

TikTok and Instagram Reels for Brand Awareness: A Case Study of Piana Cafe Medan

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/Main Objectives: The rapid growth of social media has transformed how businesses build brand awareness through digital marketing, with TikTok and Instagram Reels emerging as key channels for short video content. This study analyzes how short video content on these platforms contributes to building brand awareness at Piana Cafe Medan. **Background Problems:** Although many businesses actively use short video platforms, limited research has explored how content strategies are developed and implemented from managerial, content production, and customer perspectives within a local culinary business. **Novelty:** This study offers a qualitative case study integrating three perspectives, manager, social media specialist, and customer, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how short video content strengthens brand awareness in a local café. **Research Methods:** This research employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the manager, the social media specialist, and a customer of Piana Cafe, supported by observation of the café's TikTok and Instagram accounts, and analyzed using thematic analysis and source triangulation. **Finding/Results:** The findings indicate that consistent content production, originality, storytelling, audience engagement, and adaptive use of social media trends significantly contribute to brand awareness, while alignment between online content and customers' actual experiences strengthens consumer trust and brand recognition. **Conclusion:** Short video content is an effective digital marketing strategy for enhancing brand awareness, offering practical insights for culinary MSMEs in developing sustainable and engaging social media marketing strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the marketing landscape, particularly for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the culinary sector. One of the most significant developments in recent years is the emergence and widespread adoption of short video content on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels as an effective digital marketing tool. Short video content enables businesses to reach broader audiences in a fast, creative, and cost-effective manner compared with conventional advertising methods (Aaker, 2015).

In the city of Medan, the café industry has experienced rapid growth, resulting in increasingly intense competition among business actors. Under these conditions, a café's ability to be recognized and remembered by prospective consumers, commonly referred to in marketing as brand awareness, becomes a crucial factor in determining business sustainability. Many cafés in Medan actively utilize TikTok and Instagram Reels to promote their products and services through short video content. However, there is still limited in-depth research examining how these strategies are implemented in practice, particularly from the perspectives of managers, social media specialists, and customers.

Piana Cafe Medan was selected as the case study for this research because it is a relatively new café, established in March 2024, that has demonstrated rapid growth in brand awareness through the consistent utilization of short video content across various social media platforms. This phenomenon is worthy of investigation because it demonstrates that an appropriate content strategy can accelerate brand recognition despite the business being relatively new.

Based on this background, this study addresses the following research question: How does Piana Cafe Medan utilize short video content on TikTok and Instagram Reels to build brand awareness, and how does this strategy contribute to increasing consumer brand awareness?

Despite the growing body of research on social media marketing and short video platforms, previous studies have predominantly focused on quantitative analyses of consumer behavior, customer engagement, purchase intention, and marketing performance. Limited qualitative research has comprehensively explored how short video content is strategically planned, produced, implemented, and evaluated from multiple stakeholder perspectives within local culinary businesses. Furthermore, empirical evidence regarding the integration of managerial, content production, and customer perspectives in building brand awareness through TikTok and Instagram Reels remains limited, particularly within the context of Indonesian cafés. This research gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive investigation into the implementation of short video marketing strategies from various stakeholder perspectives.

The novelty of this study lies in its qualitative single case study approach by integrating three key perspectives, namely the café manager, the social media specialist responsible for content production, and the customer. This triangulation enables a more comprehensive understanding of how short video content strategies are formulated, implemented, and perceived in practice. Compared with previous studies that

generally relied on a single perspective or quantitative surveys, this research provides more comprehensive contextual evidence regarding digital marketing practices within a local culinary business.

This study employs a qualitative case study approach. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the manager of Piana Cafe Medan, a social media specialist responsible for planning and producing digital content, and a customer who had experienced the café after being exposed to its social media content. The interview data were supported by direct observation of the café's official TikTok and Instagram accounts. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and source triangulation to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. This methodological approach enabled the researchers to obtain in-depth insights from multiple perspectives regarding the implementation of short video marketing strategies.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the utilization of short video content on TikTok and Instagram Reels contributes to building brand awareness at Piana Cafe Medan through a qualitative case study approach. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of digital marketing and social media marketing literature while providing practical recommendations for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, particularly those operating in the culinary sector, in designing effective, creative, and sustainable short video content strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Short Video Content as a Digital Marketing Instrument

Short video content refers to audiovisual content with a relatively short duration, generally under three minutes, designed to capture audience attention quickly on digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. This format enables businesses to communicate marketing messages in a concise, engaging, and visually appealing manner by integrating visual elements, audio, and storytelling (Aaker, 2015). Compared with conventional advertising, short video content requires creators to capture audience attention within the first few seconds, making the opening hook, music selection, visual presentation, and storytelling essential determinants of content performance. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that short video content positively influences brand awareness and customer engagement across various industries. Research conducted on the culinary MSME Bakso Granat Mas Azis in Palembang found that TikTok significantly improves brand recognition, consumer recall, customer interaction, and ultimately contributes to increased sales performance (Laraskana & Sakir, 2025). Similar findings have been reported in studies involving beauty products (Hafifuddin, Nursaadah, & Busro, 2024) and processed seafood products (Insani, Nugroho, & Soedarto, 2022), suggesting that the effectiveness of short video marketing extends across different business sectors. This pattern is also reflected in international studies: research on TikTok brand marketing strategy found that interactivity, creativity, and audience engagement features significantly strengthen brand exposure and recognition (Peng et al., 2023), while an analysis of

short-form video ad content characteristics on TikTok showed that credibility, expertise, attractiveness, authenticity, and brand heritage significantly influence consumer purchase behavior (Meng, Kou, Duan, & Bie, 2024). Likewise, a study on TikTok fashion haul videos among Generation Z consumers in Indonesia found that short video content substantially shapes purchase decisions through mechanisms such as electronic word-of-mouth (Pangalila & Aprilianty, 2022), further reinforcing the cross-sector relevance of short video content as a digital marketing instrument. Although previous studies consistently report positive relationships between short video content and brand awareness, most of them primarily employ quantitative approaches to measure marketing outcomes such as engagement, purchase intention, and sales performance. Consequently, limited attention has been given to understanding how short video strategies are formulated, implemented, and evaluated from multiple stakeholder perspectives within local culinary businesses. This limitation highlights the need for qualitative evidence that explains not only whether short video content is effective but also how and why it contributes to strengthening brand awareness. A recent qualitative case study on narrative branding through TikTok among a culinary MSME in Yogyakarta similarly emphasized storytelling and cultural narrative as strategic tools for sustaining digital brand identity, adopting a case-study approach comparable to the present research (Anisawati & Dias Adiprabowo, 2026), further underscoring the value of qualitative, narrative-based investigation for local culinary businesses in the Indonesian context.

2.2 The Concept of Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is defined as the ability of prospective consumers to recognize, identify, and recall a particular brand within a specific product category (Aaker, 1991). According to Aaker, brand awareness consists of four hierarchical levels, namely unaware of brand, brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind. These stages describe the gradual process through which consumers develop familiarity with a brand, beginning from complete unawareness to the highest level of spontaneous recall. The brand awareness pyramid provides an appropriate analytical framework for evaluating digital marketing strategies because every communication activity seeks to move consumers toward higher levels of brand awareness. Research on the marketing communication strategy of Seblak RC Karawang through TikTok demonstrated that creativity, consistency, and effective digital communication significantly contribute to strengthening brand awareness among culinary MSMEs (Meilani & Solihat, 2025). Beyond the brand awareness pyramid, consumer responses to short video content can also be understood through the digital customer journey, in which consumers typically progress through the stages of attention, interest, information search, action, and post-purchase sharing. This perspective explains how audiences who initially encounter short video content may eventually become customers and voluntarily share their experiences with others through social media or word-of-mouth communication. Furthermore, brand awareness is influenced not only by the frequency of content exposure but also by the consistency of brand identity communicated through digital content.

Visual identity, storytelling, audience interaction, and consistent brand messaging help consumers recognize, remember, and differentiate a brand from its competitors over time.

2.3 Content Strategy and Brand Identity in Culinary MSMEs

Previous studies indicate that the effectiveness of short video marketing strategies is influenced by several key factors, including posting consistency, the utilization of trending audio and hashtags, alignment between content and brand identity, and the active involvement of business owners, employees, and customers in content creation. Research on Instagram marketing strategies also demonstrates that visual consistency and two-way communication between businesses and audiences contribute significantly to strengthening overall brand equity (Sakina & Aslami, 2022; Putri & Paramita, 2023). Consistent with this, research on Instagram-based marketing among certification and training MSMEs found that consumer trust, competence, and credibility signals substantially shape brand awareness outcomes (Addinna et al., 2026), while a case study of commercial brand marketing on Instagram highlighted the platform's visual and interactive features as central to strengthening business operations and consumer engagement (Zhang, 2024). Audience engagement is another important indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of short video marketing. Interactions such as likes, comments, shares, saves, and content views indicate the extent to which audiences actively respond to published content rather than merely consuming it passively. Higher engagement levels increase the likelihood that platform algorithms will distribute content to wider audiences, thereby expanding organic reach and strengthening brand awareness. Local context also plays an important role in designing effective content strategies. Research on halal culinary MSMEs utilizing TikTok found that storytelling, trend adaptation, and collaboration with local content creators are effective strategies for strengthening brand awareness while supporting business growth. Cultural relevance and linguistic familiarity further enhance audience engagement, making digital content more relatable and memorable among local consumers. These findings align with broader evidence on the role of social network marketing in supporting MSME growth, which shows that consistent and interactive digital engagement contributes meaningfully to business visibility and sustainability among small enterprises (Dalmacio, 2023). Furthermore, successful short video marketing is not determined solely by creativity or trend adoption. The strategic integration of content planning, audience engagement, brand identity consistency, and customer experience creates a sustainable digital marketing ecosystem capable of strengthening long-term brand awareness. These aspects are particularly important for MSMEs that operate with limited financial and human resources while competing in increasingly dynamic digital environments.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study proposes a conceptual framework in which short video content strategy, encompassing content themes, posting consistency, production quality, utilization of audio and hashtags, brand identity consistency, and audience engagement, is proposed as a key determinant of consumers' progression through

the levels of brand awareness, from unaware of brand to top of mind. This conceptual framework served as the foundation for developing the interview guidelines and interpreting the findings presented in the Results and Discussion section.

3. METHOD, DATA, AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a single case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of how short video content on TikTok and Instagram Reels contributes to building brand awareness at Piana Cafe Medan. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies within their real-life context rather than merely examining statistical relationships between variables (Sugiyono, 2022). The single case study design was considered appropriate because the research focused on one local culinary business that consistently utilizes short video content as its primary digital marketing strategy.

3.2 Research Object and Informants

The research object of this study is Piana Cafe Medan, a local café established in March 2024 that actively utilizes TikTok and Instagram Reels as its primary digital marketing platforms. The café adopts a family-friendly entertainment concept targeting families and young people through various facilities, including a children's playground. Piana Cafe was purposively selected because it has consistently implemented short video content to strengthen its brand awareness despite being a relatively new business. Primary data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews with three purposively selected informants representing different perspectives relevant to the research objectives. The first informant was Kurnia Aditya, Manager of Piana Cafe Medan, who provided information regarding digital marketing planning, branding strategies, and business objectives. The second informant was the café's Social Media Specialist, who was responsible for planning, producing, editing, and publishing short video content on TikTok and Instagram Reels. The third informant was a customer who first became familiar with Piana Cafe through its short video content and subsequently visited the café. The inclusion of these three informants enabled source triangulation by integrating managerial, operational, and consumer perspectives regarding the implementation of short video marketing strategies.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interview guidelines developed based on the study's conceptual framework, covering digital marketing implementation, short video content strategy, technical content elements, brand identity consistency, audience engagement, and brand awareness. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at Piana Cafe Medan and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. With the participants' consent, each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. To complement the interview findings, direct observations were conducted on Piana Cafe's official TikTok and Instagram

accounts. The observations focused on posting consistency, visual identity, audience engagement, hashtags, captions, storytelling, and overall content presentation. These observations were used to verify and support the information obtained from the interviews. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis process began with interview transcription and data familiarization, followed by data coding, theme identification, interpretation, and verification of findings. Throughout the analysis, interview data were continuously compared with observation results to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied source triangulation by comparing information obtained from the manager, the social media specialist, the customer, and direct observations of Piana Cafe's official TikTok and Instagram accounts. The interview instrument was developed based on the conceptual framework covering five major aspects: digital marketing background, short video content strategy, technical content elements, brand identity consistency, and the contribution of short video content to brand awareness. Interview questions were adapted according to each informant's role to ensure that the collected information comprehensively addressed the research objectives.

To operationalize source triangulation, cross-checking was carried out systematically after each interview. Findings from the manager were first compared against corresponding statements from the social media specialist on shared themes—namely content planning, posting frequency, and brand identity guidelines to verify consistency between managerial intent and operational practice. These two internal perspectives were then compared against the customer's account of first encountering and visiting the café, allowing the researchers to assess whether the intended brand message was actually perceived and experienced as described. Finally, both interview-based findings were cross-checked against direct observation data collected from Piana Cafe's official TikTok and Instagram accounts (see Section 4.1.1), including posting frequency, visual identity elements, and engagement patterns, to confirm that reported practices were reflected in the accounts' actual content. Where minor discrepancies emerged for example, between an informant's general description of a practice and the specific pattern recorded during observation, the researchers treated the observation data as the reference point, since it represented directly verifiable evidence, while treating the interview account as reflecting the informant's intended or perceived practice rather than a factual inconsistency. No substantive disagreement was found among the three informants regarding the core themes of brand identity consistency and the effectiveness of trend adaptation; where informants emphasized different aspects of the same theme (for example, the manager focusing on business outcomes while the specialist focused on production process), these were treated as complementary rather than conflicting, and both perspectives were retained to enrich the interpretation.

To further ensure the overall quality of the qualitative data, the procedures described above can be explicitly mapped onto the four trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). *Credibility* was

addressed through source triangulation across the manager, the social media specialist, and the customer, supplemented by direct observation of the café's official TikTok and Instagram accounts, and through the systematic cross-checking procedure described above. *Dependability* was supported by the use of a consistent, conceptual-framework-based interview protocol across all informants, audio-recording and verbatim transcription of every interview, and a uniform analytic procedure following Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. *Confirmability* was strengthened by grounding each interpretation directly in the interview transcripts and observation records (see Table 1 and Section 4.1.1) rather than in the researchers' unsubstantiated impressions, so that every finding reported in this study can be traced back to its empirical source. Finally, *transferability* was supported through detailed contextual description of Piana Cafe as a single case including its informants, platforms, and the boundaries of the research setting allowing readers to judge the extent to which the findings may be applicable to comparable small-business contexts, rather than claiming statistical generalizability.

3.4 Research Ethics

Research ethics were carefully observed throughout the study. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate after receiving an explanation of the research objectives and providing informed consent. They also agreed that the information collected could be used solely for academic purposes while maintaining research integrity. All interviews were conducted directly at Piana Cafe Medan in a comfortable environment that allowed participants to express their opinions openly and honestly.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Profile and Background of Piana Cafe's Marketing Digitalization

Piana Cafe is a local culinary business established in March 2024 in Medan, Indonesia. The café adopts a family-friendly entertainment concept that targets families, children, and young people by providing various supporting facilities, including a children's playground. Depending on operational needs, the café employs approximately 17 to 55 staff members. Since its establishment, Piana Cafe has recognized the importance of digital marketing in increasing business visibility and attracting potential customers within the highly competitive culinary industry. According to the manager, Piana Cafe actively utilizes four major social media platforms TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube Shorts as integrated digital marketing channels. Each platform serves a different communication objective. TikTok is primarily used to publish authentic, entertaining, and fast-paced point-of-view (POV) videos designed to maximize audience reach through the platform's algorithm. Instagram emphasizes visual aesthetics, hospitality, and café ambience, while Facebook and YouTube Shorts function as complementary platforms for expanding audience exposure and maintaining digital presence across multiple channels. The manager explained that the decision to prioritize short video content was influenced by the rapid growth of social media users and the effectiveness of short-form videos in reaching large audiences within a relatively short period. Although social media had been

utilized since the café's establishment, the marketing impact became increasingly evident after the business consistently produced and published short video content over the past year. This consistency enabled the café to strengthen its online visibility while gradually increasing public awareness of the Piana Cafe brand. These findings indicate that Piana Cafe has successfully integrated multiple social media platforms into a comprehensive digital marketing strategy, with each platform performing complementary functions rather than operating independently. This integrated approach enables the café to communicate consistently with different audience segments while maximizing platform-specific advantages. The findings also demonstrate that digital marketing has become an essential strategic instrument for culinary MSMEs seeking to strengthen brand awareness and remain competitive in today's digital environment.

4.1.1 Summary of Observation Findings on TikTok and Instagram Accounts

To complement the interview findings, systematic observation was conducted on Piana Cafe's official TikTok and Instagram accounts by examining the nine most recently published posts/videos on each platform, accessed between 21–25 July 2026. The observation focused on engagement metrics (views, likes, and comments) and the types of content that generated the highest audience response, following the observation guideline developed for this study (see Appendix). Table 1 summarizes the results.

Table 1. Summary of Observation Findings on Piana Cafe's Official Accounts

Indicator	TikTok	Instagram
Average views per post	4,617 (n = 9 most recent videos)	3,446 (n = 9 most recent posts)
Average likes per post	89.1 (n = 9 of 9 videos, full sample) ³	38.4 (n = 9 of 9 posts, full sample) ⁵
Average comments per post	2.0 (n = 9 of 9 videos, full sample) ³	0.56 (n = 9 of 9 posts, full sample) ⁵
Posting frequency	Approximately every 2–3 days on average (span: 28 June–21 July 2026), with clustering on some days (e.g., four videos posted within hours of one another on 21 July) rather than a strictly uniform daily rhythm ⁴	Approximately every 2–3 days on average (span: 28 June–21 July 2026, n = 9 posts), a cadence closely matching the TikTok posting pattern observed over the same period ⁵
Content type with highest engagement	Entertainment/trend content (POV, comedy skits, trending challenges)	Entertainment/trend content (POV, comedy skits, trending challenges)
Highest-performing content	Trending dance/challenge content ($\pm 25,700$ views) ²	Children's Karaoke Festival poster ($\pm 12,300$ views)

¹ Note: TikTok's public grid view displays view counts for each video but not like or comment counts; like and comment counts were therefore obtained by opening each of the nine sampled videos individually (see Note 3). ² This refers to the highest-performing video within the nine most recently observed TikTok videos; it is a separate, more recent instance from the earlier employee birthday video ($\pm 220,000$ views) discussed in Section 4.2, which was reported by the manager during interviews but fell outside the nine-video observation window. ³ Likes and comments were obtained for all nine sampled TikTok videos by opening each video individually; view counts were recorded from the

account's grid view on 24 July 2026, while individual like and comment counts were recorded between 21 and 25 July 2026. Because view counts continue to accumulate over time, absolute view figures may have increased slightly between these captures; this does not affect the relative pattern of engagement reported here. ⁴*Posting dates for the four most recently observed videos were visible only as relative timestamps (e.g., "4 hours ago") at the time of access; the remaining five videos displayed absolute dates (28 June, 1 July, 5 July, and 12 July 2026), which were used to calculate the approximate posting interval reported above.* ⁵*Instagram likes and comments were confirmed for all nine sampled posts by opening each post individually; posting dates were visible for all nine posts, allowing the posting interval to be calculated directly.*

These observation results are broadly consistent with the interview findings reported in Section 4.2 and 4.4. The prevalence of entertainment-oriented content (POV skits, employee branding, and trend-based videos) among the highest-performing posts on both platforms corroborates the social media specialist's account that trend-adapted, relatable content consistently outperforms direct promotional material; notably, the trending dance video that generated the highest views ($\pm 25,700$) also generated the highest likes (569) and comments (13) among the nine sampled videos, reinforcing this pattern across metrics. The higher average views observed on TikTok relative to Instagram (4,617 versus 3,446) is also consistent with the manager's and specialist's descriptions of TikTok's algorithm as more favorable to organic reach for short-form video content (see Section 4.4). Notably, the observed posting intervals were nearly identical across platforms, with both TikTok and Instagram content spanning the same 28 June–21 July 2026 period at an average cadence of roughly every 2–3 days; this cross-platform consistency suggests that Piana Cafe manages its short video output as a coordinated content calendar rather than treating each platform as an independent, ad hoc effort, which lends further support to the manager's description of a deliberate, centrally planned content strategy (see Section 4.2). During observation, an earlier TikTok post promoting a special-occasion celebration was also found to have accumulated substantially higher engagement (2,980 likes, 112 comments) than any post in the nine-video sample, which is broadly consistent with the manager's account of a past viral video generating significant engagement (see Section 4.2), although this earlier post falls outside the present sample and its exact view count could not be confirmed. It should be noted that TikTok engagement metrics beyond views and exact posting frequency could only be partially verified, as this information is not displayed in the account's public grid view; this is acknowledged as a methodological limitation of the observation (see Section 5).

Beyond confirming consistency with the interview data, these observation results carry direct implications for understanding how Piana Cafe's short video strategy builds brand awareness in practice. Following Aaker's (1991) conceptualization of brand awareness as encompassing both recognition and recall, the view counts observed here can be read as an indicator of brand exposure breadth, reflecting how many potential consumers encountered the Piana Cafe brand through short-form video, while likes and comments function as a more direct behavioral signal of active audience engagement rather than passive exposure alone. The consistently stronger performance of entertainment-oriented content across both view and engagement metrics suggests that, for a small, resource-constrained culinary business, relatable and low-production content is not only more accessible to produce but also more effective than polished promotional material

at converting exposure into active engagement, an interaction that plausibly reinforces the kind of repeated brand contact associated with stronger brand recall in the social media marketing literature. At the same time, the substantially lower absolute engagement on Instagram relative to TikTok indicates that brand exposure is not uniformly distributed across platforms, implying that Piana Cafe's brand awareness gains are currently driven disproportionately by TikTok, a pattern with implications for how the café allocates content production effort across its social media channels going forward.

4.2 Production Strategy and Types of Short Video Content

The findings reveal that Piana Cafe implements a systematic and adaptive approach in producing short video content for TikTok and Instagram Reels. Rather than relying solely on spontaneous content creation, the café has established an internal creative team responsible for planning, producing, editing, and publishing digital content. To maintain authenticity and avoid repetitive presentations, employees from different divisions are actively involved as content talents, allowing audiences to perceive the café's genuine working atmosphere and customer experience. The Social Media Specialist explained that although trending content remains the most effective strategy for increasing audience reach, originality remains an essential consideration during content production: "For now, the most effective short video content is content based on trends that are currently popular. However, originality is still needed to differentiate our content from others." (Social Media Specialist). This statement indicates that Piana Cafe does not simply imitate viral content but strategically adapts popular trends while maintaining originality. Such an approach enables the café to remain relevant to platform algorithms while preserving its unique brand identity. Consequently, trend adaptation and originality work together to strengthen audience recognition and support sustainable brand awareness. The content produced by Piana Cafe covers various themes designed to attract different audience interests. These include service-related videos, coffee preparation tutorials, promotional campaigns, storytelling content, point-of-view (POV) videos, and event-based content such as football celebrations, Valentine's Day activities, Lunar New Year performances, and customer interaction programs. The manager explained that content ideas are primarily inspired by trending topics appearing on TikTok's For You Page (FYP). However, instead of directly copying viral content, the creative team modifies and adapts these trends to align with Piana Cafe's brand identity and marketing objectives. Regarding content consistency, Piana Cafe follows the principle of publishing at least one piece of content every day. When producing a new video is not feasible due to operational constraints, Instagram Stories or other temporary content formats are uploaded to maintain audience engagement and platform activity. This strategy reflects the café's commitment to maintaining continuous communication with its online audience despite limited production resources. The production process is relatively simple yet efficient. Video recording is conducted using an iPhone, while editing activities are completed through the CapCut application with additional

support from artificial intelligence (AI) features for selected visual elements. After editing, every piece of content undergoes internal evaluation by the manager before receiving final approval from higher management. Depending on content complexity, production time ranges from approximately 15 minutes for simple culinary videos to one or two hours for storytelling or point-of-view content requiring more elaborate production. Music selection, audio effects, captions, and hashtags are carefully adjusted according to current social media trends while remaining consistent with the café's branding strategy. The creative team combines trending hashtags with Piana Cafe's own branded hashtags to increase discoverability without sacrificing brand identity. One of the café's most successful videos, featuring a birthday greeting competition among employees, generated approximately 220 thousand views, demonstrating the effectiveness of combining authentic storytelling with audience-oriented content. These findings indicate that Piana Cafe does not merely follow viral social media trends but strategically adapts them to support its long-term branding objectives. Regarding production challenges, the Social Media Specialist stated: "There is no specific way to overcome these challenges. I try to manage work priorities effectively, remain consistent in carrying out the production process, and focus on solving each challenge one at a time." (Social Media Specialist). This finding demonstrates that maintaining consistency in content production requires effective time management and work prioritization in addition to creativity. Despite operational constraints, continuous content production remains an important strategy for sustaining audience engagement and strengthening long-term brand awareness. The integration of creativity, consistency, employee participation, trend adaptation, and systematic content planning demonstrates that successful short video marketing depends not only on entertaining content but also on strategic alignment between content production and brand identity. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that creative adaptation and consistent branding are fundamental factors influencing the effectiveness of short video marketing in strengthening brand awareness.

A closer examination of the birthday celebration video that generated approximately 220 thousand views suggests that its success cannot be attributed to a single factor but rather to several specific content elements working together. First, the content featured genuine, unscripted reactions from employees rather than staged promotional messaging, which aligns with findings that authenticity and credibility significantly influence audience response to short-form video content (Meng et al., 2024). Second, the celebratory, humorous format tapped into a broadly relatable emotional moment marking a colleague's birthday that audiences could connect with regardless of whether they had visited the café, extending the content's appeal beyond existing customers. Third, the video followed a recognizable competitive or challenge-style format already popular on TikTok's For You Page, which increased the likelihood of algorithmic distribution while still allowing Piana Cafe's employees and branding to remain visible throughout. Finally, because the video featured real staff in the café's actual physical setting, it simultaneously functioned as an entertainment piece and an implicit demonstration of the café's atmosphere and hospitality, reinforcing brand recall even among

viewers who engaged with the content primarily for entertainment rather than promotional value. This pattern suggests that virality in the context of small culinary businesses is more attainable through relatable, low-production human moments than through highly polished promotional content, a finding consistent with the emphasis on interactivity and audience engagement features identified in prior TikTok brand marketing research (Peng et al., 2023). Taken together, these elements, authenticity, emotional relatability, employee branding, and the implicit display of the café's visual identity and hospitality, illustrate that virality in this context is best understood not as a single viral "trick" but as the convergence of several engagement drivers repeatedly identified in the social media marketing literature: entertainment value, human interest, and consistency of brand presentation across content.

4.3 Brand Identity Consistency in Content

The findings indicate that brand identity consistency is one of the fundamental elements supporting Piana Cafe's short video marketing strategy. The Social Media Specialist also confirmed that content production follows established brand identity guidelines: "Yes, there are brand identity guidelines." (Social Media Specialist). The existence of clear brand identity guidelines indicates that content production is conducted systematically rather than randomly. Every published video is expected to maintain consistent visual elements, communication style, and brand characteristics, thereby reinforcing audience recognition across different social media platforms. Rather than focusing solely on producing entertaining content, the café consistently incorporates distinctive visual and communication elements that enable audiences to recognize the brand across different social media platforms. This consistency strengthens the association between published content and the café's overall brand image. According to the manager, Piana Cafe consistently displays its logo at the end of almost every short video and in various promotional images shared through its social media accounts. The café also maintains a consistent visual identity by applying black as the primary color, gold as the signature brand color, and white as the background for several visual materials. These visual elements are intentionally maintained to improve brand recognition and create a professional yet memorable appearance. Besides visual identity, Piana Cafe also maintains consistency in its tone of communication. Although the café promotes a fun and entertainment-oriented concept, every piece of content is presented professionally while maintaining a friendly, approachable, and family-oriented atmosphere. This communication style enables audiences to perceive the café as both entertaining and trustworthy, reinforcing the overall brand image delivered through digital platforms. The findings further reveal that consistency is not limited to logos, colors, or visual appearance but also extends to the storytelling style and interaction patterns presented in each video. Employees frequently appear as content talents, creating authentic interactions that reflect the café's daily operational atmosphere. This authenticity contributes to stronger emotional connections between audiences and the brand, making the content feel more natural and relatable.

These findings support Aaker's (1991) concept that repeated and consistent brand exposure contributes significantly to the development of brand awareness. The consistent application of visual identity, communication style, and storytelling enables consumers to recognize and remember Piana Cafe more easily despite the variety of content themes being presented. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that maintaining visual consistency across digital content strengthens brand recognition and contributes positively to long-term brand equity (Laraskana & Sakir, 2025). Therefore, brand identity consistency should be viewed not merely as a visual element but as a strategic component that supports sustainable digital marketing communication.

4.4 Impact of Short Video Strategy on Brand Awareness

The findings demonstrate that the consistent implementation of short video content has significantly contributed to increasing Piana Cafe's brand awareness among potential consumers in Medan. Before adopting a structured short video marketing strategy, the café primarily relied on word-of-mouth communication to introduce its products and services. Although this conventional approach generated customer visits, its promotional reach was relatively limited compared with the broader audience accessible through digital platforms. According to the manager, the impact of short video marketing became increasingly noticeable after the café consistently published content on TikTok and Instagram Reels. Visitor numbers reportedly increased by approximately 15% on weekdays and 30% on weekends following the implementation of the strategy. In addition, the café experienced an increase of around 1,000 new social media followers, indicating that short video content successfully expanded the café's digital audience and strengthened its online presence. The manager further explained that one of Piana Cafe's short videos unexpectedly became viral, generating approximately 220 thousand views and contributing to an estimated 7% increase in customer visits. This viral exposure substantially improved the café's visibility among audiences who had previously been unfamiliar with the brand. Furthermore, the café estimated that approximately 15–30% of its new customers were influenced by TikTok and Instagram Reels before deciding to visit. These findings suggest that short video content has evolved from a complementary promotional medium into one of the café's primary marketing channels. Another important finding concerns the influence of short video content on product popularity. According to the manager, one of the café's signature menu items, the Grill Chicken Steak, became widely recognized after repeatedly appearing in short video content. This indicates that short video marketing not only promotes the café as a business entity but also strengthens consumer awareness of specific products offered by the café.

Besides relying on organic content distribution, Piana Cafe also utilizes paid advertising through TikTok Ads and Instagram Ads to expand audience reach. According to the manager, paid promotional campaigns generated positive customer responses, including direct inquiries received through the café's official social media accounts. The integration of organic content and paid advertising demonstrates a comprehensive digital marketing strategy that combines authenticity with wider audience exposure. Overall, these findings

indicate that short video content functions not merely as a promotional tool but as a strategic communication instrument capable of increasing brand awareness, attracting new customers, strengthening digital engagement, and supporting business growth. The combination of creative content, consistent publishing, authentic storytelling, and strategic advertising contributes to moving consumers from initial brand recognition toward stronger brand recall and long-term brand awareness. These findings are consistent with previous studies reporting that short video platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels play an increasingly important role in strengthening digital marketing performance and consumer awareness among culinary MSMEs (Laraskana & Sakir, 2025).

4.5 Customer Perspective on Short Video Content

The customer interview findings indicate that short video content played a significant role in influencing the decision to visit Piana Cafe. Before visiting the café, the customer had been exposed to several short videos published on TikTok and Instagram Reels, which presented the café's atmosphere, facilities, menu offerings, and customer experiences. The visual presentation successfully attracted attention and generated curiosity, ultimately encouraging the customer to visit the café. According to the customer, the short video content provided a realistic representation of the café rather than exaggerated promotional messages. The videos effectively showcased the dining atmosphere, children's playground, food presentation, and overall customer experience, allowing prospective visitors to develop realistic expectations before making a visitation decision.

The customer also stated that the consistency of content uploads increased confidence in the credibility of the café. Frequent appearances on TikTok and Instagram Reels created repeated exposure, making the Piana Cafe brand easier to recognize and remember. This repeated exposure gradually strengthened brand recall and ultimately contributed to the customer's visitation decision. Furthermore, the customer explained that the actual experience at Piana Cafe was consistent with what had been presented through its social media content. The facilities, ambience, hospitality, and menu quality matched the expectations created by the published short videos. This consistency between online promotion and offline experience strengthened customer trust and generated positive perceptions toward the brand. These findings indicate that short video content functions not only as an initial promotional medium but also as a reliable source of information that reduces customer uncertainty before making a visitation decision. The consistency between digital content and actual customer experience strengthens customer trust, reinforces positive brand perceptions, and ultimately contributes to higher levels of brand awareness. This finding supports the concept of brand awareness proposed by Aaker (1991), suggesting that repeated exposure and positive consumer experiences contribute to stronger brand recognition and long-term brand recall.

These findings can be further understood through the lens of consumer digital literacy, defined broadly as the capacity to access, evaluate, and interpret digital content critically before forming judgments or making decisions (Livingstone, 2004). In this case, the customer's ability to assess Piana Cafe's short video content

as a realistic rather than exaggerated representation reflects an active evaluative process rather than passive content consumption. Rather than accepting promotional content at face value, the customer appeared to calibrate expectations by comparing repeated content across multiple posts, using consistency as an informal credibility cue before deciding to visit. This suggests that the effectiveness of short video marketing for small culinary businesses depends not only on the quality and consistency of the content itself, but also on the audience's own capacity to interpret that content critically and form realistic expectations. Where this digital literacy is present, as appears to be the case with Piana Cafe's customer, alignment between online representation and offline experience reinforces trust; where it is absent, the same content could instead produce inflated expectations and subsequent disappointment. This observation highlights a boundary condition for the broader claim that consistent short video content builds brand awareness: its positive effect on trust appears contingent on audiences engaging with the content critically rather than uncritically.

4.6 Challenges in Content Production

The findings reveal that although short video content plays an important role in strengthening Piana Cafe's brand awareness, its implementation is not without challenges. One of the main challenges is maintaining consistency in content production due to operational workload within the café. Content creation is often adjusted to the availability of staff and daily business activities, making it difficult to maintain highly structured production schedules. The Social Media Specialist explained that managing time and prioritizing tasks is essential to ensure content production continues smoothly despite these constraints. Content creation is often conducted alongside other operational responsibilities, requiring flexibility and effective work management to maintain consistency in uploading short videos across platforms.

Another challenge is balancing trending content with brand originality. While trending topics on TikTok and Instagram Reels provide opportunities to increase reach and engagement, they also pose a risk of making content appear generic if not adapted properly. Therefore, the creative team must continuously adjust trending formats to ensure alignment with Piana Cafe's brand identity while maintaining originality in presentation. In addition, limited production resources also affect the speed and variety of content creation. Although the café utilizes simple equipment such as smartphones and mobile editing applications, producing high-quality and engaging content still requires creativity, time, and coordination among staff members. This condition reflects the common challenges faced by many micro and small enterprises in managing digital marketing activities independently.

Despite these challenges, Piana Cafe continues to adapt by maintaining consistent posting schedules and leveraging simple but effective production strategies. These efforts demonstrate that successful short video marketing does not depend solely on advanced technology or large budgets, but also on creativity, adaptability, and effective resource management within the organization.

4.7 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that short video content plays a significant role in strengthening brand awareness for Piana Cafe Medan, and that this effectiveness is not attributable to a single factor but to the interaction of content creativity, production consistency, brand identity alignment, and customer experience. Interpreted through Aaker's (1991) brand awareness framework, these findings suggest a specific mechanism rather than a mere confirmation of the framework: repeated exposure alone does not appear sufficient to move consumers toward brand recall, unless that exposure is also perceived as authentic and consistent with brand identity. This is illustrated most clearly by the birthday-celebration video, where genuine, unscripted employee interaction rather than polished promotional messaging drove both reach and recall (Section 4.2). This pattern is consistent with Meng et al.'s (2024) finding that authenticity and credibility shape audience response to short-form video ads, and with Peng et al.'s (2023) emphasis on interactivity as a driver of brand exposure on TikTok; the present study extends these quantitative associations by showing, through informants' own accounts, *why* authenticity matters in this context it functions as a substitute for the production budgets that a small, resource-constrained café like Piana Cafe does not have.

The finding that brand identity consistency (visual identity, tone, and storytelling) reinforced recognition across platforms is consistent with Laraskana and Sakir's (2025) study of a culinary MSME in Palembang, where consistency and creativity were similarly identified as key drivers of TikTok-based brand recognition. The convergence between these two Indonesian culinary-MSME cases suggests that consistency functions as a comparatively stable success factor across similar small-business contexts, rather than being specific to Piana Cafe. At the same time, the present findings diverge from studies conducted on larger or more resourced brands, such as Zhang's (2024) analysis of Instagram-based commercial brand marketing and Addinna et al.'s (2026) study of certification and training MSMEs, both of which emphasized visual and interactive platform features as central mechanisms. In contrast, Piana Cafe's brand identity consistency was maintained primarily through simple, repeatable choices, a consistent color palette, a closing logo, and a consistent communication tone, rather than through more resource-intensive interactive features. This difference indicates that the relative importance of specific mechanisms for building brand awareness may depend on a business's production capacity, and that consistency-based strategies may be particularly relevant for smaller culinary MSMEs operating with limited resources.

A further point of interpretation concerns the finding that the customer's actual visit experience matched the expectations formed through short video content (Section 4.5). Rather than treating this alignment as a straightforward confirmation of brand awareness theory, it is more accurately understood through the lens of consumer digital literacy (Livingstone, 2004): the customer's expectations proved accurate partly because the customer actively evaluated repeated content as a credibility cue rather than accepting it uncritically. This reframes the online, offline alignment identified in this study as jointly produced by the business's content

practices and the consumer's own evaluative capacity, a mechanism that has received comparatively little attention in prior short video marketing research, which has generally focused on the producer side, whether in terms of content strategy (Anisawati & Dias Adiprabowo, 2026) or platform features (Peng et al., 2023) rather than on how audiences interpret and validate that content.

Taken together, these interpretations suggest two contributions of this study. Theoretically, the findings extend Aaker's (1991) brand awareness framework beyond its original focus on exposure frequency by indicating that the *credibility* of that exposure, shaped jointly by content authenticity and audience digital literacy, conditions whether repeated exposure translates into brand recall and trust; they also extend the largely quantitative short video marketing literature (e.g., Meng et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2023; Pangalila & Aprilianty, 2022) by offering a process-level, multi-perspective account of *how and why* these associations occur within a resource-constrained MSME setting, complementing single-perspective qualitative studies such as Anisawati and Dias Adiprabowo (2026). Practically, the findings indicate that for small culinary businesses, authenticity and consistency rather than production quality or advertising spend are the more accessible levers for building brand awareness; the detailed practical recommendations arising from this contribution are elaborated in Section 4.8.

The novelty of this study lies in the combination of three elements that are rarely integrated in prior research on short video marketing for MSMEs: a single-case design that triangulates managerial, content-production, and customer perspectives; systematic observation data on account-level engagement (Table 1) used to corroborate interview accounts rather than merely supplement them; and an explicit account of the audience's own evaluative role, through the concept of consumer digital literacy, in translating online content into offline trust. Where prior studies have typically examined short video marketing from either a single stakeholder perspective or a purely quantitative angle, this integration offers a more complete picture of brand awareness formation as a co-produced outcome of business practice and consumer interpretation, one that is particularly relevant for culinary MSMEs operating with limited production resources.

4.8 Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for culinary micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) seeking to utilize short video content as a digital marketing strategy. First, consistency in content production is a crucial factor in building and maintaining brand awareness. MSMEs are encouraged to establish a regular posting schedule, even with simple content production techniques, to ensure continuous audience engagement across digital platforms.

Second, creativity and adaptation to social media trends play an important role in increasing content visibility. However, businesses should not merely imitate viral content; instead, they need to adapt trends in a way that aligns with their unique brand identity. This balance between trend adaptation and originality is essential for creating distinguishable and memorable content.

Third, maintaining strong brand identity consistency across all digital content is essential for strengthening brand recognition. Elements such as visual style, color schemes, logos, and communication tone should be consistently applied to ensure that audiences can easily recognize the brand across different platforms.

Fourth, MSMEs should consider integrating both organic content and paid advertising strategies. While organic short video content helps build authenticity and engagement, paid promotions through platforms such as TikTok Ads and Instagram Ads can expand reach and accelerate brand awareness growth.

Beyond firm-level strategy, these findings also resonate with the Indonesian government's ongoing "UMKM Go Digital" movement, which encourages micro, small, and medium enterprises to adopt digital platforms and social media marketing as a means of expanding market reach and improving competitiveness. Piana Cafe's experience illustrates how this broader policy objective can materialize in practice at the individual business level: a locally owned café with limited financial and human resources was able to build substantial brand awareness through consistent, creatively adapted short video content rather than costly conventional advertising. This suggests that government-supported digitalization programs for MSMEs would benefit from providing not only platform access or basic technical training, but also practical guidance on content strategy, brand identity consistency, and audience engagement of the kind demonstrated in this study.

Overall, this study suggests that successful implementation of short video marketing does not depend on large budgets or advanced production tools, but rather on strategic planning, consistency, creativity, and alignment with brand identity. These factors collectively enable culinary MSMEs to compete effectively in the increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that short video content on TikTok and Instagram Reels plays a significant role in strengthening brand awareness at Piana Cafe Medan. The implementation of short video marketing is not only effective in increasing audience reach but also in shaping consumer perception, building brand recognition, and encouraging customer visitation. The findings show that consistent content production, creative adaptation of social media trends, and strong brand identity consistency are the main factors that contribute to the effectiveness of short video marketing strategies. From a theoretical perspective, the findings support Aaker's brand awareness framework, which emphasizes that repeated exposure and consistent brand presentation contribute to higher levels of brand recognition and recall. The integration of managerial strategy, content production practices, and customer experience demonstrates that short video marketing functions as an effective communication tool in strengthening brand awareness within the culinary MSME sector.

This study also identifies several limitations. First, the research is limited to a single case study focusing on one café in Medan, so the findings cannot be generalized to all culinary MSMEs. Second, and perhaps most significantly, this study relied on only one customer informant. While this single perspective provided

valuable insight into the online-to-offline experience, it cannot capture the diversity of customer motivations, expectations, or levels of digital literacy that likely exist among Piana Cafe's broader customer base. Customers who discover the café through different content types, or who possess different degrees of skepticism toward promotional content, may form different expectations and evaluations than the informant interviewed in this study. This limitation should be explicitly considered when interpreting the customer-related findings, and future research involving multiple customer informants with varied backgrounds is needed to validate and extend these findings. Third, the study focuses only on TikTok and Instagram Reels, while other digital platforms were not deeply analyzed. Fourth, the observation of account-level engagement metrics (Section 4.1.1) was constrained by platform display limitations that differed by platform. Instagram's grid view did not display individual posting dates, which prevented a precise calculation of posting frequency on that platform. For TikTok, like and comment counts were not visible directly in the grid view and had to be obtained by opening each of the nine sampled videos individually; exact posting dates were likewise unavailable for the four most recently observed TikTok videos, which were displayed only as relative timestamps at the time of access. Based on these limitations, future research is suggested to expand the scope of study by involving multiple MSMEs from different regions and industries. Future studies are also encouraged to include a larger number of informants and compare different types of social media platforms to obtain more comprehensive findings regarding the effectiveness of short video content in digital marketing. Overall, short video content is proven to be an effective digital marketing strategy for building brand awareness when supported by consistency, creativity, and strong brand identity management. For culinary MSMEs, this strategy offers a practical and cost-effective approach to increasing visibility and competitiveness in the digital era.

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