. Finally, through lexical distribution maps, the research will capture users' communicative priorities by identifying the kinship, cultural, and commercial vocabulary that dominate the content sample.

This research is expected to contribute to three scholarly dimensions: (1) theoretical, by developing a digital sociolinguistics framework to understand the dynamics of regional languages on social media platforms; (2) methodological, by integrating qualitative linguistic analysis and quantitative digital metrics in one research framework; and (3) practical, by providing insights for language policy makers, digital content creators, and cultural preservation initiatives on effective strategies for revitalizing regional languages through digital technology.

Thus, this research not only fills a gap in the digital sociolinguistics literature but also offers an innovative perspective on how technology can serve as an instrument for preserving and transforming Indonesia's linguistic heritage in the 21st century.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a multiple case study design with an exploratory orientation to investigate how linguistic variation and user engagement interact across regional dialects in TikTok content. The design enabled a contextualized understanding of dialect expression within digital performance practices and allowed for comparative interpretation across cases. Include in these subsections the information essential to comprehend and replicate the study. Insufficient detail leaves the reader with questions; too much detail burdens the reader with irrelevant information. Consider using appendices and/or a supplemental website for more detailed information.

2.2 Case Selection

Five TikTok videos were purposively selected using theoretical sampling based on representativeness of major Indonesian dialects—Sundanese, Medan Batak, Minangkabau, and Javanese. Each case met two primary criteria: a minimum dialectal variation intensity of 1.5 percent and the highest engagement metrics recorded within the observation window. The threshold of 1.5% was established to distinguish intentional dialect performance from incidental linguistic slippage, ensuring that regional codes function as a measurable communicative strategy rather than isolated lexical borrowing. To mitigate potential selection bias, this criterion was strategically employed to identify 'critical cases' where the phenomenon of digital cultural capital is most manifest, rather than to assume a predetermined causal link between dialect and popularity. Furthermore, while these cases represent high-performing content in their respective niches, the sample was curated to maintain a significant variance in absolute reach—ranging from 94,000 to 2.7 million impressions—to ensure that the 'high' versus 'low' dialect intensity groups could be compared across different scales of audience size. This sampling logic focuses on the qualitative depth of successful linguistic strategies while providing sufficient contrast in engagement levels to allow for a nuanced cross-case analysis of audience resonance. This selective sampling ensured adequate contrastiveness between dialectal features and audience response patterns.

2.3 Data Collection

The data set integrated both quantitative and qualitative components. Quantitative metrics included views, likes, comments, shares, saves, and engagement rate, extracted from the TikTok interface and corroborated through independent analytics tools. Qualitative materials consisted of complete transcripts and audio excerpts that represented both linguistic structure and contextual delivery. All materials were imported into ATLAS.ti version 25 for systematic coding, memo annotation, and relational mapping.

2.4 Coding and Categorization

The linguistic data were examined through layered coding procedures. Each transcript was coded for total word count, dialectal word frequency, and type of lectal variation, covering phonological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects. Instances of dialect use were categorized by their narrative position in the video, enabling analysis of functional placement and audience emphasis. The process followed an inductive approach aligned with grounded theorization principles.

The linguistic data were examined through layered coding procedures. The analysis was conducted by two independent coders following a structured protocol that progressed through three stages: open coding to identify raw linguistic markers, axial coding to categorize markers into lectal types, and selective coding to determine narrative functions. For example, the segment "mamah" was coded as a [Lexical Variation] within a [Nostalgia] theme, while "micel" was identified as a [Phonological Variation] used for [Humor]. Each transcript was coded for total word count, dialectal word frequency, and type of lectal variation, covering phonological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects. Instances of dialect use were categorized by their narrative position in the video, enabling analysis of functional placement and audience emphasis. The process followed an inductive approach aligned with grounded theorization principles.

2.5 Quantitative and Comparative Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to assess the mean, standard deviation, range, and coefficient of variation of both dialect proportion and engagement rate. To categorize creators into intensity groups, a median split (median = 4.14%) was used to operationalize the comparison between 'High' and 'Low' dialect intensity groups. This non-parametric approach provides a robust method for contrastive interpretation in small-N exploratory samples where a normal distribution of dialect usage cannot be assumed, allowing for the identification of distinct engagement patterns across different scales of audience size. Due to the small sample size (n=5), quantitative reporting is strictly framed as exploratory to avoid overgeneralization. Correlation results were interpreted as indicative patterns within the selected cases, with uncertainty acknowledged through a descriptive assessment of variance to ensure the findings remain contextual rather than confirmatory.

2.6 Qualitative and Ethnographic Analysis

The qualitative phase extended into interpretive content analysis. Inductive coding of text and audio-visual data yielded analytical categories covering narrative strategy (nostalgia, humor, education, promotion), dialect function (cultural identity, relational proximity, commercial framing), and lexical field (kinship, cultural, and commercial terms). A digital ethnography lens further explored discursive interactions in user comments to trace affective resonance, collective sentiment, and embedded cultural values shaping engagement behavior.

2.7 Trustworthiness and Analytical Rigor

Credibility and reliability were ensured through methodological triangulation, combining quantitative indicators with interpretive findings. To maintain high coding reliability, an inter-coder agreement was established, with any discrepancies

resolved through consensus-based discussion. Peer debriefing was operationalized through bi-weekly sessions where a senior researcher audited the coding framework and validated the relational mappings in ATLAS.ti. The audit trail was systematically maintained by documenting every refinement of the codebook and maintaining an analytical log of all interpretive decisions within the software's project bundle, ensuring a transparent and replicable chain of evidence from raw data to the final conceptual categories. While the limited dataset ($n = 5$) constrains statistical generalizability, the study's intent is exploratory, offering context-specific insights that contribute to conceptualizing the Digital Linguistic Marketplace as a theoretical foundation for broader empirical inquiry.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical principles of digital ethnography and social media research. Data collection was strictly limited to publicly accessible content on TikTok, ensuring that no private accounts or restricted content were accessed and that users' original privacy settings were respected. While the identities of the content creators are disclosed because they function as public figures within the digital linguistic marketplace, all audience data extracted from the comment sections was anonymized. Usernames and profile pictures of commenters were removed or masked during the analysis and reporting phases to protect individual privacy and prevent unintended identification. Furthermore, the research process complied with TikTok's Terms of Service and focused solely on the linguistic and performative aspects of the content rather than the personal lives of the creators or their followers. These measures ensure that the pursuit of scholarly insight into regional dialects does not compromise the digital rights or privacy of the platform's users.

3. Results

3.1 Manifestation Patterns of Llectal Variation

In the context of analyzing lectal variation, Table 1 presents detailed data on dialect usage patterns across videos uploaded by several creators. This data is designed to show how lexical, phonological, and syntactic variation is manifested in digital content. The analysis includes the percentage of dialect words used, the dominant type of dialectal variation, the position of its occurrence in the video narrative, and the accompanying content theme. This information aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the manifestations of dialectal variation and their relation to each creator's communicative goals.

Table 1. Percentage of Dialect Words, Variation Type, Position, and Theme per Video

Creator	Percentage of Dialect Words	Variation Type	Position Usage	Content Theme
Hasna Rafida Sari	6,16%	Lexical ("mamah"), Pragmatic	Beginning	Nostalgia
Filix Pratama	1,97%	Phonological ("micel"), Lexical	Middle	Humor
Uni Ica	4,63%	Lexical ("urang"), Syntactic ("pahalao")	End	Culinary Promotion
Alwi	3,76%	Lexical ("geulis"), Syntax ("so remember")	Middle	Cultural Education
Desy Purba	4,14%	Phonological ("micel"), Pragmatic ("dek")	End	Call-to-action

Based on the table data, dialect variation in videos manifests in various ways. Hasna Rafida Sari is the creator who uses dialect words most often (6.16%), especially in lexical and pragmatic variations at the beginning of the video, which evokes nostalgia. On the other hand, Filix Pratama used the lowest percentage (1.97%) and relied on phonological variations to create humor in the middle of the video.

In general, lexical variation is the most common type of variation among the creators. Meanwhile, Uni Ica and Desy Purba strategically placed the use of dialect at the end of the video for a clear purpose: culinary promotion and a call to action. This pattern shows that the manifestation of dialectal variation does not occur randomly, but rather is tailored to specific communicative purposes and content themes, such as building closeness, creating a comedic effect, or promoting something.

3.2 Engagement Characteristics Based on Dialect Intensity

Table 2 presents the engagement characteristics of content creators based on the intensity of dialect usage in their videos. The table summarizes three key metrics: *engagement rate*, number of views, and dialect intensity classification (High vs. Low). This analysis is important for understanding whether the use of certain dialects affects audience engagement on digital platforms.

Table 2. Engagement Rate, Number of Views, and Dialect Group for Content Creators

Creator	Engagement Rate	Number of Impressions (Views)	Dialect Group
Hasna Rafida Sari	28,77%	94.000	High ($\geq$ median)
Uni Ica	6,28%	473.900	High ($\geq$ median)
Filix Pratama	9,12%	1.600.000	Low ($<$ median)
Alwi	5,78%	2.700.000	Low ($<$ median)
Desy Purba	4,13%	1.500.000	Low ($<$ median)

Table 2 shows that creators with high dialect intensity tend to have varying engagement rates, though these rates are generally higher than those with low dialect intensity, despite having fewer impressions. For example, Hasna Rafida Sari, who belongs to the *High* group, received only 94,000 impressions but significantly outperformed in audience interaction with an engagement rate of 28.77%, while Uni Ica, also in the *High* group, received 473,900 impressions with an engagement rate of 6.28%. In contrast, creators in the *Low group*-Filix Pratama, Alwi, and Desy Purba-recorded the largest number of impressions, ranging from 1.5 to 2.7 million, but their engagement rates were relatively low, ranging from 4.13% to 9.12%. This finding indicates that intensive use of dialect can improve audience engagement, though it does not necessarily guarantee a wider reach in impressions.

To make it easier to understand the pattern of the relationship between impressions and engagement rate for each creator, as well as the differences across dialect groups, the following visualization of the data distribution is presented as a scatter plot.

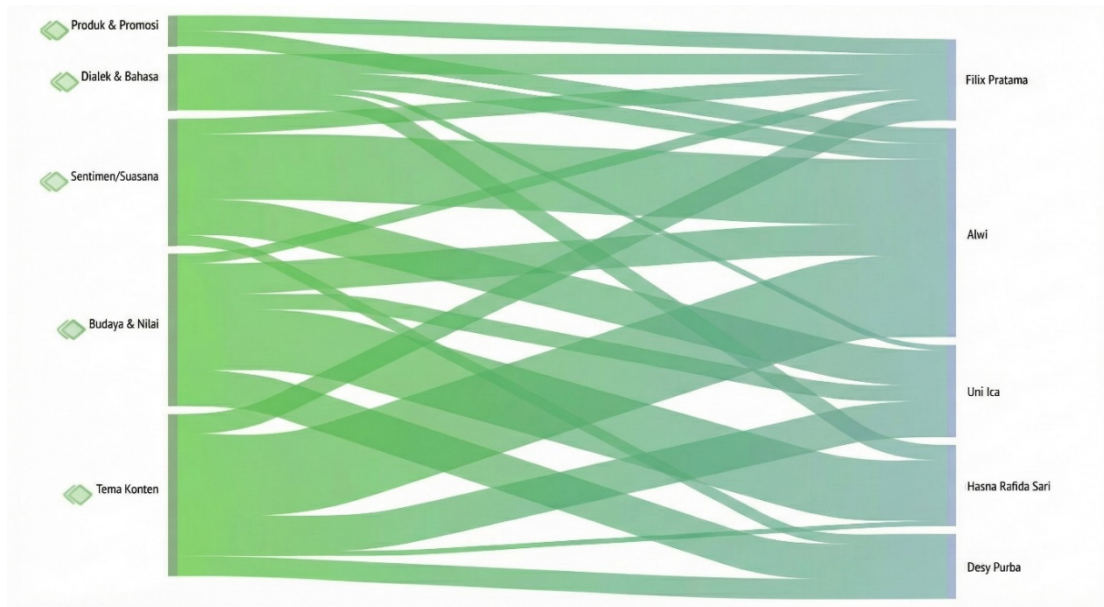


Figure 1. Dialect vs. Engagement Rate

Figure 1 above displays the relationship between the percentage of dialect usage and the audience engagement rate for the five content creators, yielding an exploratory correlation coefficient of 0.64, suggesting a positive trend in this dataset. Given the small sample size ($n=5$), this value reflects a descriptive pattern of the observed relationship rather than a statistically generalizable result and serves as a tentative indicator for future large-scale validation. While the correlation is indicative, it confirms the tendency that the greater the intensity of dialect use, the higher the level of audience engagement in the observed cases.

3.3 Creative Communication Strategy

Table 3 presents a matrix of narrative strategies and dialect functions used by the five content creators. This analysis aims to reveal how each creator uses dialectal variation to craft messages, as well as the role of dialect in achieving communication goals, ranging from building emotional closeness to encouraging direct interaction.

Table 3. Narrative Strategy and Dialect Function Matrix

Creator	Narrative Strategy	Dialect Function
Hasna Rafida Sari	Nostalgia	Cultural identity, emotional closeness
Filix Pratama	Humor	Entertainment, engagement with marking friends
Uni Ica	Promotion	Religious culinary branding
Alwi	Education	Sundanese cultural authenticity
Desy Purba	Call-to-action	Direct action ("tag your deck")

Table 3 shows that each creator adopts a different narrative strategy to maximize the function of dialect in their content. Hasna Rafida Sari chose a *nostalgic* theme to emphasize cultural identity and create an emotional connection with the audience, while Filix Pratama used *humor* to keep the content entertaining and encourage viewers to tag friends in the comments. Uni Ica focuses on *promotion*, utilizing dialect to build religious culinary branding, while Alwi relies on an *educational* approach to emphasize the authenticity of Sundanese culture. Desy Purba closes with a *call to action*,

prompting the audience to take direct action with the phrase "tag your deck". Next, take a look at Figure 2 below to see how the lectal variations and content themes are visually placed according to each creator's position.

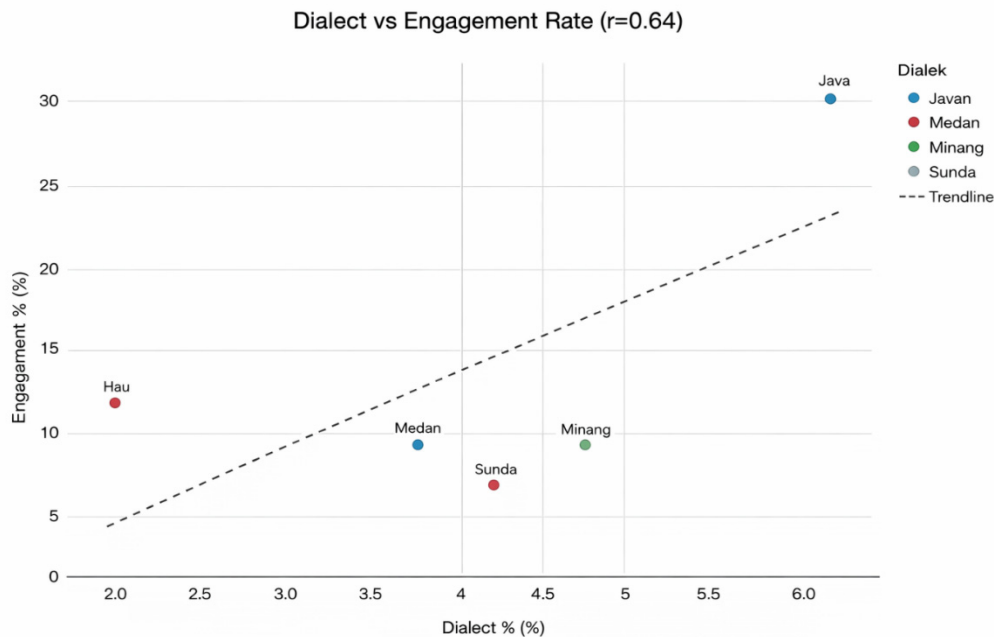


Figure 2. Visualization of the Relationship between Lectal Variations, Content Themes, and TikTok Creators

Figure 2 shows the flow of connections between the five concept categories-Product & Promotion, Dialect & Language, Sentiment/Situation, Culture & Values, and Content Themes-on the left, and each creator on the right. The thickness of each stream reflects the intensity or frequency of use of each concept by that creator. For example, Filix Pratama is prominent in the Product & Promotion category, while Alwi often ties his content to Sundanese Culture & Values. Uni Ica appears to have a relatively balanced distribution between Promotion and Sentiment/Atmosphere, reflecting a religious culinary branding strategy that combines product information with spiritual nuances. Hasna Rafida Sari is dominant in Content Themes that are nostalgic and cultural identity. In contrast, Desy Purba focuses her flow on Dialect & Language and Call-to-action, which serve to encourage direct audience action. Overall, the visuals show how each creator maps their lexical variations and narrative themes to achieve unique communication goals.

3.4 Dominant Lexical Distribution and Communicative Priorities

Table 4 shows the frequency of lexical codes along with the communicative priority score for each category, as a measure of how often a particular theme appears in the content and how much it contributes to achieving communication goals.

Table 4. Code Frequency and Communicative Priority Score

Code	Frequency	Communicative Priority Score
Culture & Values	15	75
Content Themes	14	14
Sentiment/Atmosphere	6	12
Product & Promotion	5	15
Dialect & Language	4	16

Table 4 shows that the Culture & Values category appears most frequently (15 times) and has the highest priority score (75), indicating its dominance in creators' communication strategies. Although the Content Theme also appears frequently (14 times), its priority score is much lower (14), indicating a focus on theme variations rather than a strong communicative purpose. The Dialect & Language category, despite having the lowest frequency (4 times), has a relatively high priority score (16), showing that when dialect is used, its function is highly strategic to achieve specific communication effects. Product & Promotion and Sentiment/Atmosphere occupy intermediate positions in both frequency and priority, signifying a supporting role in the overall narrative strategy. Furthermore, to clarify the relationship between the frequency of code occurrence and communicative priority score, consider the following Figure 3.

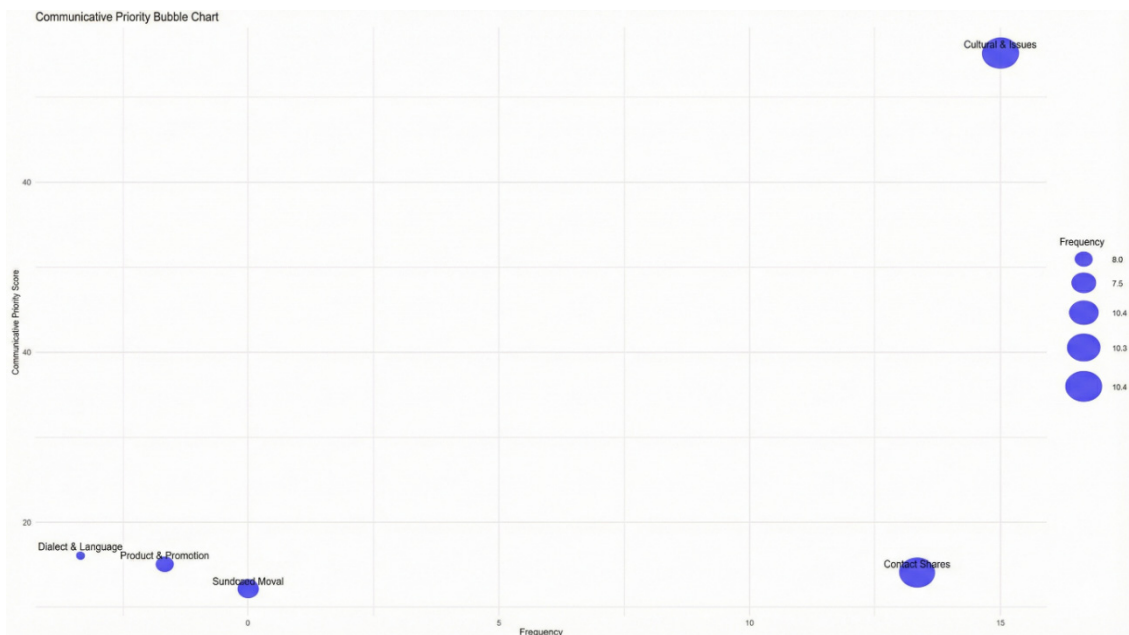


Figure 3. Lexical Frequency versus Communicative Priority Score

Based on Figure 3, the Culture & Values category dominates the creator's communication spectrum, with the highest frequency (15 occurrences) and the most significant communicative priority score (75), indicating that this theme plays a central role in the narrative strategy. Meanwhile, the Content Theme, despite appearing frequently (14 times), has a low communicative priority (14), indicating a focus on theme variation without a strong strategic emphasis. Dialect & Language, on the other hand, appears least frequently (4 times) but plays a medium priority role (16), emphasizing the function of dialect as a communicative element selectively chosen for specific effects. The Sentiment/Atmosphere and Product & Promotion categories are located in the lower quadrant, reflecting moderate frequency and communicative priority, thus serving as support in the creator's overall communication framework.

4. Discussion

TikTok has evolved into an arena for representing the archipelago's dialects, where Sundanese, Medan Batak, Minangkabau, and Javanese are used not only as means of communication but also as symbols of cultural identity. Through lexical variations such as "mamah", "lama kali", "urang", and Javanese speech varieties, users express their identity and language creativity in the digital space. This phenomenon aligns with studies on the use of other regional languages, which strengthen cultural identity while expanding audience engagement (Huttayavilaiphan, 2024; Pujiati et al., 2025; Reza et al., 2024). With its interactive features, TikTok allows dialects to function not only as identity reinforcements, similar to the revitalization of Yiddish on social media (Ramati & Abeliovich, 2024), but also as entertainment and educational instruments, as TikTok is used by museums and educational institutions to increase engagement (Carignani et al., 2024; Mirawati et al., 2024; Sallaku et al., 2025). Thus, TikTok plays a dual role as a means of preserving local languages as well as a digital entertainment medium that enriches cultural diversity in the technological era.

The results showed a striking disparity between the number of views and engagement rates on TikTok content. Alwi's account gained 2.7 million views with low engagement (5.78%), while Hasna Rafida Sari gained only 94 thousand views but very high engagement (28.77%). This phenomenon shows that popularity, as measured by views, is not always synonymous with audience engagement. Engagement is more influenced by cultural relevance, emotional resonance, and local context close to the user's identity, as previous findings emphasize the importance of cultural authenticity, content characteristics, the role of micro-influencers, and TikTok's algorithmic dynamics in determining engagement levels (Bhargava et al., 2023; Hu & Rungsisawat, 2025; Zawacki et al., 2022). The TikTok algorithm significantly modulates the visibility of dialect-heavy content through its interest-based recommendation system, which prioritizes user-content alignment over broad social reach. For creators employing high dialect intensity, the algorithm may initially enter a 'niche visibility' phase, during which content is served to audience clusters with shared cultural or linguistic backgrounds. However, the high engagement signals (likes, comments, and shares) typically generated by these core groups signal high quality to the recommendation engine, potentially triggering a wider distribution on the 'For You' Page. This algorithmic preference for interaction depth over mere visibility helps explain the 'engagement paradox' observed in this study, in which authentic linguistic performance serves as a powerful trigger for audience participation, even when total impressions are lower than for more linguistically standardized content. Thus, audience engagement indicators such as

likes, comments, and shares are more appropriate measures than impressions alone for assessing the depth of the relationship between content and audience.

TikTok creators utilize dialect as a creative communication strategy with diverse approaches. Alwi, for example, uses Sundanese dialect to build a nostalgic feel that evokes collective memory (Ballam-Cross, 2021; Y. Zhou & Kawabata, 2025). Desy Purba and Filix Pratama combined humor with Medan dialect, in line with the finding that humor and dialect can strengthen the audience's emotional closeness (Gerwin, 2024; Mai, 2024). Uni Ica highlights the promotion of Minang cuisine with a religious touch, which is in line with the practice of culture- and religion-based gastronomy promotion (Mohanty et al., 2024; Sahoo, 2020; Yadav et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Hasna Rafida Sari packaged a Javanese micro-lecture with visual text support, demonstrating the effectiveness of multimodal approaches in enhancing understanding and engagement (Lingle, 2024; Tang et al., 2022). Thus, this strategy based on lectal variation shows that dialect is not just a linguistic medium, but a creative instrument that combines humor, nostalgia, religiosity and education to enhance audience interaction.

Visualization analysis shows the close relationship between language, cultural values, and emotional dimensions in building audience engagement. Alwi uses Sundanese dialect to evoke nostalgia, while Uni Ica connects Minang cuisine with religious values; Desy Purba highlights Medan-Batak humor; and Hasna Rafida Sari packages Javanese cultural education with a micro-lecture approach. This pattern proves that audience engagement is formed through a combination of cognitive (knowledge), affective (emotion), and social (collective identity), in line with research emphasizing the close relationship between cognitive and emotional engagement (Han et al., 2024; Perez Benegas & Zanfardini, 2025), the importance of cultural sensitivity in communication (Kasianova & Kovács, 2025; Upadhyaya et al., 2025), the role of language in shaping emotional experiences (C. Zhou et al., 2021), and the use of cultural narratives and social metaphors to foster collective identity (Abbasova, 2020; Alsaqqar et al., 2025; Syaputri et al., 2024). Thus, dialects on TikTok function as a multimodal medium that integrates language, culture, and emotional dimensions to strengthen social bonds and deepen audience participation.

The dominance of the Culture & Values category as a key theme in TikTok creators' communication strategies demonstrates the importance of cultural aspects in building audience affinity and loyalty. This finding aligns with recent research confirming that content with cultural values tends to have higher appeal and stronger engagement on social media, as it can strengthen collective identity and unite digital communities across regions (Alwuqaysi et al., 2024; Ye, 2023). Meanwhile, the diverse but low-priority content themes suggest that mere diversity is not always directly proportional to message strength or communicative motivation, a pattern also found in contemporary studies of engagement on short video platforms (Lau et al., 2024).

On the other hand, the strategic use of dialects and local languages, although low in frequency, has been found to be effective in creating a more targeted and immersive communicative effect, in line with Doreleijers' (Doreleijers & Swanenberg, 2023) study that emphasizes the role of dialects in amplifying messages, differentiating identities, and increasing resonance in specific audience segments. The Product & Promotion and Sentiment/Atmosphere categories occupy an intermediate position, enriching interaction dynamics and contributing to the overall narrative (Cheng & al., 2024). Thus, the themes and communication strategies on TikTok suggest that integrating cultural values, language innovation, and narrative variety is key to long-term effectiveness in building engagement and content relevance.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Indonesian regional dialects-Sunda, Batak Medan, Minangkabau, and Javanese-function as strategic digital cultural capital in TikTok's communication ecosystem, where lexical, phonological, syntactic, and pragmatic variations are intentionally positioned by content creators to maximize emotional resonance and cultural identity. The finding of a positive correlation ($r=0.64$) between dialect usage intensity and engagement rate, albeit with a relatively lower number of impressions, reveals a paradox of engagement: culturally authentic content gains deeper engagement despite its limited audience reach. By introducing the Digital Linguistic Marketplace framework, this study extends Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital into the digital realm, showing how traditional linguistic resources gain new value in social media. The practical implications include recommendations for content creators to integrate nostalgia-based communication strategies, humor, education, promotion, and calls to action through dialects, as well as language preservation policies that leverage digital platforms to revitalize and facilitate intergenerational transmission. While the limitations of the study sample offer room for further research with broader dialect coverage and longitudinal analysis, the findings confirm that cultural authenticity and specificity are key drivers of meaningful audience engagement in the digital age. We acknowledge that the small sample size ($n=5$) restricts the statistical generalizability of the findings to the broader Indonesian population. However, this small-N design was strategically employed to prioritize 'thick description' and analytical depth over statistical breadth, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the performative mechanisms of dialect as digital cultural capital. This approach is consistent with exploratory case study methodology, where the goal is to provide a 'proof of concept' for the Digital Linguistic Marketplace framework rather than exhaustive

empirical validation. To address this limitation, future research should integrate larger-scale computational linguistics or mixed-methods designs to test the stability of these dialect-engagement correlations across a more diverse array of Indonesia's 718 regional languages and various content niches.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to the lecturers, promoter, and co-promoters of the Doctoral Program of Linguistics at Universitas Sumatera Utara and the Doctoral Program in Applied Linguistics at Universitas Negeri Medan for their academic guidance, critical insights, and constructive supervision throughout the research process. Their scholarly direction significantly contributed to the theoretical framing, methodological rigor, and analytical depth of this study. The authors also thank those who provided technical and editorial assistance during the manuscript preparation stage.

Authors contributions

Rika Kartika and Gustianingsih conceived and designed the study. Gustianingsih coordinated the research process and served as the corresponding author. T. Silvana Sinar and Amrin Saragih contributed to theoretical development and methodological supervision. Mulyadi and Dwi Widayati conducted data collection, transcription, and initial coding. Rika Kartika drafted the manuscript, while Gustianingsih, T. Silvana Sinar, and Amrin Saragih critically revised the manuscript for intellectual content. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. No special authorship agreements apply.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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