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Intercultural Communication in Improving the Competence of International Students on Instagram

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Abstract :

Intercultural communication on Instagram extends beyond visual content, encompassing culturally rich symbols that convey deep meanings. Despite its significance, it has received limited scholarly attention. This study addresses this gap by examining intercultural communication practices on Instagram, focusing on language, culinary traditions, and performing arts content. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the research explores how cultural elements are shared and represented through social media. The findings identify three primary contexts: (1) the use of native languages to introduce linguistic and cultural diversity; (2) the dissemination of traditional culinary content to reinforce cultural identity; and (3) the learning and sharing of traditional dance via Instagram as a strategy for preserving cultural heritage. These insights highlight Instagram's role as an active, dynamic, and educational space for intercultural communication.

Keywords: *Intercultural communication, Cultural symbols, Competence, International Student, Instagram*

Abstrak:

Komunikasi antarbudaya yang tersebar melalui media sosial Instagram tidak hanya terbatas pada visualisasi konten, tetapi juga merepresentasikan simbol-simbol budaya yang sarat makna. Fenomena ini masih kurang mendapat perhatian dalam kajian ilmiah. Studi ini bertujuan mengisi kekosongan tersebut dengan menganalisis praktik komunikasi antarbudaya dalam Instagram yang berfokus pada konten bahasa, kuliner, dan seni pertunjukan. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, dengan mengeksplorasi elemen-elemen budaya didiseminasikan melalui media sosial Instagram. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga konteks utama: (1) penggunaan bahasa asli oleh penutur asli untuk memperkenalkan keragaman linguistik dan budaya; (2) penyebaran konten kuliner tradisional sebagai media penguatan identitas budaya; dan (3) pembelajaran tarian tradisional melalui Instagram sebagai strategi pelestarian warisan budaya. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa Instagram berfungsi sebagai ruang aktif untuk komunikasi antarbudaya yang dinamis dan edukatif.

Kata Kunci: *Komunikasi antarbudaya, Simbol budaya, Kompetensi, Mahasiswa internasional, Instagram*

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Introduction

In the social media era, intercultural communication practices have experienced significant transformations. According to Jin (2023), communities frequently use social media platforms to facilitate more inclusive forms of intercultural communication. This is largely due to Instagram's visual and virtual nature, which allows culture, particularly through language, cuisine, and artistic performances to diffuse with relative ease (Ganglbauer et al., 2014). Fernando et al. (2025) also emphasize that intercultural communication on Instagram constitutes a critical issue warranting deeper exploration, particularly regarding its role in fostering cultural resilience. Consequently, this study analyzes the significance of intercultural communication activities on Instagram, given their complex characteristics and multifaceted impact on cultural resilience processes.

Conceptually, intercultural communication on Instagram emphasizes both optimistic and skeptical perspectives regarding its role in cultural resilience (King & Fretwell, 2022; Nakayama, 2020; Pang et al., 2024). From the optimistic perspective, such communication is frequently interpreted through the lens of glocalization and innovation diffusion (Carah & Shaul, 2016; Hurley, 2019; Waechter, 2021). Schram (2025) argues that intercultural communication on Instagram enables local cultures to be distributed globally without losing their authenticity. In contrast, the skeptical perspective views intercultural communication on Instagram as carrying risks of cultural simplification and stereotyping (Braslauskas, 2023; Nakayama, 2020; Piancazzo et al., 2024). Hungerford et al. (2023) note that the visualizing culture on Instagram may eliminate its complexity and philosophical meanings.

This phenomenon has sparked complex and contextually grounded debates. Nevertheless, existing research on intercultural communication has predominantly focused on three domains. The first is intercultural communication within the framework of ritualized cultural diplomacy (Bardhan, 2019; Oudatzi, 2019; Soydaş, 2024). The second domain is symbolic exchange governed by institutional regulations (Elsera et al., 2024; Nofrizal et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024). The third is the challenges of intercultural communication in the context of globalization (Guo, 2019; Wang, 2018; Wilhelm, 2016). Overall, the studies focusing on those three domains emphasize ritualistic, regulatory, and global challenges without providing a comprehensive exploration of the topic.

To date, scholarly work has largely overlooked intercultural communication, as practiced and represented through social media, particularly Instagram, leaving a significant gap in understanding of its characteristics, contributing factors, and broader implications. In response to these limitations, this study analyzes intercultural communication disseminated via Instagram, specifically focusing on visual content related to language, culinary practices, and artistic performance (Fauzi & Prasetyo, 2023). By examining various digital interactions and user engagement in the production and consumption of cultural content, this study provides a critical perspective on the evolving nature of intercultural communication within social media environments.

Intercultural communication on Instagram exhibits highly complex characteristics, factors, and implications, which merit in-depth analysis. Accordingly,

this study is guided by three central research questions: First, how is intercultural communication based on local languages disseminated on Instagram? Second, how is intercultural communication manifested through content related to traditional food? Third, how is intercultural communication performed through traditional art and performance content on Instagram? These questions are grounded in the view that intercultural communication on Instagram goes beyond digital audience activism, functioning as a nuanced strategy for intercultural engagement involving multiple layers of knowledge and understanding. Through its visual representation, symbolic content serves to construct and reconstruct cultural meanings within specific contextual frameworks.

Moreover, this study has global implications, particularly in showing how intercultural communication on Instagram, focused on language, food, and the arts, can enhance inclusive and dynamic cross-cultural understanding. As noted by Bernadette et al. (2022), Instagram's visual-interactive nature creates opportunities for intercultural communication to support global cultural diplomacy and foster solidarity among diverse communities. The dialogues emerging from this study highlight the risks of cultural appropriation and the oversimplification of symbolic meanings through the commodification of cultural content online. The findings offer a foundation for developing a more critical and reflective understanding of how cultural content is produced and consumed, encouraging the preservation of authenticity and respect for the values embedded in traditional practices. Ultimately, these insights can guide the development of more inclusive and ethical digital cultural policies in the context of accelerating globalization.

Method

This study was conducted amid the widespread dissemination of cultural content on Instagram. However, it focuses specifically on explaining and analyzing intercultural communication practices on the accounts @indonesianstudies.upol and @indonesia.project. Fernando et al. (2022) argue that the dissemination of certain issues in Instagram through memes, photos, videos, and hashtags, represents ongoing social and cultural conditions, making it valuable to examine the media's social and cultural context. This study is guided by three crucial considerations. First, intercultural communication issues on Instagram are central and warrant comprehensive analysis. Second, these issues have complex message characteristics that require detailed explanation. Third, intercultural communication on Instagram represents cultural significance that is crucial to analyze.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method using a case study approach. Data were obtained by investigating meme image posts on the Instagram accounts @indonesianstudies.upol and @indonesia.project. The research and review of posts on these accounts were conducted from March 31 to April 4, 2025. These accounts were selected for their active engagement in producing and disseminating intercultural content. Content selection and analysis were performed using a skimming technique focused on figures, symbols, and languages in the post. This process identified three dominant themes regarding intercultural communication practices on these accounts: first, content disseminating native languages; second, content disseminating traditional food; and third, content disseminating art performances.

The data analysis in this study follows the process outlined by Miles and

Huberman (2014), structured into three main stages. First, data reduction reorganizes the collected data into a systematic format based on classifications aligned with the situations, conditions, and implications represented. Second, data verification is conducted to derive conclusions from the thematically reduced data. Third, data description presents the verified findings in a tabular format, including meme images with corresponding descriptions validated for relevance to the study's thematic focus. Following these stages, the data undergo an inductive analysis process, forming the basis for interpreting the collected information (Fernando et al., 2023). The interpretative phase involves restating and reflecting on the data aligned with the ideas, patterns, and socio-cultural contexts it represents. These analytical steps support the formulation of a conclusion regarding the significance of intercultural communication as disseminated through Instagram.

Results And Discussion

Result

Intercultural communication through social media, particularly Instagram, often involves disseminating content related to language, culinary traditions, and performing arts. These content forms are crucial in fostering cross-cultural understanding. According to Putri (2016), the use of language and symbols representing cultural identity has become a prominent trend in intercultural communication, particularly when visually conveyed through digital media platforms. Beyond fostering appreciation for cultural diversity (Prajarto & Purwaningtyas, 2021), the dissemination of cultural symbols via social media also serves as a dynamic space for negotiation and cultural diplomacy.

Introducing the Natives' Language on Instagram

The use of native languages by local speakers on Instagram represents a form of intercultural communication that introduces the linguistic and cultural richness of a community to a global audience. Sharing content in local languages allows people outside the culture to understand linguistic nuances authentically. Cultural introduction often begins with language, as it reflects values, identity, and worldview. Therefore, Instagram functions not only as a platform for promoting linguistic diversity but also as a digital space for cultural dialogue and exchange, supporting deeper intercultural understanding globally (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

International students learning the Bahasa Indonesia



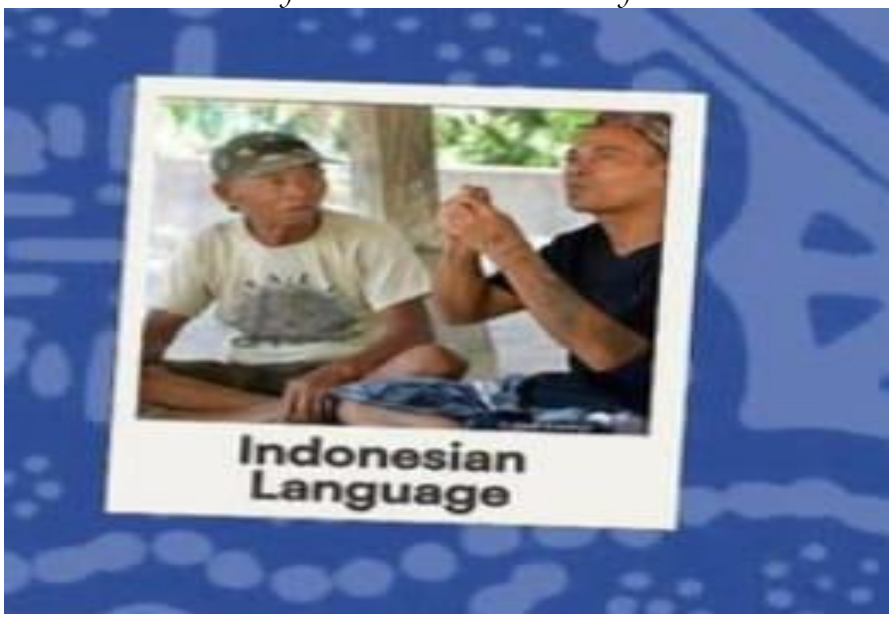
Note. Indonesian language introduction activities for international students on

Instagram help spark interest in the local language and culture among a global audience.

Figure 1 shows language introduction activities among university students on Instagram, where linguistically localized content sparks global engagement with languages outside their own cultural systems. This digital interaction not only facilitates the international diffusion of local languages but also effectively highlights the richness of local traditions. Instagram also enables intercultural communication to be more personal and authentic, offering a space for meaningful dialogue between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and functioning as a form of language-based cultural diplomacy (Nazula et al., 2024; Tombleson & Wolf, 2017). As Mahmoud (2024) notes, language used in social media content is not merely a means of communication but a reflection of cultural identity. When strategically embedded in visual content, it allows individuals outside the originating culture to interpret social meanings. Therefore, this form of intercultural communication fosters both linguistic understanding and cultural appreciation, as further illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Learning Bahasa Indonesia directly with the local community



Note. Intercultural communication through direct Indonesian language learning with the local community, contributing to enhanced language competence and authentic cultural understanding.

Figure 2 illustrates intercultural communication on Instagram through direct Indonesian language learning with local communities. Asteria et al. (2023) argue that learning directly from local communities contributes to improving language competence and authentic cultural understanding. Munjiah (2023) notes that direct interaction with local people allows intercultural communication processes to occur naturally and dynamically. This context allows individuals to understand not only language structures but also idiomatic expressions, local expressions, and inherent cultural nuances, facilitating inclusive intercultural communication. According to Suyitno et al. (2019), intercultural communication on Instagram can enhance cross-

cultural understanding and prevent potential misunderstandings between groups with limited knowledge of multicultural concepts.

Learning the Technique of Cooking Specialties

Intercultural communication on Instagram is also facilitated through traditional food content, which introduces and strengthens cultural identity through culinary practices. Video tutorials, cooking photos, and user interactions function not only as recipe-sharing tools but also as mediums for conveying cultural values and local traditions. Active participation, such as commenting and recreating dishes, demonstrates a genuine interest in learning about other cultures through food. Consequently, Instagram becomes more than a visual platform; it serves as a space for cross-cultural education and appreciation. Traditional food content fosters inclusive and meaningful dialogue, supporting greater multicultural understanding in the digital era (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

A class learning to cook specialties



Note. Intercultural communication is achieved through a demonstration of cooking traditional food, facilitating cultural exchange.

Figure 3 illustrates intercultural communication on Instagram through demonstrations of traditional food preparation, illustrating how digital culinary practices facilitate cultural exchange. As Báti (2024) argues, food-related content on social media fosters understanding not only through direct interaction but also via symbolic exchanges, such as food diplomacy, which convey group identity and cultural values. The emotional resonance and hands-on nature of these experiences create authentic, interactive spaces for intercultural dialogue. This form of communication enhances culinary skills while deepening appreciation for cultural diversity. As Hanifah and Rosdiana (2024) note, food goes beyond recipes and techniques; it embodies historical narratives, social structures, and collective identities.

Learning to cook culturally specific dishes on platforms such as Instagram enables users to engage with these deeper meanings in a concrete, contextualized manner. This dynamic process of cultural learning is further illustrated in Figure 4, which demonstrates how direct engagement with everyday practices fosters more meaningful and reflective intercultural understanding.

Figure 4
Cooking specialties with the community



Note. Intercultural communication is achieved by cooking traditional dishes with the community, strengthening cross-cultural understanding through direct interaction, and exchanging cultural values.

Figure 4 illustrates intercultural communication on Instagram through direct community-based cooking activities. According to Wijaya (2019), this context not only enhances culinary competence but also fosters cross-cultural understanding through direct interactions involving the symbolic exchange of cultural values and meanings. The dissemination of symbolic interaction content on Instagram raises appreciation for cultural products and reduces instances of global cultural appropriation (Lewis, 2018). As Roy (2020) argues, active participation in sharing cultural content on Instagram extends beyond intercultural communication, significantly influencing acceptance of cultural products beyond their normative knowledge and experience. Therefore, Instagram serves as an effective platform for introducing and strengthening appreciation of cultural diversity globally.

Practicing Local Arts

Intercultural communication shared through Instagram content is crucial in introducing and preserving a community's cultural richness for a global audience. By sharing videos, photos, and live broadcasts of traditional dances, music, crafts, and other cultural performances, users engage with the symbolic meanings and aesthetic values embedded in these artistic expressions. Interaction through comments,

discussions, and content sharing fosters a space for intercultural dialogue and appreciation of cultural diversity. Consequently, Instagram functions not only as a visual platform but also as a space for meaningful cross-cultural exchange and deeper understanding of local artistic traditions (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Learning to play an Indonesian musical instrument



Note. Intercultural communication via Instagram through learning to play an Indonesian traditional musical instrument, contributing to cultural heritage preservation.

Figure 5 illustrates how intercultural communication on Instagram, specifically through learning and sharing traditional gamelan music, plays a significant role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering cross-cultural understanding through musical expression. Direct interaction with gamelan practitioners allows learners to acquire accurate playing techniques and engage with the philosophical and social values embedded in each composition. As Baiti et al. (2021) note, users from diverse cultural backgrounds actively participate in dialogue through comments, discussions, and reposts, creating a shared space for appreciating traditional music. The use of live streams and instructional videos enhances emotional engagement and motivation, offering an immersive and authentic learning experience. In an era where traditional arts face challenges from the rise of global popular culture (Hakim et al., 2024; Ikhsano et al., 2024), Instagram functions as a strategic tool for cultural education and youth engagement. This dynamic, contextual approach to musical learning is further illustrated in Figure 6, where real-time digital interaction deepens intercultural connections.

Figure 6

Learning to practice traditional Indonesian dances.



Note. intercultural communication through learning traditional Indonesian dances on Instagram, which positively impacts cultural preservation and cross-cultural understanding.

Figure 6 illustrates that intercultural communication on Instagram, based on traditional dance learning, positively influences dance preservation while strengthening cross-cultural understanding through movement and body expression. According to Hernandez-Barraza et al. (2019), direct interaction with professional dancers or dance communities allows learners to gain authentic experience in understanding basic techniques, characteristic movements, and the philosophical meaning behind each Javanese dance sequence. Video tutorials uploaded on Instagram not only develop technical skills but also provide a comprehensive understanding of the noble values contained in traditional traditions (Rahapsari, 2022). In this context, Pradhana et al. (2019) note that Instagram, as a visual-interactive medium is often utilized to support the creation of a more dynamic and inclusive space for art appreciation, reflecting the intercultural communication process.

Discussion

This study highlights three key contexts in which intercultural communication is effectively facilitated through Instagram: introducing native languages, learning to cook traditional dishes, and practicing local arts. These findings reveal that Instagram serves not only as a platform for social interaction but also as a dynamic space for cultural transmission. First, native language content allows global audiences to engage with linguistic diversity and gain deeper insight into cultural identity. Second, culinary content enables users to explore cultural values through hands-on cooking experiences, bridging gaps through shared tastes and traditions. Third, the practice of local arts, including music, dance, and crafts, encourages emotional engagement and appreciation of cultural heritage. Together, these three areas demonstrate that digital media, particularly Instagram, significantly shapes meaningful and inclusive

intercultural dialogue. It enables the exchange of values and traditions in accessible, engaging ways, supporting global cultural literacy in the digital era.

Intercultural communication refers to the interaction between individuals or communities from different cultural backgrounds, including racial, ethnic, social, economic, or a combination of these elements that have evolved and been passed down through generations (Akhmadieva et al., 2019; Biletska et al., 2021; Paternotte et al., 2017). Consistent with this, Biletska et al. (2021) argues that each community possesses distinct cultural characteristics that constitute its identity. These differences can be bridged through intercultural communication practices, which aim to foster multicultural values in establishing contextually relevant relationships. Intercultural communication is often employed as an accommodative strategy to address and resolve issues among communities of differing racial and cultural backgrounds (Steinfatt and Millette, 2019). According to Sarwari and Abdul Wahab (2017), cultural differences, such as language, clothing, anzd communication etiquette, frequently pose significant challenges in the intercultural communication process.

The dissemination of culture-based content on Instagram offers inclusive insight into multicultural concepts within community groups. A prominent form of intercultural communication is the use of native languages by their original speakers, shared via Instagram features such as videos, captions, and live broadcasts (Maulana et al., 2020). This language-focused communication conveys not only linguistic structures but also the values, norms, and worldviews of the respective communities (Tiawati et al., 2023), fostering a more contextual and authentic understanding for audiences outside the culture. Instagram enables dynamic, real-time dissemination of local languages, reaching a global audience without geographic constraints. Consequently, intercultural interactions in the digital space extend beyond linguistic understanding to enrich deeper, integrated multicultural awareness. This process establishes a strong foundation for inclusive, respectful cross-cultural dialogue in the digital age.

Introducing typical dishes from certain communities through Instagram, according to Sari et al. (2019) is a concrete form of intercultural communication practices based on sharing culinary knowledge. In the context of globalization, culinary-based intercultural communication conveys not only cultural symbols but also helps understand the social and cultural context that defines a group's identity (Setiarto and Herlina, 2024). Furthermore, Feldman (2021) asserts that cultural communication cannot rely solely on written documentation; it also requires an inclusive platform accessible without spatial or temporal constraints, such as Instagram. Thus, the dissemination of culinassry content on Instagram not only serves as a digital activity, but also significantly deepens the understanding while facilitating global cross-cultural interactions.

Intercultural communication on Instagram, based on traditional dance learning, emerges from the need to preserve cultural heritage amid modernization and globalization. Traditional dance, according to Asriati et al. (2019), is not merely a series of body movements but a manifestation of philosophical and aesthetic values reflecting the subtlety of local culture. By learning directly from professional dancers or dance communities on Instagram, learners gain a deeper understanding of technique, rhythm, and symbolic meaning of each movement (Indra Fibiona et al., 2024). As a visual-interactive platform, Instagram provides opportunities for learners

to engage in practice, follow real-time movement guidance, and discuss with fellow art enthusiasts (Airlangga PH et al., 2024; Larasati & Fernando, 2023; Widari et al., 2024). Thus, intercultural communication occurs through social media-based traditional dance learning, serving both to preserve cultural traditions and to expand global appreciation of the arts.

Conclusion

The key findings and discussions of this study highlight how intercultural communication on Instagram unfolds and contributes significantly to cross-cultural understanding. The findings reveal that intercultural communication on Instagram transcends mere visual or informative representation, as reflected in three significant findings of the study. First, the use of native languages by indigenous speakers serves as a form of intercultural communication that introduces the linguistic richness and cultural heritage of specific communities to a global audience. Second, intercultural communication is facilitated through the dissemination of traditional food-based content, which reinforces and promotes cultural identity through culinary expression. Third, intercultural communication in traditional dance learning, as presented on Instagram, emerges from the need to preserve and transmit cultural heritage amidst modernization and globalization. Collectively, these three findings indicate that intercultural communication on Instagram transcends mere digital audience engagement, serving as a strategic approach to intercultural engagement. It offers a contextually grounded understanding of culture, incorporating knowledge and meaning embedded within specific cultural contexts.

This study presents a distinct perspective compared to previous research. While earlier studies have predominantly addressed intercultural communication descriptively and normatively, this study demonstrates that intercultural communication on Instagram possesses unique characteristics, influencing factors, and significance in maintaining and enhancing the visibility of cultural identities. Accordingly, these findings are expected to provide a dialogical foundation for future research exploring intercultural communication on social media in a more comparative and reflective manner. Nonetheless, this study acknowledges a limitation in its data collection method, which relied solely on investigative analysis of selected Instagram accounts. However, this limitation also presents an opportunity to guide future studies in examining intercultural communication across a broader range of Instagram accounts and user communities.

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