Daengku: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Innovation *ISSN: 2775-6165 (online)*
Vol. 6 No. 5 (2026)
https://doi.org/10.35877/454RI.daengku5245

Comment-Based Engagement Loops in TikTok Burger Promotion: Humour, Creator Persona, and User Participation in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines how humour, creator persona, and user participation shape comment-based engagement in TikTok food promotion. Using Aldi's Burger in Indonesia as an information-rich case, the research employs qualitative digital netnography of 25 TikTok videos and 2,250 public comments. The analysis combines video-level stimulus mapping and comment-level thematic coding guided by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework as a qualitative sensitising lens. The findings show that absurd humour, recognisable creator persona, repeated promotional phrasing, product visibility, visual food cues, location cues, and comment affordances function as key promotional stimuli. Users interpret these cues through amusement, curiosity, persona familiarity, perceived authenticity, promotional evaluation, brand recall, and product interest. These interpretations are subsequently transformed into participatory practices, including parody, jargon repetition, tagging, product and location inquiries, support, criticism, consumption narratives, and user-to-user interaction. The study demonstrates that public comments are not merely engagement metrics or sentiment indicators. Instead, they function as recursive interactional mechanisms that reproduce, negotiate, amplify, and extend promotional meaning. Building on these findings, the study introduces the concept of a comment-based engagement loop, contributing to digital marketing scholarship by explaining how platform-mediated promotional meaning is continuously co-created through audience participation in TikTok comment environments.

Keywords: Tiktok Marketing; Comment-Based Engagement; Creator Persona; Humour Appeal; Digital Netnography; Food Promotion

Received: 27 July 2026 Revised: 17 October 2026 Published: 31 December 2026

1. Introduction

Digital marketing communication has shifted from controlled promotional messaging toward participatory, platform-mediated interaction. Brands and creators no longer circulate promotional meaning in a one-directional manner. In social media environments, audiences interpret, reproduce, challenge, parody, recommend, question, and socially circulate promotional messages through visible platform practices. This shift is theoretically important because consumer engagement cannot be reduced to exposure, attention, or aggregate metrics. Engagement increasingly appears through communicative practices such as commenting, tagging, joking, repeating slogans, asking product-related questions, and responding to other users.

TikTok provides a particularly relevant context for examining this shift. As a short-video platform, TikTok combines audiovisual intensity, algorithmic distribution, comment visibility, tagging, repetition, imitation, and participatory culture. Promotional content on TikTok is rarely encountered as isolated advertising. It appears within a continuous stream of entertainment, humour, trends, creator performances, user responses, and algorithmically circulated content. The platform interface also makes comments visible and socially consequential. Users can extend a promotional message by repeating a phrase, tagging friends, continuing a joke, asking about a product, or responding to other users. In this environment, comments are not only traces of response but also interactional resources that may generate further engagement.

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Burger promotion is a useful empirical context for analysing this process because food-related content is visual, sensory, experiential, and socially shareable. Burger promotion relies not only on information about product attributes but also on appetite appeal, visual food cues, taste curiosity, location inquiry, social recommendation, and consumption narratives. Users may respond by asking where the burger is sold, whether it tastes good, whether others have tried it, or whether the promotion itself is entertaining. Thus, burger promotion on TikTok enables researchers to observe how entertainment-oriented interaction and product-oriented discussion coexist in the same comment environment.

This study uses Aldi's Burger promotion as an empirical case to examine how humour, creator persona, and user participation shape comment-based engagement in burger promotion on TikTok in Indonesia. Aldi's Burger is relevant because its TikTok promotion combines product cues, public recognisability, humorous communication, repetition, informal delivery, and active audience participation.

The case is not treated as representative of all TikTok food promotion in Indonesia. Rather, it is treated as an information-rich case for understanding how humour-driven and persona-centred burger promotion becomes extended through comment-based interaction.

Aldi Taher is central to this case because his creator persona functions as a message carrier. For international readers, Aldi Taher may be understood as an Indonesian public figure whose online visibility is strongly associated with spontaneous, humorous, repetitive, informal, and unconventional communication. His promotional presence differs from conventional celebrity endorsement because audiences do not respond only to the product being promoted. Users also respond to his recognisable communicative style, public persona, repeated expressions, and humorous unpredictability. In this context, creator persona becomes part of the promotional stimulus itself.

The Aldi's Burger case is analytically relevant because the promotion does not rely solely on conventional product claims. It is embedded in a broader creator persona characterised by absurd humour, repetitive promotional phrasing, playful incoherence, cultural references, and attention-oriented self-branding. In the observed promotional context, burger-related messages were not presented only through product attributes such as taste, texture, location, or online ordering. They were also carried through incongruent references, repeated verbal patterns, wordplay, and unexpected associations with public figures or popular culture. These elements make the case suitable for examining how a creator persona becomes a promotional stimulus and how audiences transform such stimuli into comment-based participation, parody, tagging, jargon repetition, and product inquiry.

The term chaos marketing is used in this study only as an empirical descriptor, not as a formal theory or primary conceptual construct. It refers to the observed promotional style: spontaneous, humorous, repetitive, informal, and unconventional. This descriptor helps capture how the promotional content appears to users as entertaining and unpredictable rather than conventionally polished. However, the article does not treat chaos marketing as a generalisable strategic model. The theoretical focus remains on humour, creator persona, user participation, and comment-based engagement.

Existing research on TikTok marketing and social media promotion has provided important insights into engagement metrics, influencer credibility, content characteristics, entertainment value, purchase intention, electronic word-of-mouth, user-generated content, and viral communication. These studies explain why users may attend to, evaluate, or share promotional content. However, comments are often treated as measurable engagement indicators, sentiment traces, or e-WOM outputs. This leaves an important theoretical gap: limited attention has been given to how comment sections themselves function as participatory spaces where users recursively generate engagement through humour, repetition, tagging, inquiry, parody, and user-to-user interaction.

The novelty of this study lies in developing the concept of a comment-based engagement loop. A comment-based engagement loop refers to a recursive process in which user comments transform promotional stimuli into continuing participation, social circulation, and co-created promotional meaning. This concept differs from e-WOM, which primarily explains information exchange, recommendation, and consumer evaluation. It also differs from meme marketing, which focuses on humorous circulation and cultural spreadability. While related to co-creation, the concept specifically highlights the platform comment environment as the mechanism through which engagement is repeatedly generated.

The study is guided by the following research question: How do humour, creator persona, and user participation shape comment-based engagement in burger promotion on TikTok in Indonesia? To answer this question, the study employs qualitative digital netnography and analyses 25 selected TikTok videos related to Aldi's Burger promotion alongside 2,250 valid public comments. The Stimulus-Organism-Response framework is used as a qualitative sensitising

framework to organise the analysis of promotional stimuli, audience interpretations, and comment-based responses. It is not used to test causal relationships or statistical effects.

This article makes three contributions. First, it contributes to TikTok marketing literature by explaining how short-video promotion can be extended through visible comment-based participation. Second, it contributes to consumer engagement and co-creation research by conceptualising comments as engagement-generating practices rather than merely engagement indicators. Third, it contributes to qualitative digital netnography and S-O-R-oriented research by showing how promotional stimuli, audience interpretations, and participatory responses can be analysed interpretively within a platform-based comment environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Consumer Engagement and Comment-Based Participation

Consumer engagement provides the first theoretical basis for understanding how TikTok users participate in burger promotion beyond passive exposure. Engagement has been conceptualised as a multidimensional process involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioural participation in brand-related interactions (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014; van Doorn et al., 2010). This perspective is important because platform users do not simply receive promotional messages. They interpret, evaluate, reproduce, challenge, and extend them through visible practices such as commenting, tagging, joking, asking questions, sharing experiences, and interacting with other users.

In much digital marketing research, comments are commonly treated as engagement indicators. They are counted as metrics, classified as sentiment traces, or analysed as textual evidence of consumer opinion. Such approaches are useful for measuring audience response, yet they provide limited explanation of how comments themselves become part of the engagement process. A comment may not only express approval, criticism, or curiosity. It may also trigger replies, invite other users, repeat promotional language, extend jokes, and generate further interaction. Thus, comments can operate not only as outputs of engagement but also as inputs for subsequent engagement.

The concept of co-creation helps explain why comments matter for brand meaning. Co-creation literature argues that brand meanings are not produced solely by firms but emerge through interaction among multiple actors (Brodie et al., 2013; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). However, co-creation remains too broad to explain the specific mechanics of TikTok comment environments. This study therefore narrows the analytical focus to comment-based engagement, where users co-produce promotional meaning through platform-specific comment practices.

2.2. TikTok Affordances and Short-Video Participation

TikTok's platform architecture makes it especially relevant for studying comment-based engagement. Affordance theory explains how technological features create possibilities for user action (Evans et al., 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). In social media environments, affordances such as visibility, persistence, editability, association, recommendation, tagging, and commenting shape how users interact with content and with one another. These affordances do not determine behaviour mechanically, but they structure what becomes easy, visible, repeatable, and socially meaningful. In broader digital environments, immersive and interactive platform features have been shown to generate new patterns of user behaviour that challenge existing analytical and regulatory frameworks (Lala, 2025).

TikTok differs from many earlier social media platforms because it combines short-video delivery, algorithmic recommendation, audiovisual intensity, creator performance, imitation, and public interaction. Users encounter promotional content not as isolated advertisements but as part of a rapid feed of entertainment, humour, trends, product recommendations, and creator-centred communication. Short-form video advertising research shows that content characteristics and brand-related cues are relevant to consumer response in TikTok environments (Meng et al., 2024). However, a content-characteristics perspective does not fully explain how users collectively extend promotional messages after viewing the video.

2.3. Humour, Parody, and Meme-Like Participation

Humour is a major mechanism through which promotional content can attract attention and invite participation. Advertising research has long shown that humour can enhance attention, affective response, and message reception when it fits the audience, message, and context (Eisend, 2009). In social media environments, humour becomes more

participatory because users can respond to, imitate, remix, and extend humorous content. A funny promotional video may therefore become a starting point for collective joking rather than a finished advertising message.

Meme marketing literature provides further insight into this process. Memes rely on humour, cultural resonance, recognisability, spreadability, and user participation (Malodia et al., 2022; Razzaq et al., 2023). Meme-like participation can help brands become culturally visible because users do not merely consume a message; they reuse and transform it. However, meme marketing usually emphasises the circulation of humorous content across users, platforms, and cultural contexts. The present study differs by focusing on recursive participation within the comment section itself.

2.4. Creator Persona as Message Carrier

Influencer marketing research commonly explains promotional effectiveness through credibility, attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, authenticity, parasocial interaction, and perceived fit between influencer and brand (Barta et al., 2023; Lou & Yuan, 2019). These dimensions remain useful, particularly for understanding why audiences may attend to creator-led promotional content. However, they are not sufficient for explaining cases where the creator's persona becomes part of the promotional stimulus itself.

A creator persona is not simply a personal brand or an external endorsement asset. It refers to the recognisable communicative identity through which audiences interpret content. This includes speech style, humour, repetition, spontaneity, emotional tone, public associations, and audience expectations. In persona-centred TikTok promotion, the audience may respond as much to the creator's style as to the product. The creator therefore functions as a message carrier: the promotional message is carried not only by product claims but by the symbolic and affective meanings attached to the creator.

2.4.1. Absurd Persona as Promotional Stimulus

In humour-driven TikTok promotion, creator persona may also operate as an absurd persona as promotional stimulus. This concept refers to a communicative condition in which recognisable absurdity, playful incoherence, repetition, and unconventional self-presentation become part of the promotional material itself.

Unlike conventional influencer marketing, which often emphasises credibility, attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, authenticity, or product fit, an absurd persona may generate engagement through recognisability, surprise, mnemonic absurdity, imitation potential, and participatory reinterpretation. In this logic, audiences do not respond only to the promoted product or to the creator's credibility. They also respond to the creator's recurring communicative style as material for joking, quoting, parodying, tagging, and extending the promotional message.

This perspective is important for analysing TikTok-based promotion because the platform rewards visible, repeatable, and culturally recognisable forms of participation. An absurd persona can provide users with reusable cues: unusual phrasing, exaggerated product claims, humorous cultural references, incongruent associations, and repeated verbal formulas. These cues may become comment resources through which users reproduce the promotional style, question it, mock it, circulate it, or connect it to product curiosity. Therefore, absurd persona should not be treated merely as communicative disorder or reputational noise. In a platform-mediated promotional environment, it can become symbolic material for engagement-generating practices and comment-based promotional meaning-making.

2.5. Food Promotion and e-WOM-Like Interaction

Burger promotion is part of the broader field of food promotion, but it has specific characteristics that make it suitable for studying comment-based engagement. Food content is visual, sensory, experiential, and socially shareable. Users often respond to food promotion through taste curiosity, appetite expression, location questions, price inquiries, menu discussions, peer invitations, and consumption narratives. These practices show that food promotion can generate both affective and practical forms of engagement.

The concept of e-WOM is relevant because users may ask questions, share product impressions, recommend the product, or invite others to try it (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). However, e-WOM alone cannot fully explain the comment practices observed in humour-driven TikTok promotion. Many comments are jokes, tags, imitations, persona references, or playful responses that later lead to product inquiry.

2.6. S-O-R as a Qualitative Sensitising Framework

The Stimulus-Organism-Response framework offers a useful structure for analysing how promotional cues are transformed into comment-based engagement. In consumer research, S-O-R generally explains how external stimuli influence internal states and subsequent responses. It has often been applied in quantitative studies to test relationships among marketing stimuli, consumer perceptions, and behavioural intentions (Kamboj et al., 2018; Kuo & Chen, 2023; Wu & Li, 2018). However, the present study uses S-O-R as a qualitative sensitising framework rather than a causal statistical model.

Within this study, stimulus refers to promotional cues embedded in videos, such as humour, creator persona, repetition, captions, hashtags, product cues, visual food cues, location cues, and informal delivery. Organism refers to audience interpretations visible in comments, such as amusement, curiosity, perceived authenticity, brand recall, promotional evaluation, confusion, and product interest. Response refers to comment-based practices such as support, parody, jargon repetition, tagging, product inquiry, location inquiry, consumption narratives, user-to-user interaction, and critical commentary.

2.7. Literature Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature shows that TikTok promotion is shaped by consumer engagement, platform affordances, short-video participation, humour, meme-like interaction, creator persona, food promotion, and e-WOM. These streams provide valuable theoretical resources, but they do not fully explain how comment sections become recursive engagement environments. Consumer engagement research explains participation, but often remains broad. TikTok affordance research explains platform-enabled interaction, but does not always connect these

affordances to specific promotional meaning-making processes. Humour and meme marketing explain attention and cultural spreadability, but less often explain how jokes are sustained within comment sections. Influencer marketing explains communicator effects, but often focuses on credibility or purchase intention rather than creator persona as material for user participation.

This creates the central gap addressed by the present study. Comments in social media marketing are frequently treated as metrics, sentiment traces, e-WOM outputs, or indicators of content performance. Less attention has been given to comments as engagement-generating practices. In TikTok burger promotion, comments may recursively generate further engagement by repeating promotional language, extending humour, tagging additional users, asking product questions, sharing consumption experiences, and creating interactional cues for subsequent users.

Table 1. Theoretical Positioning of the Comment-Based Engagement Loop

Related stream	Typical analytical focus	Limitation for this study	How this article extends it
Consumer engagement	Cognitive, affective and behavioural participation in brand interaction	Often remains broad or metric-oriented when applied to comments	Specifies comments as engagement-generating practices
e-WOM	Information exchange, recommendation and consumer evaluation	Does not fully explain parody, jargon repetition and humour continuation	Shows how informational and playful practices coexist in comments
Meme and humour marketing	Cultural spreadability, recognisability and remixing	Often focuses on circulation rather than comment-section recursion	Locates recursive participation within TikTok comment environments
Influencer and creator studies	Credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, expertise and fit	Less attention to persona as reusable promotional material	Conceptualises absurd persona as a stimulus for participatory meaning-making

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative digital netnography design to examine how humour, creator persona, and user participation shape comment-based engagement in burger promotion on TikTok in Indonesia. Digital netnography was selected because the study focuses on naturally occurring interaction, symbolic meaning, platform-specific humour, and participatory practices in an online social environment (Kozinets, 2020). The aim was not to measure content performance, test causal relationships, or classify comments statistically, but to interpret how users make sense of promotional stimuli and transform them into visible comment-based engagement.

The study is not positioned as a conventional content analysis of comments alone. While thematic coding was used as an analytical procedure, the broader research logic was netnographic. The research process involved observing TikTok as a cultural and communicative environment, attending to comment practices, recording field notes, interpreting Indonesian TikTok humour, and examining how creator persona, repetition, parody, tagging, product inquiry, and user-to-user interaction were produced within the platform. No interaction was initiated with users, no comments were posted, and no attempt was made to influence the observed conversations.

3.2. Empirical Case Context

This study uses Aldi's Burger promotion as an information-rich empirical case. Aldi's Burger was selected because it represents a case in which product promotion, food-related curiosity, creator-centred communication, humour, repetition, informality, and user participation intersect within TikTok comment environments. Aldi Taher is conceptualised as a creator persona and message carrier rather than merely as a celebrity endorser. His recognisable public style, spontaneous expression, humorous delivery, repetition, and unconventional communication become part of the promotional stimulus itself.

In addition to the main dataset, the study used a contextual persona archive as supporting netnographic field notes. This archive consisted of researcher observations of publicly visible communicative patterns associated with Aldi Taher's promotional persona, including repetitive promotional commenting, playful and incongruent promotional phrasing, absurd humour, popular culture references, wordplay, and unconventional public-facing promotional gestures. These contextual notes were not treated as the primary dataset and were not coded as equivalent to the 25 selected TikTok videos or the 2,250 valid public comments. Their function was interpretive: they helped contextualise the creator persona and humour-driven promotional style observed in the selected videos and comment sections. The main empirical claims of the study remain grounded in video-level stimulus analysis and comment-level thematic coding.

The evidentiary structure of the study was organised through three complementary evidence types to maintain a clear audit trail between video-level stimuli, comment-level interpretation, and contextual persona interpretation.

Table 2. Evidence Structure and Analytical Role

Evidence type	Code format	Analytical role
Video-level record	V01-V25	Identifies promotional stimuli embedded in selected TikTok videos before comment coding
Comment-level evidence	C-V01-001 to C-V25-090	Supports thematic interpretation and preserves an anonymised evidence chain
Contextual persona archive	FN-01 to FN-05	Contextualises creator persona, absurd humour and repetitive phrasing without being treated as primary comment data

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted between January and March 2025. TikTok was used as the sole observation site because the study specifically examines comment-based engagement in short-video burger promotion. The data collection process consisted of keyword and hashtag search, video identification, manual video screening, comment export, public accessibility verification, consolidation of exported files, and data cleaning.

The search strategy used keyword combinations related to Aldi's Burger and its promotional context, including Aldi Burger, Aldi's Burger, Aldi Taher Burger, burger Aldi, burger Aldi Taher, burger viral, burger Jakarta, and relevant Indonesian-language variations. The search also included hashtags associated with the case, such as #AldisBurger, #AldiTaher, #BurgerAldi, #BurgerViral, #KulinerJakarta, #KulinerViral, and related hashtags that emerged during iterative searching. The search was not restricted to hashtags alone because TikTok visibility is shaped by captions, account references, audio, recommendations, search results, and platform-based discovery pathways.

Public comments were exported using ExportComments. The tool was used only to retrieve publicly visible TikTok comments from videos that were accessible without private account access, password restriction, or closed-group membership. ExportComments was not used to access private messages, restricted profiles, non-public account data, or information beyond the publicly available comment environment. After export, all files were consolidated, checked for duplication, verified against the selected video list, and prepared for cleaning and coding.

3.4. Video-Level Stimulus Analysis

Before comment coding was conducted, the 25 selected TikTok videos were analysed at the video level to identify promotional stimuli embedded in the audiovisual content. This step ensured that stimulus categories were not inferred only from user comments. Instead, promotional stimuli were first documented through manual observation of the videos and then used as a separate analytical reference when interpreting comment-based responses. This procedure helped distinguish between stimuli present in the video content and audience interpretations expressed in the comment section.

The video-level analysis focused on observable promotional cues, including humour type, creator persona cue, spontaneous or informal delivery, repetition and jargon, caption and hashtag cue, product cue, visual food cue, location cue, audio or verbal cue, and interaction cue. Each video was reviewed manually and recorded in a coding matrix. The coding did not aim to quantify visual features statistically. Rather, it documented the presence and analytical relevance of recurring promotional stimuli that could plausibly structure audience interpretation and comment-based participation.

3.5. Comment Sampling Strategy

The final dataset consisted of 25 selected TikTok videos, with 90 valid public comments selected from each video, resulting in 2,250 comments for analysis. This sampling strategy was designed to balance interpretive depth and cross-video comparability. The study did not aim for statistical representativeness. Instead, it aimed for analytical transferability by providing a transparent and defensible basis for case selection, comment sampling, coding, and interpretation.

The decision to select 90 valid comments per video was based on four methodological considerations. First, comparability was required because the study examined patterns across multiple videos. Selecting the same number of comments from each video reduced the risk that videos with unusually large comment volumes would dominate the analysis. Second, interpretive depth was required because the study sought to examine humour, creator persona, product curiosity, tagging, parody and user-to-user interaction in detail. Third, the strategy supported bias control by preventing overdependence on a few highly viral videos. Fourth, the final dataset was considered adequate in terms of information power (Malterud et al., 2016) and saturation adequacy (Guest et al., 2020) because recurring interpretive and participatory patterns appeared across videos during iterative reading, coding and cross-video comparison.

Operationally, comment selection was conducted after cleaning rather than before cleaning. Each exported comment file was first screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, duplicate or irrelevant entries were removed, and the first 90 eligible comments available within the cleaned export for each video were retained for coding. This procedure preserved comparability across videos while avoiding the overrepresentation of spam, duplicated comments, emoji-only entries without interpretable meaning, and comments unrelated to the Aldi's Burger promotional context.

Table 3. Data Collection, Cleaning, and Audit Trail Summary

Stage	Procedure	Quality control purpose
Video identification	Keyword, hashtag and iterative TikTok search related to Aldi's Burger and Aldi Taher	Ensures case relevance and platform specificity
Eligibility screening	Public accessibility, promotional relevance, identifiable cues and sufficient comment availability	Ensures that the corpus supports video-level and comment-level analysis
Comment export	ExportComments used only for publicly visible comments from eligible videos	Preserves the public-data boundary and avoids restricted/private content
Cleaning and anonymisation	Duplicates, spam, irrelevant, unreadable and sensitive entries removed; identifiers deleted	Reduces noise and re-identification risk
Final analytic sample	25 videos x 90 valid comments per video = 2,250 comments	Balances cross-video comparability with qualitative interpretive depth

3.6. Data Cleaning and Anonymisation

After export, all comment files were consolidated into a master dataset and checked for video identity, duplicate entries, file duplication, raw comment count, and eligibility status. Each selected video was assigned a video code, such as V01, V02, V03, and so forth. Each selected comment was assigned an anonymous comment code using the format C-V01-001, C-V01-002, and so on. This coding structure enabled the researcher to maintain an audit trail while protecting user identity.

Comments were included when they were relevant to the video, Aldi's Burger, the burger product, Aldi Taher as creator persona, humour, parody, tagging, promotional repetition, product inquiry, location inquiry, consumption experience, critical response, or user-to-user conversation. Comments were excluded when they were duplicates, empty entries, unreadable text, bot-like entries, unrelated promotional spam, irrelevant to the video context, emoji-only comments without interpretable meaning, or comments containing sensitive personal information.

All usernames, profile links, account handles, user IDs, and individual profile information were removed from the analytical dataset. The study does not report direct links to comments or user profiles. Illustrative comments were anonymised and either quoted in short excerpts or lightly paraphrased where necessary to reduce searchability and re-identification risk. Indonesian comments are presented with English translations in brackets. Microsoft Excel was used as the primary tool for data management, coding matrix construction, codebook development, memo writing, and audit trail documentation. Excel was not used as an automated analysis tool.

3.7. Data Analysis and Coding Procedure

The data were analysed through thematic coding guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterned meanings in the comments while preserving interpretive flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). S-O-R was used as a qualitative sensitising framework rather than a causal statistical model. The framework provided an organising logic for tracing how promotional stimuli were interpreted by users and transformed into comment-based responses. It did not assume that specific stimuli statistically caused specific responses.

The analysis followed four stages. The first stage was open coding, in which comments were read repeatedly to identify descriptive meanings, including humour, amusement, confusion, curiosity, product interest, creator-persona reference, promotional recall, tagging, parody, repetition, location inquiry, taste inquiry, support, criticism, and user-to-user interaction. The second stage was S-O-R categorisation, in which initial codes were

grouped into stimulus, organism, and response dimensions. The third stage was theme refinement through iterative review of conceptual overlap, recurrence, and interpretive boundaries. The fourth stage was cross-video comparison to determine whether patterns appeared consistently or only in specific videos.

The coding procedure followed an evidence chain logic: comment evidence was linked to an initial code, the initial code was mapped to an S-O-R dimension, the dimension was connected to a theme, and the theme was interpreted in relation to comment-based engagement. This evidence chain ensured that theoretical interpretation remained grounded in the observed data. Evidence references are reported using consistent codes: V01-V25 for video-level records, with 25 eligible videos included after screening; C-V01-001 to C-V25-090 for anonymised comment-level evidence within the selected video-specific ranges; and FN-01 to FN-05 for contextual persona archive notes.

3.8. Trustworthiness, Reflexivity, and Ethical Considerations

Several procedures were applied to strengthen trustworthiness. Credibility was supported through repeated reading of comments, iterative coding, cross-video comparison, memo writing, and short anonymised evidence excerpts in the findings. Dependability was supported through a documented workflow covering keyword search, video identification, manual screening, comment export, inclusion and exclusion decisions, cleaning procedures, codebook development, coding revisions, and theme refinement. Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining a coding matrix, analytical memos, and an audit trail of interpretive decisions. Transferability was supported through detailed description of the empirical case, data composition, sampling logic, comment environment, and analytical boundaries (Carcary, 2020; Williams & Morrow, 2009).

Reflexivity was considered because interpretation of humour, creator persona, and TikTok comment culture depends partly on cultural familiarity. The researcher approached the data as an Indonesian observer familiar with local social media references, public entertainment culture, and informal TikTok humour. This familiarity supported cultural interpretation but also required reflexive caution. To reduce interpretive overreach, the analysis avoided attributing private motivations to users and focused only on meanings visible in public comments.

Ethically, the study analysed only publicly accessible TikTok comments. Public accessibility was not treated as unrestricted ethical permission. The study recognised that users may not expect their comments to be reproduced in academic publications even when posted publicly (Buck & Ralston, 2021; Franzke et al., 2020; Golder et al., 2017; Zimmer, 2010). No usernames, profile links, account handles, user IDs, or identifiable profile information are reported. Individual comment links are not included. Short illustrative excerpts are used only when they are necessary to preserve participant voice and analytic meaning; sensitive comments are paraphrased or excluded to reduce searchability and re-identification risk. The study does not infer users' private motivations, demographic identities, psychological states, actual purchasing behaviour, or sales conversion from their comments. This approach aligns with broader concerns about the governance of digital data across platforms, where the balance between data utilisation and user protection remains an evolving challenge across jurisdictions (Rahayudin et al., 2025).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Data Composition and Analytical Overview

The final dataset consisted of 25 selected TikTok videos related to Aldi's Burger promotion and 2,250 valid public comments, with 90 comments selected from each video. The analysis combined video-level stimulus coding and comment-level thematic coding. The video-level analysis was conducted first to document promotional stimuli embedded in the selected videos, while the comment-level analysis examined how users interpreted and responded to those stimuli in the comment section.

The findings reported in this section are qualitative patterns, not statistical prevalence claims. The analysis does not claim that the selected comments represent all TikTok users, all burger consumers, or all food-promotion audiences in Indonesia. Instead, the results show recurring interpretive and participatory patterns across the selected videos and comment sections. These patterns were organised through the S-O-R sensitising framework: video-level promotional cues were coded as stimuli, audience interpretations visible in comments were coded as organism-level meanings, and observable comment practices were coded as responses.

4.2. Video-Level Promotional Stimuli

The video-level stimulus analysis identified several promotional cues that appeared across the selected TikTok videos before comment coding was conducted. Humour, creator persona, repetition, product cues, visual food cues, caption

and hashtag cues, location cues, audio-verbal cues, and interaction cues were documented through manual observation of the videos as separate analytical evidence.

Humour appeared through exaggerated verbal delivery, absurd phrasing, spontaneous performance, playful tone, and unexpected communicative rhythm. In several videos, the promotional message did not follow a conventional product-focused advertising format. Instead, the creator performed the promotion through comic exaggeration, informal speech, and unusual phrasing. Analytically, humour functioned as an attention-generating cue that made the content easier to reinterpret, imitate, and extend in comments.

Table 4. Evidence Matrix Linking Stimuli, Interpretations, and Comment-Based Responses

Stimulus	Audience interpretation	Comment-based response	Evidence code	Analytical meaning
Humour and absurd phrasing	Amusement and persona familiarity	Parody and jargon repetition	C-V01-027; C-V10-010; C-V19; C-V22	Promotional language becomes reusable participatory material
Creator persona and repeated style	Recognition of communicative identity	Persona references, quotation and support	C-V01-026; C-V01-004; C-V05-004; FN-01	The creator operates as a message carrier whose style becomes part of the stimulus
Product and visual food cues	Product curiosity and appetite-oriented interest	Product inquiry, intention to try and consumption narratives	C-V01-002; C-V01-007; C-V01-029; C-V05-004	Entertainment-oriented attention shifts into product discussion
Location and ordering cues	Place-based curiosity and access evaluation	Address questions, branch requests and delivery references	C-V01-003; C-V01-025; C-V01-031; C-V25	Comments connect humour with practical availability questions
Tagging and comment affordances	Social invitation and peer-directed relevance	Peer tagging and user-to-user interaction	C-V01-090; C-V13; C-V23	Comments extend promotional circulation to additional users
Critical or playful contestation	Ambivalence, irony or evaluative distance	Comparison, joking criticism and negotiation	C-V05-083; C-V14; C-V20	Engagement is not always supportive; irony also contributes to recursion

Creator persona operated as a stimulus when the promotional message was carried through recognisable speech patterns, improvised delivery, recurring public references and self-referential humour. The persona cue was analytically separated from general celebrity visibility: a video was coded as containing a creator persona cue only when the promotional delivery depended on the creator's recognisable communicative style rather than merely on the creator's presence.

Product and visual food cues anchored the humorous performance in a commercial object. Burger close-ups, taste descriptors, location references and online-ordering cues made the content interpretable as food promotion rather than entertainment alone. This distinction is important because many comments moved between playful imitation and practical product interest. The video-level mapping therefore helped prevent the analysis from over-attributing product-related meanings to comments without first establishing that product cues were present in the stimulus environment.

4.3. Absurd Persona as Promotional Stimulus

A further pattern emerging from the video-level stimulus analysis and contextual netnographic observation is the role of absurd persona as promotional stimulus. In the Aldi's Burger case, the creator persona did not function merely as a recognisable celebrity presence. It operated as a source of promotional material through repetitive phrasing, absurd humour, playful incoherence, incongruent cultural references, and wordplay. Promotional messages were repeatedly attached to product cues such as burger texture, taste descriptors, online ordering, and location references, but these cues were often combined with unexpected names, references, or associations that made the message appear deliberately unconventional. This pattern was recorded in the contextual persona archive as repetitive and contextually incongruent promotional phrasing (FN-01) and as a recurring video-level cue across selected video-level records such as V01, V05, and V10.

This pattern is analytically significant because the promotional stimulus became memorable not only through product information but also through mnemonic absurdity. Repetition made certain phrases recognisable; absurd humour made them comment-worthy; and playful incoherence made them available for participatory reinterpretation. One highly liked comment explicitly framed the creator as the promotional mechanism itself: "dia ga butuh marketing karena dia adalah marketing, aldis burger cempaka putih rotinya lembut dagingnya juicy lucy mahalini rizky febian, bisa pesen online" [he does not need marketing because he is the marketing; Aldi's Burger Cempaka Putih, the bun is soft, the meat is Juicy Lucy, Mahalini Rizky Febian, can be ordered online] (C-V01-026). This excerpt was coded as persona reference, marketing evaluation, product interest, and jargon repetition because it links creator persona, product description, and promotional phrasing in one comment. Another user reproduced the wordplay more directly: "oh ini burger yg juicy luicy mahalini rizky febian bisa pesan online" [oh, this is the burger that is Juicy Luicy, Mahalini, Rizky Febian, and can be ordered online] (C-V01-027). This comment was coded as jargon repetition and humorous wordplay because it transforms a product cue into participatory language.

The data suggest that absurd persona worked as a bridge between video-level stimuli and comment-based responses. Users did not only interpret the burger as a food product. They also interpreted the promotional style as a recognisable performance. This recognition enabled several response practices: parody, jargon repetition, playful product inquiry, tagging, and user-to-user conversation. In this sense, absurdity did not interrupt promotional communication. Rather, it became part of the platform-mediated promotional meaning-making process. The creator persona supplied recurring symbolic material, while users transformed that material into engagement-generating practices within the comment environment.

This finding also clarifies why comment-based engagement in the case cannot be understood only through e-WOM or sentiment. Some comments were product-oriented, such as questions about price, taste, outlet location, or online delivery. However, many others were participation-oriented: users repeated phrases, joked about the creator's style, tagged peers, or responded to the incongruity of the promotional performance. The absurd persona therefore strengthened the comment-based engagement loop by producing cues that were easy to recognise, imitate, and circulate.

4.4. Audience Interpretation in Comments

Audience interpretation was visible in comments that expressed amusement, curiosity, persona familiarity, product interest, promotional evaluation, confusion, and brand recall. These comments were coded as organism- level meanings because they indicated how users made sense of the promotional stimuli. The analysis did not treat these comments as evidence of private psychological states. Rather, they were interpreted as public traces of audience meaning-making within the TikTok comment environment. To strengthen participant voice, this section uses short anonymised excerpts with English translations.

Humour was visible through comments that responded to the promotional content as entertainment. One user wrote, "cinta bet sama oasis bang wkwkwkw" [you really love Oasis, bro, hahaha] (C-V01-081), while another observed, "Aldi taher se cinta itu sama oasis ya sampe nama burgernya mirip kaya nama personil oasis" [Aldi Taher loves Oasis so much that even the burger's name sounds like an Oasis member's name] (C-V10-010). These comments were coded as amusement, persona familiarity, and absurd humour because they show that users interpreted the promotion through the creator's recognisable cultural references rather than through product information alone. Analytically, the humour did not remain inside the video; it became a public trace of audience meaning-making in the comment section.

Creator persona was interpreted through comments that connected the burger promotion with Aldi Taher's public style and previous public references. A user wrote, "Bang bangkitkan lagi mie ayam aldi taher" [Bro, bring back Aldi Taher's

chicken noodle business] (C-V01-004). This comment was coded as persona recognition because it interpreted the burger promotion through the creator's earlier food-selling identity and public persona. Promotional evaluation also appeared in comments that treated the promotional style as memorable and performative rather than merely informative. These comments show that users did not interpret unconventional delivery only as disorder. In some cases, perceived irregularity became part of the promotional appeal.

Curiosity and product interest appeared when users shifted from entertainment to questions about the burger. A concise product-inquiry comment asked, "bisa pake nasi?" [can it be served with rice?] (C-V01-007). This comment was coded as product inquiry because it transformed humour-oriented exposure into a practical question about consumption. Location-based curiosity was also visible when users asked for expansion, as in "bolehkah buka cabang di bogor, kabita aq teh" [could you open a branch in Bogor? I really want it] (C-V01- 025). This evidence is interpreted only as comment-based product interest and place-based curiosity, not as evidence of actual purchase behaviour.

4.5. Comment-Based Response Practices

Comment-based responses were observable practices that extended the promotional environment beyond the original video. These responses included support, parody, jargon repetition, tagging, product inquiry, location inquiry, consumption experience, user-to-user interaction, and critical commentary. They were placed under the response dimension because they represented visible forms of participation rather than only interpretation. The following illustrative quotations are verified short excerpts from the comment dataset.

Supportive responses appeared in comments that expressed encouragement toward the creator or the promotion. One user wrote, "wahh mantap ntar aku order di ojol yaa bang aldi. sukses selalu" [wow, great; later I will order through an online delivery app, Bro Aldi; wishing you success] (C-V01-002). This comment was coded as

support and product interest because it publicly reinforces the creator-product association while also mentioning online ordering. It is not treated as confirmed purchase behaviour.

Parody and humorous imitation appeared when users echoed the creator's style or transformed product references into jokes. The comment "oh ini burger yg juicy luicy mahalini rizky febian bisa pesan online" [oh, this is the burger that is Juicy Luicy, Mahalini, Rizky Febian, and can be ordered online] (C-V01-027) condensed product description, music references, and ordering cues into a reusable phrase. A longer variant extended the same pattern by stringing together product descriptors with a sequence of unrelated celebrity and sports names (C-V01-048). These comments were coded as jargon repetition and humorous wordplay because they show that promotional language moved from video content into user-generated comment expression.

Tagging functioned as social diffusion. In one anonymised comment, a user tagged another account and wrote, "@peer: assalamualaikum, bang buka cabang di makassar juga dong, insyaallah atas kehendak allah laris manis juga" [@peer: peace be upon you, Bro, please open a branch in Makassar too; God willing, it will also sell well] (C-V01-090). Although this kind of comment does not add detailed product information, it extends the audience of the promotional content by inviting another user into the comment environment. Product and location inquiry were also visible in shorter requests such as "alamat bangg" [the address, bro] (C-V01-003) and "buka cabang jogja, bang" [open a branch in Jogja, bro] (C-V01-031).

Consumption experience comments added e-WOM-like meaning to the comment environment. One user wrote, "udh nyobain buat buka puasa kmrn ternyata lumayan enak aldis burger cempaka putih rotinya lembut dagingnya juicy lucy mahalini rizky febian, bisa pesen online" [I tried it for breaking the fast yesterday; it was quite tasty, Aldi's Burger Cempaka Putih, the bun is soft, the meat is Juicy Lucy, Mahalini Rizky Febian, and it can be ordered online] (C-V01-029). This comment was coded as consumption experience, product interest, and jargon repetition because it added experience-based meaning while reproducing the promotional phrase. Critical and playful contestation was also present, for example: "katanya klo toko lagi tutup,bisa order di Burger Bangor / Burgerking saja" [they said that if the shop is closed, just order from Burger Bangor or Burger King] (C-V05-083). This shows that engagement did not always mean support; users also negotiated, joked about, or contested the promotional message.

4.6. Cross-Theme Mechanisms of Comment-Based Engagement

The findings show a cross-theme mechanism in which video-level promotional stimuli moved into audience interpretation and then into comment-based response practices. The process did not occur in a simple linear way. A single comment could combine humour, persona recognition, product inquiry, and social diffusion. One user wrote,

"udah di titik pengen banget nyobain Aldi's burger cempaka putih rotinya lembut dagingnya juicy luicy mahalini rizky febian bisa pesen online, jauh bangettttt" [I have reached the point of really wanting to try Aldi's Burger Cempaka Putih, whose bun is soft and meat is Juicy Luicy, Mahalini Rizky Febian, and can be ordered online, but it is very far away] (C-V05-004). This comment was coded across product curiosity, jargon repetition, persona reference, and location constraint because it combined a desire to try the burger with a repeated promotional phrase and a practical distance-related barrier. This evidence shows that comment-based engagement is multi-layered: users may express product interest, imitate promotional language, recognise persona cues, and negotiate practical access simultaneously.

The first mechanism was humour-to-participation. Video-level humour generated amusement in comments, but amusement often developed into parody, jargon repetition, or humorous product naming. In S-O-R terms, humour was coded as stimulus, amusement as organism, and parody or repetition as response. Analytically, this sequence shows how humour became a participatory resource. Users did not merely laugh; they continued the promotional performance in textual form.

The second mechanism was persona-to-recognition. The creator persona helped users interpret the promotion through prior familiarity with Aldi Taher's communicative style. Comments referring to his public style, earlier food-related associations, or recognisable humour were coded as persona reference and placed within organism- level interpretation. When users then repeated his style, supported him, or parodied his phrasing, persona recognition became comment-based participation.

The third mechanism was entertainment-to-product curiosity. Product inquiries, location inquiries, and intention-to-try statements show that the comment section enabled a shift from entertainment response to practical product discussion without proving actual purchase or sales conversion. The fourth mechanism was comment-to-comment activation. The anonymised tagging comment "@peer: assalamualaikum, bang buka cabang di makassar juga dong, insyaallah atas kehendak allah laris manis juga" [@peer: peace be upon you, Bro, please open a branch in Makassar too; God willing, it will also sell well] (C-V01-090) illustrates how a comment can invite another user while also extending location-based demand. Tagging, reply-oriented remarks, repeated slogans, and user-to-user references created new interactional cues for subsequent users. These patterns show that comments themselves became resources for further comment-based engagement.

4.7. Comment-Based Engagement Loop

The empirical findings support the concept of a comment-based engagement loop. In this study, a comment-based engagement loop refers to a recursive process in which user comments transform promotional stimuli into continuing participation, social circulation, and co-created promotional meaning. The loop began with video-level promotional stimuli, including humour, creator persona, absurd humour, repetition, product cues, visual food cues, caption and hashtag cues, location cues, and audio-verbal cues. These stimuli were documented through video-level analysis before comment coding.

At the interpretation stage, users made sense of the stimuli through amusement, curiosity, persona familiarity, promotional evaluation, brand recall, confusion, and product interest. At the response stage, users transformed their interpretations into visible comment-based practices such as support, parody, jargon repetition, tagging, product inquiry, location inquiry, consumption narratives, user-to-user interaction, and criticism. These responses extended the promotional message because they added jokes, questions, evaluations, invitations, and experience-based remarks to the comment environment.

The loop can be summarised as follows: video-level promotional stimuli attract attention; users interpret the stimuli affectively and cognitively in comments; those interpretations become visible through comment-based response practices; the responses create new interactional cues for subsequent users; and the comment section becomes a recursive environment where promotional meaning is reproduced, negotiated, amplified, and extended. The comment "dia ga butuh marketing karena dia adalah marketing" [he does not need marketing because he is the marketing] (C-V01-026) captures this loop in condensed form: the audience recognises the creator persona, comments on the promotional mechanism itself, and recirculates the product phrase. This finding is central to the article because it shows that comment-based engagement in the Aldi's Burger case was not formed only by the original video or by the creator alone. It emerged through the interaction between video-level promotional cues and user-generated comment practices.

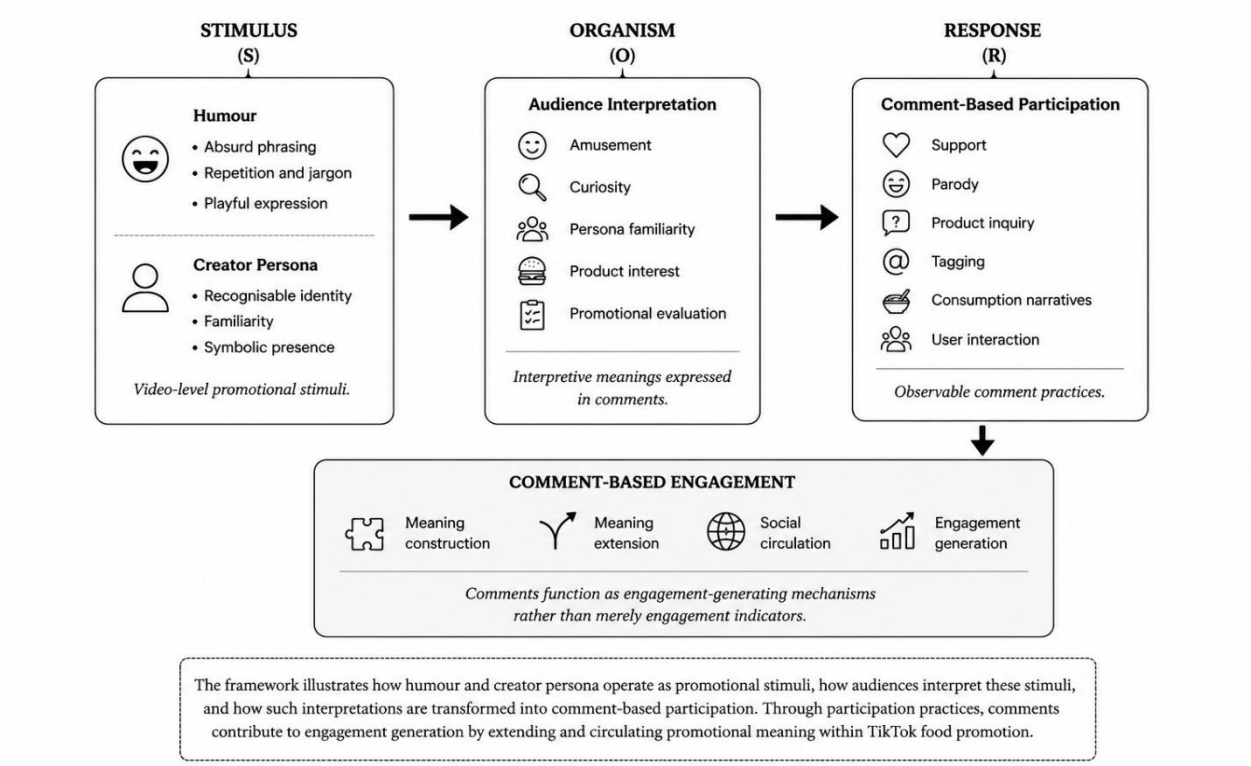


Figure 1. *Analytical Framework of Humour, Creator Persona, and User Participation in Shaping Comment-Based Engagement*

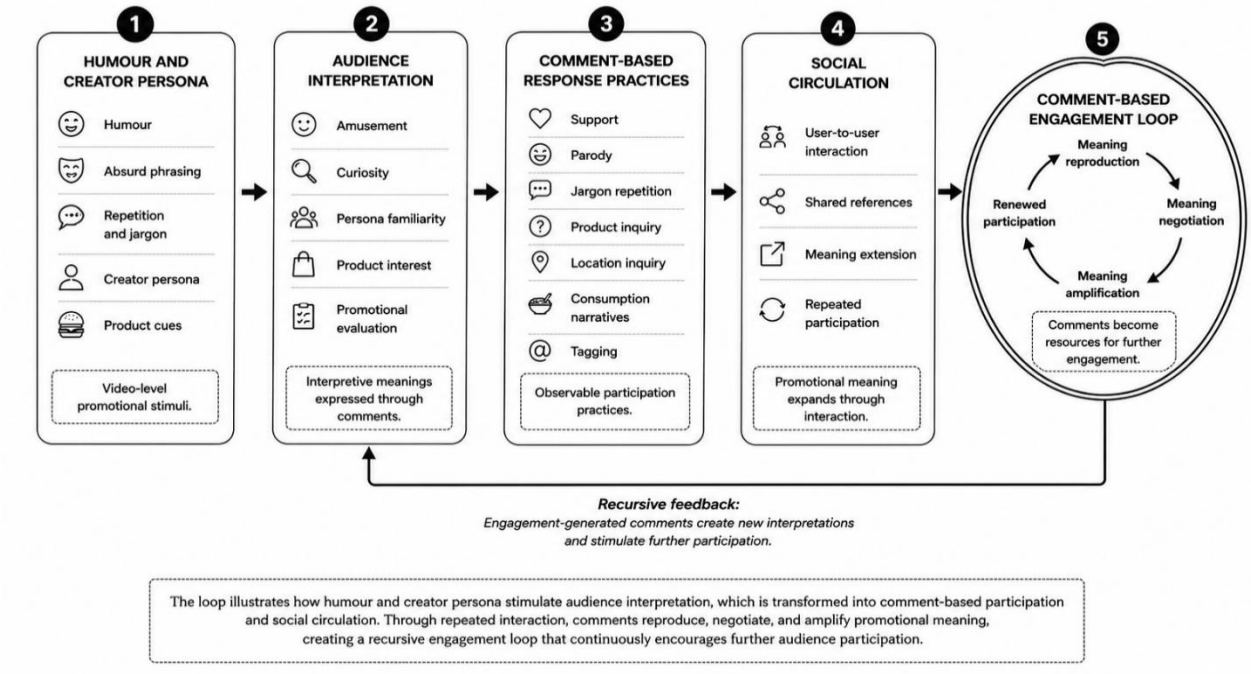


Figure 2. *Empirical Comment-Based Engagement Loop in Burger Promotion on Tiktok in Indonesia*

Figures 1 and 2 visualise the analytic framework and the recursive comment-based engagement mechanism identified in the study.

4.8. Discussion and theoretical interpretation

4.8.1. Relationship to existing literature

The findings confirm that consumer engagement in TikTok-based promotion is not limited to behavioural indicators such as likes, views, shares, or comment counts. Consistent with consumer engagement literature, the data show that engagement involves cognitive, affective, and behavioural participation in brand-related interaction (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014; van Doorn et al., 2010). In the Aldi's Burger case, users

did not merely react to the promotional video. They interpreted humour, evaluated the promotional style, recognised the creator persona, asked product-related questions, tagged other users, repeated promotional language, and produced supportive or critical commentary.

The findings also confirm the relevance of TikTok affordances for shaping short-video participation. Comment visibility, persistence, tagging, association, and imitation-oriented participation enabled users to extend the promotional message beyond the original video. The role of humour in the findings confirms prior arguments that humorous advertising can attract attention and generate affective response (Barta et al., 2023; Eisend, 2009; Wang, 2020). However, in the TikTok comment environment, humour did more than create amusement. It provided interactional material that users could reuse through parody, joking, repetition, and playful product references.

The findings further confirm the importance of creator persona in platform-based promotion. Aldi Taher's recognisable communicative style operated not merely as a source of celebrity visibility but as part of the promotional stimulus. Users responded to his style, repetition, spontaneity, and public familiarity as much as to the burger product itself. Finally, the findings confirm the relevance of e-WOM-like food interaction. Product inquiry, location inquiry, taste-related remarks, and consumption narratives added product-oriented meaning to the promotion, although they should be interpreted as public engagement traces rather than verified consumption behaviour.

4.8.2. Extending existing literature

This study extends existing literature by showing that comments can function as engagement-generating practices. Unlike prior studies that treat comments primarily as outcomes of engagement, this study shows that comments may operate as inputs for subsequent engagement. A comment can become a joke to be continued, a phrase to be repeated, a question to be answered, a tag that invites another user, or a critical cue that stimulates further discussion. This recursive distribution of meaning through multiple layers of interaction parallels findings in agricultural commodity research, where the structure of intermediary channels significantly shapes how value is distributed across marketing system actors (Nendi et al., 2026). Thus, the comment section is not only a place where engagement is recorded. It is also a space where engagement is produced and reproduced.

This finding extends consumer engagement research by specifying a platform-level mechanism through which engagement becomes recursive. Engagement is often conceptualised as cognitive, affective, and behavioural participation. The present study adds that such participation can be sequentially and socially regenerated through comment-based interaction. The study also extends TikTok marketing research by demonstrating how short-video promotion can be sustained through comment practices, shifting attention from content characteristics alone to the post-viewing interaction environment (Meng et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2024).

The findings also extend influencer marketing and creator persona literature by showing that promotional influence in TikTok environments is not always organised around credibility, attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, or product fit. In the Aldi's Burger case, the creator persona operated through absurd recognisability, humorous repetition, playful incoherence, and comment-level imitation. This challenges conventional assumptions that effective creator-led promotion must appear polished, credible, or strategically coherent. Instead, the case shows that an unconventional promotional style can become engagement-generating when audiences recognise the persona, reuse its linguistic cues, parody its absurdity, and transform the performance into comment-based participation. The theoretical contribution is therefore not that absurdity automatically produces marketing effectiveness, but that absurd persona can function as promotional material under specific boundary conditions: recognisable creator identity, humour-driven short-video content, visible comment affordances, and a product category that allows playful interpretation.

4.8.3. Challenging metric-centred engagement views

The findings challenge metric-centred engagement approaches that treat comments primarily as counts, sentiment traces, or e-WOM outputs. Comment counts can indicate volume, but they cannot explain what comments do within a

promotional environment. A single comment may perform different engagement functions: it may support the creator, repeat promotional language, invite a friend, ask about the product, continue a joke, share experience, or contest the promotional message. Treating all comments as equivalent engagement units risks flattening their social and interpretive functions.

The study also challenges a narrow sentiment-based reading of comments. Positive, negative, and neutral classifications may be useful for computational analysis, but they may miss the ambivalent, humorous, ironic, and participatory nature of TikTok comments. The findings also challenge a narrow e-WOM interpretation. Some comments resembled e-WOM because they contained product inquiry, location inquiry, taste-related remarks, or consumption narratives. However, many comments were not primarily informational recommendations. They were jokes, tags, repeated phrases, persona references, and playful imitations.

4.8.4. Theoretical contributions

First, this study contributes to TikTok marketing literature by conceptualising the comment section as a recursive promotional environment. TikTok promotion is often discussed in terms of content features, algorithmic visibility, creator influence, or engagement metrics. This study shows that the comment section itself can become a mechanism of promotional extension. In the Aldi's Burger case, comments reproduced humour, circulated product cues, brought new users into the discussion, and transformed the video into an ongoing interactional event.

Second, the study contributes to consumer engagement and co-creation research by positioning comments as engagement-generating practices. Unlike prior studies that treat comments as outcomes of engagement, this study shows that comments may operate as inputs for subsequent engagement. This reframing clarifies how engagement becomes recursive: user comments create new cues for later users, and those later users may continue the interaction through tagging, parody, repetition, inquiry, support, or criticism.

Third, the study contributes to research on creator persona and participatory culture. It shows that creator persona is not only a factor of credibility, attractiveness, or personal branding. In persona-centric TikTok promotion, creator persona can operate as symbolic material that users recognise, reuse, parody, and circulate. Fourth, the study contributes methodologically to qualitative S-O-R and digital netnography. The S-O-R framework is used not as a causal statistical model but as a qualitative sensitising framework for organising promotional stimuli, audience interpretations, and comment-based responses.

4.8.5. Practical implications and boundary conditions

For food brands leveraging humour-driven, persona-centric short-video strategies, the findings suggest that comment sections should be treated as strategic interpretive spaces, not merely as engagement dashboards. Comments can reveal how audiences interpret humour, recognise creator persona, ask about product attributes, request location information, repeat promotional language, or circulate the content to peers. Monitoring these practices can help brands understand whether promotional content is generating amusement, curiosity, confusion, product inquiry, or contestation.

The findings also suggest that promotional content may be more participatory when it provides users with reusable cues. Humour, repeated phrases, distinctive creator style, visible product cues, and location information can create material that users transform into comments. However, these cues should not be understood as guaranteed drivers of performance. Their value depends on whether users recognise them, find them culturally meaningful, and can reuse them within the platform environment.

The practical implications are strongest for food brands leveraging humour-driven, persona-centric short-video strategies. The findings may not apply equally to ordinary brands without a recognisable creator persona, to highly formal corporate advertising, or to product categories where humour and parody are less culturally acceptable. Public comments do not prove actual purchase behaviour, sales conversion, or causal business performance.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how humour, creator persona, and user participation shape comment-based engagement in burger promotion on TikTok in Indonesia. Using qualitative digital netnography, the study analysed 25 selected TikTok videos related to Aldi's Burger promotion and 2,250 valid public comments. The S-O-R framework was used as a qualitative sensitising framework to organise video-level promotional stimuli, audience interpretations visible in comments, and comment-based response practices.

The findings show that comment-based engagement emerged through the interaction of humorous promotional cues, creator persona, repeated verbal expressions, product visibility, food-related cues, and user participation. Humour attracted attention and invited playful interpretation. Creator persona made the promotional message recognisable and reusable. Repetition and jargon provided linguistic material for imitation and parody. Product and visual food cues connected entertainment-oriented engagement with burger-related curiosity. User participation then extended the promotional message through support, tagging, parody, product inquiry, location inquiry, consumption narratives, user-to-user interaction, and critical commentary.

The main contribution of this study is the conceptualisation of a comment-based engagement loop. This concept explains how user comments transform promotional stimuli into continuing participation, social circulation, and co-created promotional meaning. Unlike approaches that treat comments only as engagement indicators, sentiment traces, or e-WOM outputs, this study shows that comments may operate as inputs for subsequent engagement. In humour-driven and persona-centric TikTok promotion, the comment section can become a recursive environment where promotional meaning is reproduced, negotiated, amplified, and extended.

5.1. Limitations

This study has several limitations that define the boundaries of its claims. First, the study focused on a single platform, TikTok, and therefore does not explain how comment-based engagement may operate on other platforms such as Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, Facebook, or X. Second, the study used Aldi's Burger promotion as a single empirical case. The findings are analytically transferable to comparable humour-driven and persona-centric short-video promotion, but they should not be generalised to all food brands, all burger promotions, or all TikTok marketing practices.

Third, the analysis relied on publicly available comments only. The dataset did not include demographic information, user profiles, private messages, interviews, transaction records, sales data, or verified behavioural data. As a result, the study cannot determine users' demographic characteristics, private motivations, actual consumption behaviour, or commercial outcomes. Fourth, the study used purposive sampling rather than statistical sampling. The selected 25 videos and 2,250 comments were appropriate for qualitative interpretation and cross-video comparison, but they were not designed to represent a population of TikTok users.

Finally, the S-O-R framework was used as a qualitative sensitising framework, not as a causal model. The study does not test whether specific stimuli cause specific responses. Its findings are based on qualitative interpretation of video-level stimuli and public comment practices. Accordingly, the conclusions should be read as interpretive insights into comment-based engagement, not as causal claims about purchase behaviour, sales conversion, or business performance.

5.2. Future research

Future research can extend this study in several directions. First, cross-platform comparison is needed to examine whether comment-based engagement loops operate differently across TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, Facebook, and X. Such studies could clarify how platform affordances such as visibility, persistence, tagging, algorithmic circulation, and comment threading shape recursive engagement.

Second, comparative case studies across burger brands, local food businesses, franchise brands, and broader food promotion contexts would help identify which elements of the loop are case-specific and which are transferable across different promotional settings. Comparative studies could also examine whether comment-based engagement is stronger in humour-driven and persona-centric campaigns than in more conventional product-centred promotion. Third, future research could incorporate interviews with users, creators, brand managers, and food business operators to provide deeper insight into audience interpretation, creator strategy, brand decision-making, and the relationship between comment-based engagement and promotional planning.

Fourth, longitudinal digital netnography could examine how comment-based engagement develops over time, especially when promotional phrases, creator persona, or product narratives evolve across multiple videos. Fifth, future studies may combine computational text analysis with qualitative interpretation. Sentiment analysis, topic modelling, semantic network analysis, or natural language processing could map large-scale comment patterns, while qualitative netnography could explain the cultural meaning of humour, parody, tagging, and persona references. Finally, quantitative research could test the proposed comment-based engagement loop by examining relationships among

promotional stimuli, audience interpretation, comment-based participation, and subsequent engagement indicators across larger datasets.

Because the study analyses public social media comments and intentionally removes identifiers to reduce re-identification risk, raw comment exports, usernames, profile links and source URLs are not included in the public manuscript. An anonymised codebook, aggregate coding matrix and non-identifying audit-trail materials may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and platform-related constraints.

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