Intercultural Communication in Improving the Competence of International Students on Instagram

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Abstract :

Intercultural communication disseminated through Instagram extends beyond mere visual content; it embodies culturally rich symbols that convey deep meanings. Despite its significance, this phenomenon has received limited scholarly attention. This study seeks to address this gap by examining intercultural communication practices on Instagram, with a specific focus 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 by speakers to introduce linguistic and cultural diversity; (2) the dissemination of traditional culinary content as a means of reinforcing 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

Intercultural communication practices are no longer static; they have undergone significant transformations in the era of social media. According to Jin (2023), social media platforms are frequently utilized by communities to facilitate more inclusive forms of intercultural communication. This is largely attributed to the visual and virtual nature of Instagram, which enables the diffusion of culture particularly through language, cuisine, and artistic performances with relative ease (Ganglbauer et al., 2014). Fernando et al. (2025) also emphasizes that intercultural communication on Instagram constitutes a critical issue that warrants deeper exploration, especially in relation to its role in fostering cultural resilience. Consequently, this study aims to analyze the significance of intercultural communication activities disseminated through Instagram, given their complex characteristics and multifaceted impact on cultural resilience processes.

Conceptually, intercultural communication disseminated through the Instagram platform often emphasizes both optimistic and skeptical perspectives regarding its significance in the process of cultural resilience (King & Fretwell, 2022; Nakayama, 2020; Pang et al., 2024). From the perspective of the optimistic group, intercultural communication disseminated on Instagram 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, from the perspective of the skeptical group, intercultural communication disseminated on Instagram carries the risk of cultural simplification and stereotyping (Braslauskas, 2023; Nakayama, 2020; Piancazzo et al., 2024). Hungerford et al. (2023) notes that the visualization of 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 primary domains. First, studies addressing intercultural communication within the framework of ritualized cultural diplomacy (Bardhan, 2019; Oudatzi, 2019; Soydaş, 2024). Second, research that explores symbolic exchange governed by institutional regulation (Elsera et al., 2024; Nofrizal et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024). Third, scholarship centered on the challenges of intercultural communication in the context of globalization (Guo, 2019; Wang, 2018; Wilhelm, 2016). In general, these studies tend to emphasize ritualistic, regulatory, and global challenges, without providing a comprehensive exploration of the topic.

To date, scholarly work has largely neglected the examination of intercultural communication as it is practiced and represented through social media content—particularly on Instagram—leaving a significant gap in our understanding of its characteristics, contributing factors, and broader implications. In response to these limitations, the present study seeks to analyze the phenomenon of intercultural communication as it is disseminated via Instagram, specifically focusing on visual content related to language, culinary practices, and artistic performance (Fauzi &

Prasetyo, 2023). Through an examination of various forms of digital interaction and user engagement in the production and consumption of cultural content, this study aims to provide 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. To this end, the 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 argument that intercultural communication on Instagram goes beyond mere digital audience activism; it functions as a nuanced strategy for intercultural engagement that involves complex layers of knowledge and understanding. Symbolic content, through its visual representation, becomes a means of constructing and reconstructing cultural meanings within specific contextual frameworks.

Moreover, this study has global implications, particularly in illuminating how intercultural communication on Instagram centered 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 opens up opportunities for intercultural communication to contribute to 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 in digital spaces . The study's findings offer a foundation for building a more critical and reflective understanding of how cultural content is produced and consumed online, encouraging the preservation of authenticity and the respect for the original values embedded in traditional practices. Ultimately, these insights can inform the development of more inclusive and ethical digital cultural policies in the face of accelerating globalization.

METHOD

This study was conducted in the midst of massive cultural content disseminated on the Instagram social media platform (Rizkika, 2021). However, this study only focuses on explaining and analyzing intercultural communication practices disseminated on Instagram social media platforms named @indonesianstudies.upol and @indonesia.project. Fernando et al. (2022) also argued that the dissemination of certain issues in Instagram social media using meme images, photos, videos, and hastags, represents the characteristics of the ongoing situation and conditions so it is very interesting to reflect on the social and cultural context of the media (Mukhametgaliyeva et al., 2022). This study is also based on three crucial considerations. First, intercultural communication issues disseminated in Instagram social media are central issues that are comprehensively considered. Second, intercultural communication issues have such complex message characteristics that it is essential to explain them. Third, the issues of intercultural communication disseminated in Instagram social media represent a cultural significance that is crucial to analyze.

This study is descriptive qualitative method using a case study approach (Miles & Huberman, 2014). The data used in this study were obtained through an investigation process on meme image posts disseminated on the Instagram social media accounts @indonesianstudies.upol and @indonesia.project. The process of searching and reading the posts disseminated by the Instagram social media accounts @indonesianstudies.upol and @indonesia.project started from March 31 to April 4, 2025. The selection of these social media accounts is based on consideration of their activism in conducting and disseminating inter-cultural-based content. The selection and reading of the content was done quickly using a skimming technique focused on figures, symbols, and languages arranged in the disseminated content. The reading process resulted in three dominant themes regarding intercultural communication practices disseminated in the Instagram social media accounts @indonesianstudies.upol and @indonesia.project. First, content that disseminates native languages. Second, content that disseminates typical food. Third, content that disseminates art performances.

The data analysis in this study refers to the process outlined by Miles and Huberman (2014), which is structured into three main stages. First, data reduction is conducted to reorganize the collected data into a more systematic form based on classifications aligned with the situations, conditions, and implications represented by the data. Second, data verification is carried out to derive conclusions from thematically reduced data. Third, data description is undertaken to present the verified findings, which are organized in a tabular format containing meme images along with corresponding descriptions that have been validated for their relevance to the study's thematic focus. Following these three stages, the data is subjected to an inductive analysis process, forming the basis for interpreting the collected information (Fernando et al., 2023). The interpretative phase involves restating and reflecting upon the data in accordance with the ideas, patterns, and socio-cultural contexts represented within it. These analytical steps enable the formulation of a conclusion regarding the significance of intercultural communication as disseminated through the Instagram platform.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Result

Intercultural communication through social media, particularly Instagram, is frequently conducted by disseminating content related to language, culinary traditions, and performing arts. These forms of content play a crucial role in fostering cross-cultural understanding. According to Putri (2016), the use of language and symbols that represent cultural identity has become a prominent trend in the process of intercultural communication, particularly as these elements are visually conveyed through digital media platforms. In addition to fostering appreciation for cultural diversity (Prajarto & Purwaningtyas, 2021), the dissemination of cultural symbols via social media also functions 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 aimed at introducing the linguistic and cultural richness of a community to a global audience. Sharing content in local languages creates opportunities for people outside the original culture to understand linguistic

nuances in an authentic way. 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 in the global context (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: International students learning the Bahasa Indonesia

Figure 1 shows language introduction activities among university students disseminated through Instagram, where linguistically localized content plays a significant role in sparking interest among global audiences to engage with languages outside their own cultural systems. This form of digital interaction not only facilitates the international diffusion of local languages but also effectively draws attention to the richness of local traditions. Through Instagram, intercultural communication becomes 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) argues, 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 mode 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

Figure 2 shows the form of intercultural communication disseminated through Instagram social media, based on direct Indonesian language learning with local communities. Asteria et al. (2023) argue that by learning directly from local communities the intercultural communication process can make an important contribution to improving language competence as well as authentic cultural understanding. Through direct interaction with local people, Munjiah (2023) states that the intercultural communication process can take place naturally and dynamically. The context allows individuals to understand not only language structures but also idiomatic expressions, local expressions, and inherent cultural nuances, so that the intercultural communication process can take place inclusively. According to Suyitno et al. (2019) intercultural communication disseminated in Instagram social media can not only be a cross-cultural understanding, but also prevent potential misunderstandings in communication between groups that lack understanding of multicultural concepts.

Learn the Technique of Cooking Specialties

Intercultural communication on Instagram is also facilitated through traditional food content, which serves to introduce and strengthen 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. As a result, Instagram becomes more than a visual platform; it evolves into 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

Figure 3 shows a form of intercultural communication on Instagram through demonstrations of how to prepare traditional foods, 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 conveys group identity and cultural values. The emotional resonance and hands-on nature of these experiences help create authentic, interactive spaces for intercultural dialogue. This form of

communication not only enhances culinary skills but also deepens appreciation for cultural diversity. Food, as noted by Hanifah & Rosdiana (2024), goes beyond recipes and techniques; it embodies historical narratives, social structures, and collective identities. Learning to cook culturally specific dishes on platforms like Instagram enables users to engage with these deeper meanings in a concrete, contextualized way. This dynamic process of cultural learning is further exemplified in Figure 4, which demonstrates how direct engagement with everyday practices leads to more meaningful and reflective intercultural understanding.

Figure 4. Cooking specialties with the community

Figure 4 shows intercultural communication through Instagram social media based on learning how to cook directly with the community. According to Wijaya (2019), in addition to increasing culinary competence, this context can also shape cross-cultural understanding through direct interactions that involve the symbolic exchange of cultural values and meanings. The dissemination of symbolic interaction content on Instagram not only raises appreciation for cultural products, but can also minimize the occurrence of global cultural appropriation (Lewis, 2018). The active participation of Instagram social media users in disseminating cultural content, as Roy (2020) argues, goes beyond mere intercultural communication and has a significant impact on people's acceptance of cultural products beyond their normative knowledge and experience. Therefore, Instagram serves as an effective tool in introducing and strengthening appreciation for cultural diversity globally.

Practicing Local Arts

Intercultural communication shared through Instagram content plays a vital role 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 can 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. As a result, 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.

Figure 5 shows how intercultural communication through Instagram specifically via the learning and sharing of 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 not only acquire accurate playing techniques but also to engage with the philosophical and social values embedded in each composition. As Baiti et al. (2021) notes, 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 and contextual approach to musical learning is further expanded in Figure 6, where real-time digital interaction deepens intercultural connections.

Figure 6. Learning to practice traditional Indonesian dances.

Figure 6 shows that intercultural communication disseminated in Instagram social media based on traditional dance learning can have a positive impact on the preservation of dance 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, typical movements, and the philosophical meaning behind each Javanese dance sequence. Through video tutorial uploads disseminated on Instagram social media, it can form technical skills, but provide a comprehensive understanding of the noble values contained in traditional traditions (Rahapsari, 2022). In this context, Pradhana et al. (2019) also noted that Instagram social media as a visual-interactive medium is often utilized to support the creation of a more dynamic and inclusive art appreciation space, as a realization of 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 understand cultural identity at a deeper level. Second, culinary-based 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, such as music, dance, and crafts, encourages emotional engagement and fosters appreciation of cultural heritage. Together, these three areas demonstrate that digital media, particularly Instagram, plays a significant role in shaping 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 that occurs between individuals or communities from different cultural backgrounds, be it 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). In line with this, Biletska et al. (2021) also argues that every community possesses distinct cultural characteristics that serve as their 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 arising among communities of differing racial and cultural backgrounds (Steinfatt & Millette, 2019). According to Sarwari & Abdul Wahab (2017), cultural differences, such as language, clothing, and communication etiquette frequently pose significant challenges in the intercultural communication process.

The dissemination of culture-based content through Instagram offers an inclusive insight into multicultural concepts within community groups. One prominent form of intercultural communication is the use of native languages by their original speakers, shared via Instagram's features such as videos, captions, and live broadcasts (Maulana et al., 2020). This language-focused communication not only

conveys linguistic structures but also introduces the values, norms, and worldviews of the respective communities (Tiawati et al., 2023). It fosters 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 building inclusive, respectful cross-cultural dialogue in the digital age.

Introducing typical dishes from certain communities through Instagram social media, according to Sari et al. (2019) is a concrete form of intercultural communication practices based on sharing culinary knowledge. In the context of the globalization era, intercultural communication based on culinary content not only conveys cultural symbols, but also helps understand the social and cultural context behind cultural symbols as a group's identity (Setiarto & Herlina, 2024). Furthermore, Feldman (2021) asserts that cultural communication cannot only be achieved through written documentation, but also requires an inclusive platform that can be accessed without space and time constraints, such as Instagram social media. Thus, the dissemination of culinary content on Instagram not only serves as a digital activity, but also has a significant impact in deepening the understanding of the culture that is the identity of society, while facilitating cross-cultural interactions globally.

Intercultural communication in traditional dance learning-based Instagram social media arises from the need to maintain the transfer of cultural heritage in the midst of modernization and globalization. Traditional dance by Asriati et al. (2019) is not just a series of body movements, but also a manifestation of philosophical and aesthetic values that reflect the subtlety of local culture. Through direct learning from professional dancers or dance communities on Instagram, learners can understand the technique, rhythm, and symbolic meaning of each movement more deeply (Indra Fibiona et al., 2024). Instagram social media as a visual-interactive platform provides opportunities for learners to engage directly in practice, follow real-time movement guidance, and discuss with fellow art lovers (Airlangga PH et al., 2024; Larasati & Fernando, 2023; Widari et al., 2024). Thus, intercultural communication can occur in the process of social media-based traditional dance learning, and can be a strategy in maintaining cultural traditions but also expanding art appreciation to the global community.

CONCLUSION

The key findings and discussions in this study highlight how intercultural communication on Instagram unfolds and contributes significantly to cross-cultural understanding. The findings reveal that intercultural communication disseminated through Instagram content transcends mere visual or informative representation. This is reflected in three significant findings of the study. First, the use of native languages by indigenous speakers on Instagram serves as a form of intercultural communication aimed at introducing the linguistic richness and cultural heritage of specific communities to a global audience. Second, intercultural communication on Instagram is also facilitated through the dissemination of traditional food-based content, which seeks to reinforce and promote cultural identity through culinary expression. Third, intercultural communication in the context of traditional dance learning, as presented

on Instagram, emerges from the need to preserve and transmit cultural heritage amidst the forces of modernization and globalization. These three findings indicate that intercultural communication disseminated through Instagram not only transcends digital audience activism but also serves 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 discussed intercultural communication in a descriptive and normative manner, the present study demonstrates that intercultural communication disseminated through Instagram possesses unique characteristics, influencing factors, and significance with respect to the persistence and visibility of cultural identities. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a dialogical foundation for future research seeking to explore issues of 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 is also seen as an opportunity—laying the groundwork for future studies to explore intercultural communication across a more diverse range of Instagram accounts and user communities.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Julia Magdalena Wuysang and Ira Patriani contributed as concepts and drafter of the article; Henky Fernando and Yuniar Galuh Larasati contributed as data analyzer and interpreter; Julkarnaen and Leanne Morin contributed to collecting data and critically revising the article. All authors agree to take responsibility for all aspects of this work.

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