



Crafting Digital Image: Examining Language, Visuals, and Identity of Sugema Raya Garut on TikTok

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ABSTRACT

This study is motivated by the growing role of social media in shaping perceptions and brand image in the digital age, particularly in the highly competitive culinary sector. As a short-form video platform, TikTok has become a strategic space for businesses to build their identity and reach a wide audience. This study aims to analyze the construction of Sugema Raya Garut's digital identity on the TikTok platform through the use of language, visuals, and narrative in building brand image. The rise of TikTok has transformed culinary marketing communication patterns, where public perception of brands is heavily influenced by visual representations and audience interactions. Although various studies have examined the effectiveness of digital marketing, research on the process of brand self-presentation within the context of a platform's dynamic algorithms remains limited. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using data collection techniques such as in depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The results indicate that the Real Self dimension is built through consistency in product quality, service, and authentic consumer experiences; the Ideal Self is constructed through visual curation, storytelling reinforcement, and consistent positioning; while the False Self manifests as communication adjustments to trends and platform characteristics without altering the brand's core values. These findings indicate that digital image formation is a strategic, cyclical, and continuous process that integrates operational foundations, symbolic representation, and audience participation through organic marketing practices. Practically, this study offers implications for culinary business operators in managing their digital self-presentation in an authentic, adaptive, and brand sustainability oriented manner.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has driven significant changes in the marketing patterns of the culinary business, both for large-scale enterprises and small and medium-sized businesses. Social media has now become a strategic tool in building and managing a restaurant's brand image. One platform experiencing rapid growth is TikTok, which relies on short-form video content with dynamic, fast-paced, and easily shareable visual characteristics. These characteristics make TikTok an effective medium for shaping public perception of a culinary brand in a relatively short period of time.

Ideally, using TikTok as a digital marketing platform helps build a positive digital image that aligns with the brand's identity and fosters audience engagement through active interaction. This engagement is expected to extend beyond the digital realm, translating into tangible actions such as customer visits and purchasing decisions, thereby enabling restaurants to achieve strategic goals such as enhancing brand awareness through content tailored to the purchasing behavior of their offline audience. Thus, social media serves as a communication channel that bridges a brand's digital presence with its real-world business performance (Widodo et al., 2024).

In the context of regional restaurants like Sugema Raya Garut, a visual communication strategy that highlights the authenticity of the story, the visual appeal of the menu, and cultural narratives and local experiences is a key element in strengthening the brand's position on TikTok. Content that is not only promotional but also informative and based on consumer experiences such as reviews and testimonials has been shown to significantly influence trust and purchasing decisions, particularly among Generation Z, the dominant user group on this platform. Therefore, the use of interactive and credible content has the potential to strengthen engagement while driving consumer preference for local restaurant (Gozali et al., 2025).

In reality, Sugema Raya is known as a buffet restaurant in Garut Regency with a relatively diverse menu selection that has attracted the interest of local consumers. In addition to relying on in-person visits, Sugema Raya has also begun to gain exposure in the digital realm through various food recommendation posts uploaded by users and local content creators on social media platforms, including TikTok. Content generally showcases the dining atmosphere, menu variety, and dining experience visually, which has the potential to build audience interest and encourage visit





(Wahyuni et al., 2025).

The presence of review content indicates that Sugema Raya has become part of the digital communication ecosystem that shapes the restaurant’s image in the public sphere. This representation is worth examining because what is displayed in social media content often highlights certain performative aspects, thereby creating a discrepancy between the image presented to the audience (front stage) and the operational reality taking place behind the scenes (back stage) (Jin et al., 2022).

In a broader context, the growing use of TikTok as a digital marketing platform has also influenced consumer decision-making patterns, including in the Garut region. This platform enables businesses to establish two-way communication with consumers, expand their market reach, and create a richer interactive experience through a combination of visual and audio elements. These factors contribute to the formation of consumer perceptions and trust levels before they decide to visit a restaurant (Widilestari et al., 2025).

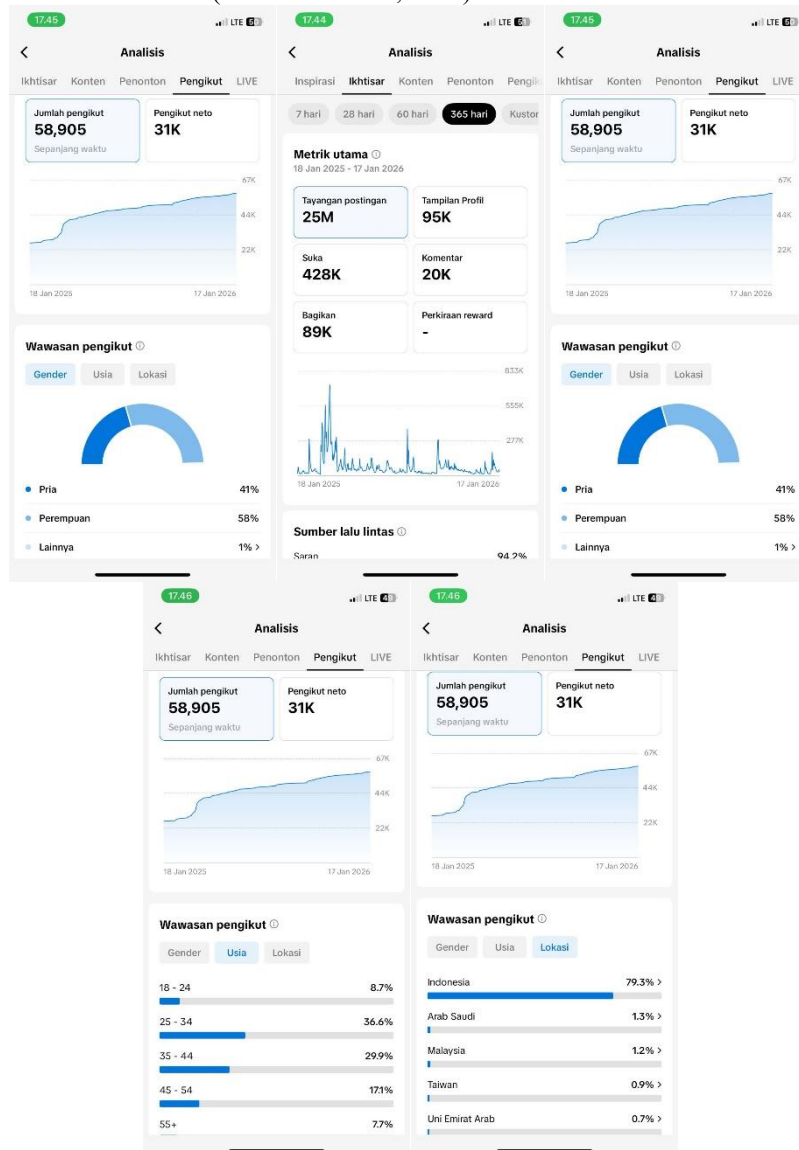


Figure 1. Source; TikTok @sugema raya garut

Based on observations and analytical data obtained from the administrator of the Sugema Raya Garut TikTok account, the account demonstrated significant digital performance over a one-year period, from January 18, 2025, to January 17, 2026. Quantitatively, this account recorded approximately 25 million views, 428,000 likes, 20,000 comments, and 89,000 shares, as well as 95,000 profile visits. These achievements indicate a high level of exposure and audience interest in the brand representation and content presented at on the TikTok account (Usman et al., 2025).

In terms of audience growth, the Sugema Raya TikTok account has a total of 58,905 followers, with a net increase of approximately 31,000 followers over the course of a year. This relatively stable growth pattern demonstrates the content’s ability to sustain audience engagement over time. Demographically, followers are dominated by women (58%) and the working-age group, particularly those aged 25–34 (36.6%) and 35–44 (29.9%). These findings confirm





that the account's reach is not limited to Generation Z but also includes audience segments with purchasing power and a tendency to use social media as a reference in making culinary decisions (Eryc, 2022).

Based on geographic reach, the majority of the audience comes from Indonesia (79.3%), with a small portion of followers from abroad, such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates. The dominance of the domestic audience demonstrates the strong relevance of the content to the local cultural context and consumption preferences. The high level of engagement, expansion of audience reach, and coverage by several national media outlets indicate that the digital marketing strategy via TikTok plays a crucial role in strengthening the appeal and position of the Sugema Raya brand in the digital sphere (Bhikuning et al., 2025).

Based on empirical data obtained from statistical charts and analytical insights from the Sugema Raya TikTok account, it can be concluded that high digital performance metrics do not merely reflect the frequency of posts but also indicate the effectiveness of the communication strategies implemented in each piece of content. The high number of views, interaction rates, and follower growth indicate an alignment between the characteristics of the content presented and the preferences and behavior of the digital audience (Wahid et al., 2023).

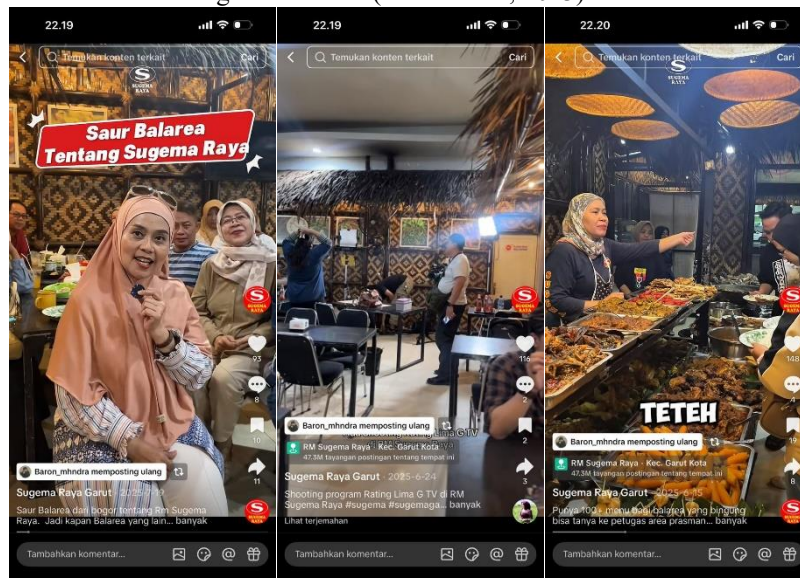


Figure 2. Source; TikTok @sugema raya garut

The language used in Sugema Raya's TikTok content is communicative and relevant to the audience's daily lives, consistent with the fact that its followers are predominantly in the working-age group and the high level of engagement. The language not only conveys information but also builds emotional closeness through narratives of dining experiences, emphasis on the flavors of the menu, and controlled informal persuasive expressions, as reflected in audience participation in the form of comments and content sharing (Wahid et al., 2023).

Visual content plays a crucial role in capturing the audience's attention, as evidenced by the high number of views and the frequency with which content is shared. Detailed depictions of the menu, the serving process, and the restaurant's ambiance shape perceptions of product quality and the dining experience. Visuals are not merely aesthetic; they also represent the dining experience, which encourages the audience to visit (Marić et al., 2025).

Sugema Raya's brand identity is shaped by consistent content that highlights the concept of a buffet-style restaurant, menu diversity, and a local vibe. Repetitive visual patterns and narratives reinforce audience recall while distinguishing the brand from other culinary content on TikTok. Thus, the integration of language, visuals, and brand identity plays a role in building a positive digital image and influencing audience perceptions and decisions regarding Sugema Raya (Maghfiroh et al., 2024).

The phenomenon of rapidly shifting viral trends on the TikTok platform is fast-paced and dynamic, which in practice drives some businesses to prioritize short-term virality over the development of a consistent brand identity. This tendency leads to the replication of trends without considering their alignment with the brand's values and character, thereby potentially obscuring the authenticity of the brand's identity. TikTok's algorithm-driven nature and reliance on audience interaction further reinforce this situation, where the construction of a digital image is no longer entirely controlled by the producer but is shaped through reciprocal relationships with users. This dynamic is also linked to sustainability challenges in the food and beverage sector, particularly for cafes and restaurants, which face pressures stemming from shifts in consumer behavior and digital disruption. A number of business and economic studies indicate that many culinary businesses experience stagnation or even failure in maintaining their existence over a certain period, underscoring the importance of communication strategies that are not only adaptive to trends but also capable of sustaining brand identity consistently (Ardiansyah et al., 2024).





In this context, Sugema Raya serves as a relevant case study because it exhibits distinct characteristics compared to similar culinary businesses. The brand's success is driven not only by content strategies but also by the emergence of organic marketing practices through user-generated content that develops naturally from its audience—a phenomenon rarely observed consistently among comparable businesses. This situation indicates the presence of a strong identity representation capable of driving voluntary public engagement. Sugema Raya is also known as one of the iconic culinary tourism destinations in Garut Regency and has gained exposure through various national television stations as a local culinary recommendation. This level of visibility has not been matched by adequate academic research, making this study relevant to fill that gap through a comprehensive analysis of language, visuals, and digital identity construction within the social media ecosystem (Ardiansyah et al., 2024).

This phenomenon is supported by a previous study titled *“Digital Media Management at Jurnal Garut in Implementing the Pikiran Rakyat Mediapreneur Initiative.”* The study explains that advancements in digital technology are driving media organizations to adapt to new work patterns and business models in the digital age. The presence of various online media outlets and media partnership networks, such as the Pikiran Rakyat Media Network, demands that local media be able to adapt to the dynamics of technological development and the ever-changing needs of their audience. This adaptation is not only related to the utilization of digital technology but also concerns content management strategies, strengthening media identity, and efforts to maintain existence amidst increasingly competitive information markets (Purnama et al., 2023).

The findings of this study indicate that digital media management requires the implementation of structured management functions including planning, organizing, directing, and controlling (POAC) in carrying out journalistic activities while simultaneously developing the concept of mediapreneurship. These findings indicate that changes in the digital ecosystem require every institution whether media organizations or businesses to adapt their communication strategies and digital platform management without compromising the identity and core values that define the organization or brand (Purnama et al., 2023).

Research on the food industry on social media has so far focused primarily on digital marketing strategies and the effectiveness of promotions. Studies specifically examining the process of shaping brand self-representation through language, visuals, and narratives on TikTok remain relatively limited. This situation indicates a research gap in examining the formation of digital identity on a rapidly evolving platform that involves active audience participation (Salsabila, 2024).

Given this context, this study focuses on how Sugema Raya builds its digital image on TikTok through language, visuals, and narrative to shape its brand identity amid the platform's evolving trends and algorithms. An *organic marketing* framework is employed to understand brand communication involving *user-generated content* (UGC) and *electronic word-of-mouth* (eWOM) as forms of audience participation in constructing brand meaning and perception (Zahrah et al., 2024).

This study aims to analyze Sugema Raya's self-representation in TikTok content, covering identity strategies, communication styles, as well as the role of visuals and audience engagement through UGC in strengthening brand image. This study is expected to provide conceptual insights into the construction of digital identity for culinary businesses in a competitive social media landscape, and it is also expected to offer practical guidance for entrepreneurs, particularly in the culinary sector, serving as an initial reference for new entrepreneurs in understanding the process of brand identity formation through social media, while also serving as a source of inspiration for innovation and material for evaluative reflection for established businesses in managing digital communication more strategically. Academically, this research also holds urgency in enriching studies on digital communication and branding, particularly regarding brand identity construction within the social media space, thereby expanding theoretical perspectives on brand self-representation practices in the context of increasingly dynamic digital media competition (Van Dat et al., 2025).

The research conducted by the researcher is related to a number of previous studies, one of which is titled *“The Effectiveness of TikTok Social Media in Building the Brand Image of Mie Gacoan.”* That study showed that the use of short-form video content on TikTok through its visual appeal, communicative style, and consistency of posts plays a significant role in shaping brand perception and image in the minds of the digital audience. The difference between that study and this one lies in the research focus, where the study emphasizes the effectiveness of using TikTok in building brand image, while this study places greater emphasis on analyzing brand identity representation through language, visuals, and content presentation patterns on the TikTok account of Sugema Raya Garut (Zulfia et al., 2024).

A similar approach is also found in a study titled *“Strategic Digital Branding on TikTok: A SOSTAC-Based Case Study of Camille Beauty's Skincare Marketing in Indonesia.”* This study confirms that the success of brand image building on TikTok is influenced by integrated digital strategy planning, particularly through visual consistency, brand narrative, and a communication style aligned with the brand's positioning. The difference between that study and this one lies in the analytical approach used, where the former employs the SOSTAC marketing strategy planning model, while this study adopts a self-presentation perspective to understand how brand identity and image are constructed through TikTok content (Yuliono, 2025).

Another relevant study is illustrated by a research paper titled *“The Implementation of Instagram Social Media*





Marketing Strategies at Rumah Makan Riung Panyaungan.” Although focused on Instagram, this study reinforces the understanding that visual and interactive communication strategies on social media play a crucial role in building brand image and fostering consumer engagement in the culinary sector. The difference between that study and this one lies in the media platform and the focus of the analysis: while that study examined marketing strategies on Instagram, this study specifically examines brand identity construction through language, visuals, and audience interaction on the TikTok platform (Khaq & Shabrina, 2023).

The novelty of this study lies in its interpretation of TikTok as a strategic communication space where a brand’s digital image is constructed through the process of self-representation. This study views an image not merely as the result of promotion, but as a product of the ongoing management of messages, visuals, and interactions through the use of language, visuals, and narrative. Within this framework, brand communication practices are analyzed as symbolic performances that shape identity and influence audience perception amidst the dynamics of trends, platform algorithms, and audience participation through user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth as part of organic marketing practices (Salsabila, 2024)

The novelty of this study is also evident in the choice of research subject, which examines Sugema Raya as a local culinary brand that has become one of the iconic culinary tourism destinations in Garut Regency, yet has not been extensively studied in previous academic research. This study employs Erving Goffman’s Self-Presentation theory, adapted for the digital context by Adam Michikyan, to analyze marketing communication strategies in the food and beverage sector an approach that remains relatively underutilized in studies of culinary business marketing communication. This study also presents a more comprehensive analysis by examining the relationship between communication language, visual content, and brand identity construction through various perspectives of the parties involved in the digital communication process. This approach provides a more holistic understanding of the process of digital image formation and the dynamics of successful brand communication on social media (Salsabila, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory used in this study is the Self-Presentation theory proposed by Erving Goffman in 1959, which views individuals as social actors who present themselves in accordance with the social context to manage impressions (impression management). In the context of the digital age, this theory was adapted by Dr. Adam Michikyan by dividing self-presentation into three dimensions: the Real Self, the Ideal Self, and the False Self, which describe how individuals present versions of themselves online through language, visuals, and narrative (Jin et al., 2022).

This study employs self-presentation theory to examine how Sugema Raya constructs her self-representation through language, visuals, and digital identity on TikTok. To strengthen the analysis, this study draws on the three dimensions of self-presentation developed by Michikyan: the Real Self, the Ideal Self, and the False Self (Jin et al., 2022).

These three dimensions suggest that self-presentation on social media always involves an aspect of authenticity that one wishes to convey, an ideal image one seeks to achieve, and the possibility of modifying one’s identity to create a specific impression. Through this framework, the study examines how Sugema Raya manages its authenticity, aspirations, and identity adjustments in shaping its digital image on TikTok. Thus, Goffman’s theory helps this study understand not only what the brand displays but also how and why the brand chooses to present a specific image in an increasingly competitive digital space (Michikyan et al., 2014).

Digital media serves as a crucial space for both individuals and social entities to construct and negotiate their identities through visual communication practices. Social media enables users to present themselves selectively through language, visuals, and narratives tailored to specific audiences, contexts, and objectives. In this context, self-presentation is not spontaneous but rather the result of an impression management process influenced by social norms, audience expectations, and the nature of the digital platform used (Michikyan et al., 2014).

The Self-Presentation Theory used in this study is conceptually linked to the social phenomenological approach proposed by Alfred Schutz. Phenomenology posits that an individual’s social actions are influenced by experiences, motives, and meanings constructed in relation to the social reality they encounter. In Schutz’s thought, human actions are explained through two types of motives: “*because motives*,” which relate to past experiences that shape an individual’s perspective, and “*in-order-to motives*,” which refer to the goals one seeks to achieve through an action. This perspective emphasizes that social action is the result of an individual’s subjective process of making sense of life experiences and the goals they wish to achieve within a social context (Purnama et al., 2026).

The similarity with the concept of Self-Presentation lies in the view that social actions do not arise spontaneously, but rather through a process of deliberation and meaning-making in interaction with an audience. The difference lies in the focus of the study, where phenomenology places greater emphasis on subjective experience and the motives underlying actions, whereas Self-Presentation focuses on how identity and impressions are presented in social interactions.

Nevertheless, these two perspectives remain interconnected because they both view the individual as an actor who actively constructs meaning regarding the actions displayed. The dimensions of the Real Self, Ideal Self, and False Self in Self-Presentation ultimately also reflect the experiences, goals, and processes of identity adjustment in shaping





specific impressions. This shared orientation indicates that the use of Self-Presentation theory in this study remains consistent with the phenomenological perspective in understanding how Sugema Raya constructs her identity representation and digital image on the TikTok platform (Purnama et al., 2026).

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the complex phenomena occurring in marketing communication practices in the digital era. This study aims to identify and narratively describe the marketing communication strategies used by Rumah Makan Sugema Raya in building a digital image, reaching consumers, and maintaining business sustainability amid the challenges of digitalization, which have caused many businesses to experience a decline or even closure (Naeem et al., 2023).

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at describing and conducting an in depth analysis of the marketing communication strategies implemented by Sugema Raya Garut through social media and digital platforms. The qualitative approach was chosen to explore the communication process, the meaning of messages, and the strategic considerations underlying the creation and delivery of digital content. Data collection was conducted using three main techniques in depth interviews, observation, and documentation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the marketing communication activities carried out (Naeem et al., 2023).

This study was conducted at Sugema Raya Restaurant, located in Garut Regency, West Java Province. The location was selected because Sugema Raya Restaurant consistently utilizes digital media particularly TikTok and Instagram as a marketing communication tool. Furthermore, Sugema Raya’s position within the local culinary competitive landscape makes it a relevant subject for examination in the context of digital image and identity formation.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves choosing participants based on their involvement and relevance to Sugema Raya’s marketing communication strategy. The primary informants consisted of business owners and internal teams involved in the planning and implementation of digital marketing communication. To enrich the perspective, this study also involved active customers and other culinary business owners as supporting informants, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the implemented communication strategies. The clarification and in-depth analysis processes were further strengthened through interviews with expert sources.

Table 1. Source; Created By Mahardika

Informants	Profession	Description
Raya Azriel	Owner	CEO
Sahrul Imam	Performance Marketing	Content Planner
Nahda Muhamad Fajar	Creative Marketing	Content Executor
Citra Sari Utami	Manager	Operations Manager

Expert	Profession	Description
Muhamad Isman M.B.A	Academic	Comprehensively analyzes marketing communication strategies
Munggaran Pandji	Practitioner	Providing insights on content results based on empirical experience
Arfie Adjie Rayina S.Ars	Entrepreneur	Offers opinions and serves as a peer reference among fellow entrepreneurs

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher, who serves as the key instrument. In addition, a semi-structured interview guide was used to gather information regarding the management of marketing communications, the use of digital media, and the informants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the content produced by Sugema Raya. Supporting instruments included a voice recorder, field notes, and digital documentation in the form of screenshots of content and promotional materials.

Data collection was conducted through in depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in person at the Sugema Raya location or via online platforms and lasted approximately 30–60 minutes. Observations focused on marketing communication activities taking place within the physical space of the restaurant as well as on Sugema Raya’s social media accounts. Documentation was used to collect data in the form of content posts, promotional materials, and relevant digital communication record (Naeem et al., 2023).

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using a thematic analysis approach. Data from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed in depth to identify patterns of meaning related to Sugema Raya’s marketing communication strategies. The findings were then grouped into key themes, such as content strategy, language and visual usage, and patterns of interaction with the audience. This process yielded a contextual understanding of the marketing communication practices being implemented (Naeem et al., 2023).

This study adheres to research ethics by obtaining consent from all informants prior to data collection. The





confidentiality of informants' identities was maintained as agreed, and all data collected were used exclusively for academic purposes (Naeem et al., 2023).

RESULT

This study focuses on the digital self-presentation practices employed by Sugema Raya in building its brand image through digital content on TikTok. This analysis employs Erving Goffman's Self-Presentation theory, which explains that social actors present themselves to manage social impressions. In the digital context, this concept is elaborated through the dimensions of the Real Self, Ideal Self, and False Self (Michikyan et al., 2014).

The research findings indicate that Sugema Raya's digital self-presentation is built through the integration of these three dimensions. The Real Self serves as the primary foundation through the demonstration of actual operational activities, service experiences, and consistent product quality. The Ideal Self plays a role in optimizing the brand's image through enhanced visual quality, storytelling, and curated content narratives to reinforce perceptions of the brand's professionalism. Meanwhile, the False Self manifests as an adaptation of digital communication through visual curation, trend alignment, and storytelling enhancement all while maintaining the brand's core values (Michikyan et al., 2014).

Overall, Sugema Raya's digital self-presentation practices demonstrate a balance between identity authenticity, the optimization of an ideal image, and the adaptation of digital communication to the characteristics of the platform and the audience. These findings suggest that a brand's self-presentation in the digital space is a process of negotiation between operational realities, the aspirational image one seeks to build, and the need for digital communication strategies that are relevant to the evolution of social media.

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings obtained from informants regarding the representation of a restaurant's authentic identity in digital communication. This analysis employs the concept of Self-Presentation proposed by Erving Goffman and adapted to the digital context by Adam Michikyan, which emphasizes that social actors present their authentic identities as part of impression management in digital social spaces (Michikyan et al., 2014).

Real Self Dimension

In the context of this study, the analysis focuses on how Sugema Raya presents its authentic identity through digital content on TikTok. Based on the interview results, the informant stated that Sugema Raya's authentic identity is built upon the restaurant's actual operational strengths and is then communicated through digital content. The informant emphasized that the brand's positioning is always aligned with the restaurant's genuine strengths.

Research findings indicate that Sugema Raya's digital identity stems from the restaurant's operational fundamentals, particularly its product strengths and the quality of its hospitality which constitute the core customer experience when interacting directly with the restaurant. These two aspects form the foundation for brand identity development before being communicated through various forms of digital content.

According to the informant Sugema Raya's positioning in digital communication is built on the restaurant's tangible strengths, particularly its buffet concept, which serves as the primary differentiator compared to competitors. The informant explained as follows:

In terms of content, we already have our own benchmark. Our highlighted tagline is "the most comprehensive buffet in Garut." This is evident from the content we present, as we also feature buffet menus at . This aligns with our branding strategy, as Sugema Raya is the only competitor that dares to position itself as offering the most comprehensive buffet in Garut (Azriel, 2026).

This statement indicates that Sugema Raya's digital communication strategy is not built solely on symbolic image-building, but rather stems from the fundamental strengths of the products the restaurant actually offers. Thus, the digital content presented to the audience does not stand alone as a promotional tool, but rather serves as a representation of the operational reality that forms the foundation of the brand's identity.

In addition, the informant also emphasized the importance of maintaining consistency between digital representations and the actual conditions experienced by customers on the ground. In the process of producing digital content, various aesthetic elements such as visual marketing are indeed used to enhance the content's appeal, but efforts are made to ensure they do not deviate too far from reality. The informant explained this as follows:

Content must remain true to reality. Even if it is made more visually appealing, it should not stray too far from the restaurant's actual conditions. If it strays too far, customers' expectations may differ from reality (Imam, 2026).

This explanation demonstrates that in the practice of digital communication, there is an effort to maintain a balance between the need for visual marketing and the necessity of preserving brand authenticity. This is crucial because customers' experiences with the product and hospitality are the primary factors determining their perception of the brand's credibility.

In addition, the informant also explained that Sugema Raya's true identity is most evident in the customer experience when they are physically present at the restaurant. In this context, brand identity is shaped not only through digital content but also through real-world interactions involving the quality of the food, service, and dining atmosphere





experienced by customers. The informant explained this as follows:

Sugema Raya's true identity is evident from customers' firsthand experiences at the restaurant. This includes everything from the taste of the food and the service to the restaurant's atmosphere. The content typically showcases real-life elements on the ground, such as the cooking process or food presentation (Utami, 2026).

Informants also emphasized that the operational aspects most closely maintained by the restaurant team are food taste standards, the quality of raw ingredients, and the quality of customer service. This indicates that the strength of the Sugema Raya brand lies not only in digital marketing strategies but also in the consistency of operational quality, which serves as the primary foundation of the brand's identity.

The most important aspects are undoubtedly the food's taste standards, the quality of its ingredients, the presentation, and customer service. As much as possible, what is shown on social media should match the reality when customers arrive (Utami, 2026).

These findings indicate that Sugema Raya's digital communication stems from a strong operational foundation, meaning the content produced is not purely symbolic in nature. The digital identity presented remains closely tied to the reality experienced by customers during their direct interactions with the restaurant.

These informants' statements are further supported by findings from previous research indicating that the success of digital communication on social media platforms is heavily influenced by the level of authenticity of the content presented to the audience. Previous research explains that digital content packaged authentically and representing the actual state of the product is capable of building emotional closeness with the audience and increasing consumer trust in the brand. In this context, honest visual representations of the product and customer experience are considered more effective than overly symbolic or exaggerated image constructions. Thus, the digital communication practices employed by Sugema Raya which showcase cooking processes, food presentation, and the actual conditions of the restaurant align with these research findings, where authenticity serves as a key factor in building brand credibility on social media (Rinaldi, 2026).

However, there are some differences in the context of their application. Previous research has placed greater emphasis on digital communication strategies focused on content creativity and the use of social media trends to increase audience engagement. Meanwhile, this study found that Sugema Raya's digital identity is not only built through content creativity but stems from the restaurant's fundamental operational strengths, such as product quality, the buffet concept, and the hospitality experience directly felt by customers. Despite these differing focuses, both findings still point to a consistent conclusion: effective digital communication must be grounded in product reality and consumer experience to build a credible and sustainable brand image on social media (Rinaldi, 2026).

Ideal Self Dimension

In the context of this study, the Ideal Self dimension is analyzed in terms of how Sugema Raya builds an ideal image through digital content on TikTok. Digital communication not only serves to convey information about products or services but also acts as a strategic tool for building a brand image that is professional, modern, and meets certain quality standards.

According to the informant Sugema Raya's ideal image is built as a restaurant that maintains its local character while adhering to modern and professional operational standards. The informant explained as follows:

The image we want to build is actually that of a restaurant that remains local but meets modern standards. We want people to see Sugema as neat, clean, and professional, yet still warm and close to its customers (Azriel, 2026).

This statement indicates that Sugema Raya's digital communication strategy aims not only to increase brand visibility but also to build a brand identity with a distinct character in the eyes of the audience. This identity is built through a combination of local values, professionalism, and an emotional connection with customers.

In addition, the informant also explained that the creation of an ideal brand image is achieved through a curation process in digital content production. Various visual marketing elements such as image composition, camera angles, lighting, and color tones are strategically considered so that the resulting content creates a professional and appealing impression for social media audiences. The informant explained as follows:

In content creation, there is indeed a curation process. It starts from the camera angle and lighting to the visual tone. On TikTok, first impressions are important, so the visuals must be good so that people trust the quality of our brand (Imam, 2026).

In addition to visual elements, the creation of an ideal brand image is also tied to the use of marketing language in various forms of digital content. The language used in captions, storytelling, and video narration is tailored to the characteristics of the social media audience so that the message can be received more effectively. The use of marketing language in digital content also plays a role in strengthening the brand's identity, enabling the audience to easily recognize Sugema Raya's distinctive communication style.

Furthermore, the informant also emphasized that digital content is not only intended to achieve short-term virality, but also plays a crucial role in building the brand's image over the long term. The informant explained as follows:

We want people to immediately perceive Sugema as a restaurant with integrity and high standards when they see





our content. So the content isn't just about going viral; it must also provide value for long-term branding (Fajar, 2026).

However, a different perspective also emerges from the operational side. The informant emphasized that the ideal image presented in digital communications must still be achievable in real-world practice. The informant explained as follows:

From an operational standpoint, we still have to ensure that what is shown in the content can actually be realized on the ground. Because if it's too high-flying or overly polished, customers might end up disappointed when they come. So ideally, it should remain realistic and feasible (Utami, 2026).

These informants' statements are further supported by findings from previous research indicating that the formation of an ideal brand image on social media is heavily influenced by the quality of visual representations featured in digital content. Research conducted by other scholars on brand authenticity on TikTok indicates that social media audiences tend to form perceptions of a brand's professionalism and credibility through curated visual elements, such as image composition, lighting quality, visual style, and the aesthetic consistency of the content. Strategically designed visuals can create the impression that a brand maintains high-quality standards and is professionally managed. These findings align with the digital communication practices of Sugema Raya, where visual curation processes such as adjusting angles, lighting, and content tone play a crucial role in building the ideal image of a modern, well-organized restaurant with professional standards in the eyes of social media audiences (Gyrd-Jones, 2023).

However, there are differences in several aspects. Previous research has placed greater emphasis on how TikTok's platform features and audience perceptions shape the meaning of authenticity and brand image through the experience of consuming digital content. Meanwhile, this study found that the formation of Sugema Raya's ideal image depends not only on visual strategies in digital content but is also evaluated based on the restaurant's operational capabilities to bring that image to life in practice. Despite this difference in focus, both findings still point to a consistent conclusion: that an ideal brand image on social media must be built through strategic visual management while maintaining consistency with product quality and the actual experiences perceived by consumers (Gyrd-Jones, 2023).

False Self Dimensions

In the context of this study, the analysis aims to understand how Sugema Raya adapts the digital content it produces on TikTok. These adaptations relate to platform performance requirements, digital communication trends, and evolving audience expectations within the social media ecosystem. In this context, digital communication strategies focus not only on conveying brand identity but also on the brand's ability to adapt to the dynamics of algorithms and evolving content consumption patterns on social media.

In the practice of digital content production, the informant explained that there is a process of enhancing the visual appeal of the content to make it more engaging online. The informant explained as follows:

When it comes to digital content, we do have a visual enhancement process. For example, in terms of lighting, camera angles, or color tones to make it more visually appealing on TikTok. Sometimes we also make the storytelling more engaging. But it doesn't mean we're altering reality; it's more about showcasing the best aspects of the existing conditions to better resonate with the digital audience (Imam, 2026).

Furthermore, the informant stated that content adjustments are also influenced by the need for exposure and the platform's algorithm as follows:

On TikTok, we can't just upload random content. We have to keep an eye on trends, identify content formats that perform well, and analyze audience behavior. So sometimes we tailor our content to match the formats that are currently trending, but it still has to align with Sugema's brand identity. If we don't adapt, our reach usually drops (Fajar, 2026).

In the broader context of digital communication, this strategy also involves the use of organic marketing approaches, where brand exposure stems not only from official content produced by the company, but also from audience interactions that generate User-Generated Content (UGC) and exposure from Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs). The presence of UGC and KOLs in the digital communication ecosystem can trigger the formation of electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) communication, which organically expands the brand's reach through user experiences and recommendations.

However, from an operational perspective, there is a view that digital representations do not always fully reflect the conditions occurring in the day-to-day operations of restaurants. Informants explained as follows:

When it comes to shooting content, we usually make sure the area is clean, the food is neatly plated, and the kitchen is ready. That doesn't mean we make it look different from how it actually is, but we ensure that what's shown is the best possible version of what's already there. Because if it's too raw, it can sometimes be less visually appealing (Utami, 2026).

These informants' statements are further supported by findings from previous research indicating that, in digital communication practices, brands often adapt the presentation of their content to better align with the characteristics of social media platforms. This research explains that enhancing visual elements such as lighting, image composition, and more engaging narrative packaging is part of a digital communication strategy aimed at increasing content appeal





without altering the actual reality. In the context of social media, audiences tend to be more responsive to content that is visually appealing yet still feels authentic; therefore, brands need to balance visual aesthetics with the authenticity of representation (Hersandi et al., 2025).

However, there is a difference in context between that study and the findings of this study. Previous research has primarily focused on digital representation practices within the context of individual communication on social media, whereas this study situates such practices within the framework of brand communication strategies on the Sugema Raya TikTok account. Although there are differences in the subject and context of the research, both studies share the common finding that the process of adapting to platform characteristics, content trends, and audience behavior is a critical factor in building visibility and credibility in the digital space. Thus, a communication strategy that combines visual reinforcement, adaptation to platform algorithms, and brand identity consistency can strengthen the sustainability of brand image and audience trust within the social media ecosystem (Hersandi et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher explains the problem through a discussion based on insights from experts regarding the representation of a restaurant's authentic identity in digital communication. This analysis employs the concept of Self-Presentation proposed by Erving Goffman and adapted to the digital context by Adam Michikyan, which emphasizes that social actors present their authentic identities as part of impression management in digital social spaces (Michikyan et al., 2014).

In the context of the Real Self, the informants stated that the authenticity of digital content today is also influenced by the characteristics of the social media platforms themselves, as follows:

The TikTok platform features many raw, minimally edited videos not overly polished, yet far from unprofessional. This is likely due to the algorithm developed by TikTok itself (Isman, 2026).

This statement indicates that content authenticity is part of a digital communication strategy, as audiences tend to be more receptive to representations that appear natural rather than content that is overly professionally produced. Additionally, the source emphasizes that a brand's authenticity stems not only from the form of the content but also from the consistency of the messages conveyed to the audience in building trust with the digital audience as follows:

Branding is all about awareness and consideration. Sugema is already strong in the awareness stage. Consistency and honesty in communication are key to maintaining consumer trust (Isman, 2026).

These findings indicate that the "Real Self" in digital communication is closely linked to the consistency of brand information conveyed to the public. This consistency serves as the foundation for building audience trust in the brand's identity. The findings from these sources also align with previous research indicating that self-presentation practices on social media are influenced by the norms and characteristics of the digital platforms used. The study explains that social media users tend to present a self-representation that appears more authentic and natural to align with audience expectations within the platform. Content that is not overly professionally produced, is more spontaneous, and showcases daily activities is considered capable of creating an impression of closeness and honesty, making it easier for the audience to accept and trust the messages conveyed. This indicates that authenticity is a key factor in building relationships between communicators and audiences in the digital space (Zillich et al., 2024).

However, there is a contextual difference between that study and the findings of this research. The previous study focused more on self-presentation practices among individual social media users, whereas this study examines the concept within the context of brand communication on the Sugema Raya TikTok account. Nevertheless, both studies share the common finding that authentic self-representation and consistency in conveying messages are key factors in building audience trust. Thus, a "Real Self" presented through natural, minimally staged content, and consistent in conveying information can strengthen the audience's perception of the brand identity built on social media (Zillich et al., 2024).

In the context of the Ideal Self, the source explains that the creation of an ideal brand image on social media is part of a digital positioning strategy as follows:

An ideal brand image is important for shaping consumers' initial perceptions. However, ideally, it must still be grounded in real value. If the image strays too far from real value, the brand typically fails to sustain itself (Isman, 2026).

This statement indicates that a brand's ideal image cannot be separated from its authentic values. The "Ideal Self" serves as an aspirational representation intended for public display, yet it must remain grounded in the brand's reality. This statement is reinforced by another source who emphasizes that, in digital branding practice, the ideal image is often built through visual consistency and storytelling, as follows:

On TikTok, people are more likely to trust a brand if its visuals and narrative are consistent. Ideally, a brand should have a strong visual identity so that people can recognize it immediately without having to see the logo (Pandji, 2026).

The speaker also noted that when building an ideal brand image, it is important to keep up with digital trends without losing the brand's identity, as follows:

A brand must be able to adapt to trends, but must not lose its identity. Being ideal does not mean following every





trend, but knowing which trends align with the brand's character (Pandji, 2026).

This indicates that the creation of an Ideal Self on social media is not achieved solely through verbal messaging but also through a consistent visual identity. In line with this statement, another source noted that a brand's ideal image also serves to enhance competitiveness in the digital marketplace as follows:

Brands with a strong, consistent image typically find it easier to gain market awareness. However, consistency is key. If the brand's image is inconsistent, market trust will also decline (Rayina, 2026).

These findings are also consistent with previous research indicating that the formation of a brand's image and public perception is inextricably linked to the implementation of an integrated and structured marketing communication strategy. The study explains that effective marketing communication requires clear positioning, message consistency, and alignment between the values held by the organization and the representation presented to the public through various communication media, including digital media. A systematically designed communication strategy enables a brand to build a strong identity while fostering a closer relationship with its audience (Shahana et al., 2026).

However, there is a difference in focus between previous studies and this study. Previous studies have placed greater emphasis on the implementation of integrated marketing communications within the broader organizational context, whereas this study specifically highlights how the creation of an ideal brand image is realized through self-presentation practices in Sugema Raya's TikTok content. Nevertheless, both findings indicate a commonality: the success of building an ideal brand image is not solely determined by visually appealing content or engaging narratives, but also by the consistency of communication strategies and the alignment between the brand's actual values and the representation presented to the public. Thus, the Ideal Self constructed on social media can function as an effective positioning strategy as long as it remains grounded in the brand's genuine values and identity (Shahana et al., 2026).

In the context of the False Self, the interviewee explained that in the digital creative industry, content is often curated to boost engagement in the following ways:

In the world of digital content, mild dramatization is acceptable as long as it doesn't alter the brand's core values. Typically, what's emphasized is storytelling, visual mood, or video flow to make it more engaging. But if it ends up changing the brand's identity, that's actually dangerous in the long run (Pandji, 2026).

This statement indicates that in the practice of digital communication, there is a fine line between content curation and brand identity manipulation. In line with this statement, another source noted that while digital content curation does influence market performance, it must still adhere to the following ethical boundaries of brand communication:

Content that is packaged more attractively does indeed usually perform better. But if it's too over-the-top, the audience usually catches on. Ideally, a brand should maintain boundaries, so it still appears authentic even when packaged more aesthetically (Rayina, 2026).

The statements made by these informants are further supported by findings from previous research, which indicate that the practice of false self-presentation in digital communication often arises through content curation aimed at increasing audience appeal and engagement. Research conducted by other scholars shows that in social media environments, both individuals and brands tend to adjust how they present themselves online to appear more appealing, engaging, and aligned with audience expectations. This process is typically achieved through enhanced storytelling, visual curation, or more dramatic narrative packaging without completely altering the core identity. These findings align with the perspectives of the informants in this study, who view mild dramatization in digital content production as a common practice as long as it does not alter a brand's core values or fundamental identity (Nor et al., 2025).

However, there are differences in several aspects. Previous research has primarily addressed the phenomenon of false self-presentation in the psychological context of social media users, particularly in relation to social comparison and the need for social validation from the audience. Meanwhile, this study analyzes the phenomenon within the context of brand communication and digital content production strategies in the creative industry. Although they have different research focuses, both findings still point to a consistent conclusion: that the packaging of identity in digital communication is indeed often done to enhance content performance, yet it still requires ethical boundaries to prevent a disconnect between the image presented and the reality of the brand (Nor et al., 2025).

In this section, the researcher presents a flowchart illustrating the strategic marketing communication framework implemented by Sugema Raya in building and maintaining its digital image. To provide a more systematic overview of the research findings, the researcher has created this flowchart as a visual representation of the sequence of processes observed in the field. This visualization is designed to show the interrelationship between the business's operational foundation (), the digital communication strategies implemented, and the social validation processes that emerge from audience interactions on social media. Through the presentation of this diagram, the researcher aims to demonstrate how each of these elements is interconnected and forms a communication strategy pattern that is not linear but rather continuous and mutually influential in building and maintaining Sugema Raya's digital image.



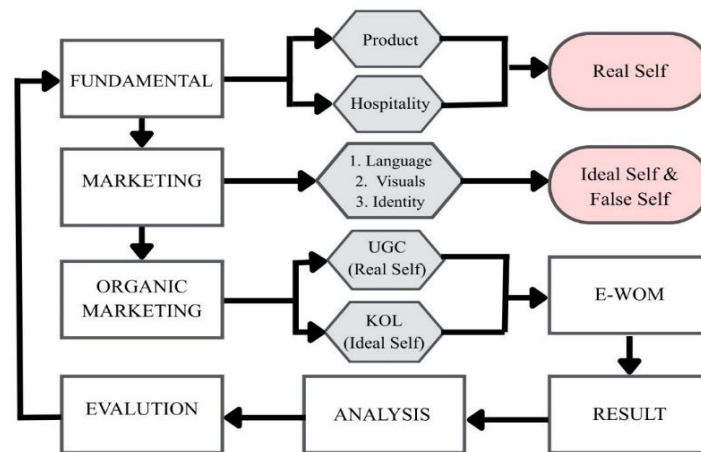


Figure 3. Flowchart, Source; Created by Mahardika

This flowchart represents the research findings regarding the strategic marketing communication patterns implemented by Sugema Raya in building and maintaining its digital image through the integration of operational foundations, digital communication strategies, and social validation from the audience. This pattern indicates that marketing communication strategies do not proceed in a linear fashion but rather form a continuous cycle in which the various stages influence one another.

At the Fundamental stage, the strategy begins with strengthening the brand’s foundational aspects, which consist of product quality and service quality (hospitality). At this stage, the “Real Self” dimension is formed that is, the representation of the brand’s authentic identity derived from consumers’ real-world experiences. Research findings indicate that the effectiveness of digital communication heavily depends on the consistency of the offline experience, meaning that the “Real Self” is constructed not only through digital communication but also through consumers’ direct experiences with products and services.

The next stage is Marketing, which serves as the process of transforming the brand identity into digital communication. At this stage, the strategy focuses on three key elements: communication language, visual content, and brand identity. These three elements then form two layers of digital self-presentation: the Ideal Self, representing the best image the brand aims to achieve, and the False Self, a strategic adaptation of communication tailored to audience needs and the characteristics of digital platforms (Nurhadi et al., 2024).

The Organic Marketing stage involves the natural distribution of messages through the digital ecosystem. At this stage, there are two main channels: User-Generated Content (UGC), which reinforces the Real Self because it is based on authentic consumer experiences, and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), which reinforce the Ideal Self by shaping an aspirational brand image. Both of these channels contribute to the formation of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) as a form of digital social validation of the brand image (Tarmidzi et al., 2024).

The output from this process moves to the Result stage, which represents the tangible impact of digital communication on public perception, audience engagement levels, and the brand’s digital reputation. Next, the resulting data is analyzed in the Analysis stage to measure the effectiveness of the communication strategies that have been implemented. The results of this analysis are then used in the Evaluation stage as the basis for strategy improvements, which in turn further strengthen the brand’s foundational elements.

Based on these findings, the researchers also examined the results of the analysis through the lens of other theoretical perspectives as a form of conceptual comparison. This approach was taken to demonstrate that the research findings are not relevant only when analyzed using the theoretical framework employed in this study, but also align when viewed through different theoretical perspectives. Thus, this step serves as an effort to demonstrate that the identified communication strategy patterns possess a sufficiently strong conceptual foundation within the fields of communication and branding studies (Priatna et al., 2026).

Theoretically, when analyzed through Peter Montoya’s personal branding framework, the findings of this study also demonstrate conceptual coherence, wherein Sugema Raya’s communication strategy reflects the principle of specialization through a clearly defined positioning, distinctiveness in the consistency of visual and narrative styles, as well as unity and persistence in maintaining alignment between operational quality and the digital representation established. Thus, Montoya’s personal branding framework reinforces the argument that the success of a brand’s digital image is determined not only by the frequency of communication, but by the consistency of identity, the integrity of values, and structured and sustainable reputation management (Priatna et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, the personal branding perspective has limitations when compared to the self-presentation approach used in this study. The personal branding framework places greater emphasis on the strategic formation of identity and brand differentiation, but does not provide an in-depth explanation of the dynamics of how these identities





are presented and negotiated through interactions in the digital space. Therefore, the use of the self-presentation approach in this study is considered better able to explain the interactive process of digital image formation, particularly in the context of how brand identity is constructed through communication practices occurring in the media (Priatna et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that digital marketing communication strategies are not only used for promotion but also to build, present, and consistently maintain brand identity through communication on social media. Based on an analysis of Sugema Raya's communication practices on TikTok, this study demonstrates that digital image-building does not rely solely on content but depends on the interconnection between actual operational quality, visual and narrative representation strategies, and the ability to adapt communication to the platform's characteristics and audience behavior. These findings align with Erving Goffman's concept of Self-Presentation and its adaptation to the digital context by Adam Michikyan, which asserts that a brand's self-presentation in the digital space is a deliberate, measured, and contextual process of impression management. Thus, this study demonstrates that the strength of a brand's digital communication lies in the consistency between its inherent identity, the image it seeks to build, and the adaptation strategies employed, ensuring that the resulting digital image is not only visually appealing but also credible, relevant, and strategically sustainable.

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