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HUMAN-ORIENTED DIGITAL COMMUNICATION PSYCHOLOGY IN DRIVING SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY

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Abstract:

The acceleration of digital transformation has fundamentally changed entrepreneurial communication practices, especially in micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) that increasingly rely on social media-based interactions to maintain business sustainability. One of the platforms that has experienced significant growth in the context of digital entrepreneurship is TikTok, which allows (MSMEs) to build audiovisual interactions that are fast, personal, and viral. However, the economic recovery discourse still tends to focus on technology and platform aspects, while the psychological dimension in human-oriented digital communication has not been comprehensively studied. This study aims to analyze the role of the psychological elements of digital communication which include trust, empathy, message clarity, and digital interpersonal relationships in strengthening the resilience of (MSMEs) businesses and supporting sustainable economic recovery through the use of TikTok. This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory design. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted online with eight (MSMEs) actors in the food and beverage sector in Kelantan, Malaysia, who actively use TikTok as a medium of business communication. The use of online interviews was chosen because it is in line with the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied, namely digital communication that is not bound by geographical limitations. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify patterns of shared experiences, perceptions, and meanings in informants' digital communication practices.

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Digital Communication Psychology; TikTok; Micro and Small Enterprises; Human Oriented communication; Sustainable Economic Recovery.



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Introduction

The development of the global digital ecosystem has driven fundamental changes in the way economic activities are carried out, particularly in entrepreneurial communication practices. Micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) increasingly rely on audiovisual content-based social media, such as TikTok, as the main space to interact with customers, build long-term relationships, and maintain business sustainability amid uncertain economic dynamics. TikTok offers a short video format that allows (MSMEs) actors to convey personal, narrative, and emotional messages, thus opening up new opportunities in building customer engagement at a relatively low cost (Barta et al., 2023; Zeng et al., 2023). In the context of a sustainable global economic recovery, digital communication is no longer understood solely as a technical means of information exchange, but rather as a social and psychological medium that shapes the quality of human relationships (Castells, 2021; Verhoef et al., 2021).

Along with the increasing adoption of social media by (MSMEs) actors, academic studies on digital entrepreneurship and the sustainable economy have also experienced significant developments. However, most of the research still focuses on the technological aspects of the platform and digital marketing strategy, with a tendency to position business actors and customers as passive users of digital systems. This approach often ignores the psychological dimensions of digital communication, such as trust, empathy, message clarity, and the quality of interpersonal relationships, which are actually important factors in building customer loyalty and the resilience of (MSMEs) businesses on social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020; Lemoine et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Recent studies show that the success of (MSMEs) on TikTok is greatly influenced by the ability of business actors to present authentic and human-centered communication, not just product promotion (Barta et al., 2023).

In a global and interconnected digital economy, the communication practices of local (MSMEs) actors through social media platforms do not stand separately but are part of a cross-border digital network that brings together business actors with consumers from various social and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the digital communication experience of (MSMEs) actors at the micro level, especially through TikTok, which has conceptual relevance to understand the dynamics of sustainable global economic recovery. This study aims to explore how human-oriented digital communication psychology is carried out by (MSMEs) actors through TikTok and how the practice contributes to strengthening business resilience and sustainable global economic recovery (Kraus et al., 2022; Xanthopoulou et al., 2023).

Literature Review

The literature review in this study was prepared to build a theoretical foundation that is relevant to the focus of the study, namely the psychology of human-oriented digital communication in the context of entrepreneurship of micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) and sustainable global economic recovery. The literature studied includes the perspectives of communication, psychology, entrepreneurship, and digital economy, with special attention to the role of TikTok social media as a medium of communication for (MSMEs) businesses.

Definition of Human-Oriented Digital Communication

Human-oriented digital communication in this study is interpreted as a communication practice mediated by digital technology by placing the psychological and relational aspects of humans as the center of interaction. This approach views communication not only as a means of conveying messages or promotions, but as a process of building common meaning, trust, empathy, and interpersonal closeness in the digital space. In the context of (MSMEs) entrepreneurship, human-oriented digital communication is reflected through authentic, responsive, and contextual interactions, especially when business actors utilize audiovisual-based social media such as TikTok to establish sustainable relationships with customers.

First, the study on digital transformation and entrepreneurship confirms that digitalization has changed the pattern of business communication from face-to-face interaction to communication based on social media platforms. For (MSMEs) actors, platforms like TikTok not only function as a promotional channel, but also as a space for social interaction that allows the building of emotional relationships with customers. Recent research shows that the adoption of TikTok by (MSMEs) actors contributes to increasing business visibility and customer engagement when accompanied by the right communication strategy (Nambisan, 2020; Verhoef et al., 2021; Barta et al., 2023).

Second, the literature on digital communication psychology emphasizes that the effectiveness of social media-based communication is greatly influenced by psychological factors, such as trust, empathy, and the perception of social closeness. In the context of TikTok, audiovisual elements and personal narratives allow (MSMEs) actors to display nonverbal expressions and communication styles that strengthen their sense of social *presence*. Business relationships built through digital communication tend to be more sustainable if business actors are able to provide communication quality that is human and relational, not purely transactional (Walther, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022; Marcoux, 2024).

Third, the *human-centered communication* approach places individual experiences, emotions, and needs at the core of the communication process. In the digital entrepreneurship practices of (MSMEs) actors on TikTok, this approach is reflected in the use of storytelling, personalized language, and empathic responses to customer comments and messages. Studies in the field of digital marketing and communication show that a human-centered approach is able to increase emotional attachment and customer loyalty, especially for small-scale businesses that rely on relational proximity as a competitive advantage (Norman, 2020; Lemoine et al., 2022; Barta et al., 2023).

Fourth, the study of (MSMEs) actors and business resilience shows that flexibility, relational proximity, and the ability to build trust are key factors that enable businesses to survive in economic crisis situations. Social media such as TikTok plays a strategic role as a strategic means for (MSMEs) actors to maintain relationships with customers and adjust communication strategies quickly and adaptively. Empathically managed digital communication has been proven to strengthen the resilience of (MSMEs) in the long term (OECD, 2021; Kraus et al., 2022; Eggers, 2020).

Fifth, the literature on global economic recovery and sustainable development confirms that long-term economic recovery is not only determined by economic growth alone, but also by the sustainability of social relations and people-oriented business practices. In this context, the digital communication practices of (MSMEs) actors through TikTok can be understood as a micro contribution that builds economic resilience at a broader level. The psychology of digital communication serves as a conceptual bridge between (MSMEs) entrepreneurial practices and the dynamics of sustainable global economic recovery (UNDP, 2021; Xanthopoulou et al., 2023).

Based on the synthesis of previous studies, it can be concluded that research on digital transformation, communication psychology, and economic recovery still tends to be studied separately. Studies that integratively place (MSMEs) actors, human-oriented digital communication psychology, and the use of TikTok in one analytical framework are still relatively limited. Therefore, this research is directed to fill this gap by exploring human-oriented digital communication practices carried out by (MSMEs) actors through TikTok as part of the global digital economy ecosystem.

The theoretical framework of this study integrates three main footholds to understand how human-oriented digital communication contributes to (MSMEs) resilience and sustainable economic recovery. First, the study of the psychology of digital communication places attention on the cognitive and affective mechanisms that influence how digital messages are interpreted and how emotional bonds are formed in the online space. Contemporary research highlights concepts such as the perception of social presence, interpersonal trust, and digital empathy, which are factors that determine the quality of customer-business relationships on short-form video platforms such as TikTok (Marcoux, 2024; Zhao, Li, & Liu, 2022). Second, the human-centered communication perspective emphasizes that the effectiveness of communication is not only measured by the frequency of message delivery, but by the extent to which the message strengthens the experience, authenticity, and mutual trust between the communicator and the audience; This approach is relevant when (MSMEs) actors use narrative strategies, personal language, and empathic responses to build attachment on social media (Verhoef et al., 2021; Lemoine, Hartnell, & Leroy, 2022). Third, the literature on digital entrepreneurship and business resilience places digital channels as strategic infrastructure that allows (MSMEs) to adapt, access new markets, and maintain customer relationships in times of crisis; Recent research shows that the level of digital maturity and quality of digital communication are positively correlated with the ability to survive and recover businesses (Kraus et al., 2022; Xanthopoulou, Sahut, & Teulon, 2023). In this context, TikTok is seen as a communication medium that offers a unique opportunity that is a combination of audiovisual and viral formats to actualize the principles of communication psychology and human-centered messaging (Barta et al., 2023). Therefore, this study utilizes an integrative framework that combines the psychological dimensions of messages (trust, empathy, clarity), the quality of interaction based on human-centered communication, and the conception of digital entrepreneurship/resilience

to analyze the communication practices of (MSMEs) actors on TikTok and their implications for business resilience and sustainable economic recovery.

To clarify the relationship between the concepts that are the basis of the analysis in this study, a conceptual framework is prepared that represents the flow of research thought. This framework is used as an analytical guide to understand how humanitarian-oriented digital communication practices, as carried out by micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) through TikTok social media, shape psychological interactions with customers. Through this framework, the relationship between the psychological elements of digital communication, customer engagement, business resilience, and sustainable economic recovery can be understood systematically. This conceptual framework is formulated as a synthesis of the findings of the literature that have been discussed earlier and is used as an analytical guide in interpreting the results of the research.

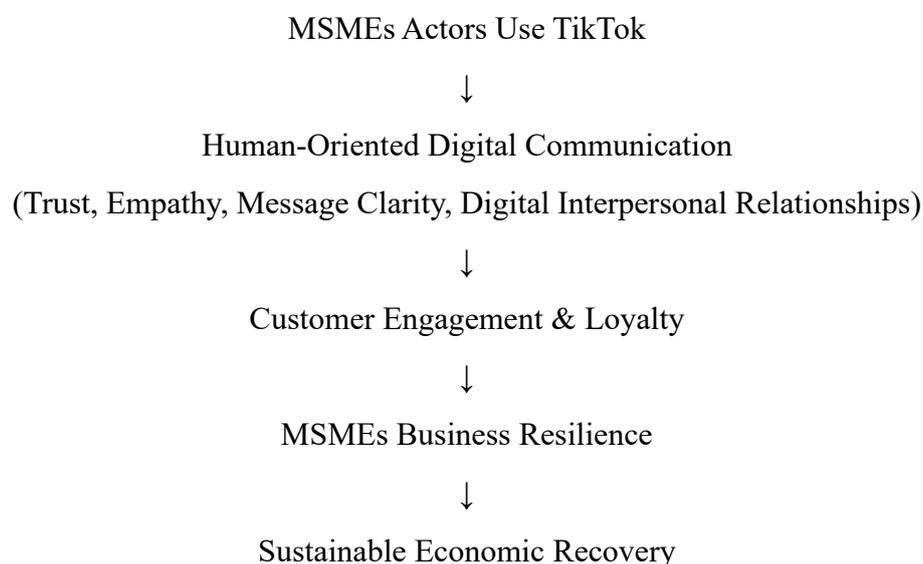


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's Conceptual Framework Developed from Literature Synthesis and Empirical Insights

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study which shows the flow of the relationship between the use of TikTok by micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) and the broader impact of digital communication practices. Human-oriented digital communication characterized by trust building, empathic interaction, message openness, and digital interpersonal relationships plays a key role in shaping customer engagement and loyalty. These relational dynamics further contribute to the ability of MSMEs to maintain the sustainability of their business. Conceptually, this framework emphasizes that digital communication practices at the local level are linked to sustainable economic recovery efforts.

This research uses an exploratory qualitative approach to examine in depth how micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) interpret and apply digital communication that is oriented towards the humanitarian aspect in entrepreneurial activities. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on understanding the experiences, perceptions, and psychological processes that arise in digital communication interactions, which are more precisely analyzed through interpretation of meaning rather than quantitative measurement (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019; Guest, Namey, & Saldaña, 2020). Data was collected through a semi-

structured online interview of eight food and beverage (MSMEs) actors in Kelantan, Malaysia, who were selected purposively based on their active involvement in the use of digital communication platforms to interact with customers. The interview is conducted with five core questions that are developed flexibly during the interview process. Interviews conducted online are seen as relevant because the phenomenon studied is digital communication that is not bound by geographical limitations. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis through the process of organizing data, identifying units of meaning, grouping themes, and interpreting findings to uncover patterns of shared experiences related to the role of digital communication in business resilience and sustainable economic recovery (Guest et al., 2020; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2022). The validity of the data is maintained through checking the consistency between informants and clarifying key findings to ensure that the researcher's interpretation reflects the actual experience of the participants.

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory design to examine in depth how micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) interpret and apply human-oriented digital communication in entrepreneurial practices. The research informants are (MSMEs) actors in the food and beverage sector located in the Pangkalan Chepa area, Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia, and were selected purposively based on their active involvement in the use of TikTok social media as a means of communication with customers. The selection of this location context is based on the characteristics of (MSMEs) that intensively utilize social media in their daily business activities.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured online interviews using the chat feature on the TikTok platform. The interviews focused on informants' experiences in communicating with customers, strategies for building trust and digital closeness, and their perceptions of the role of digital communication in supporting business sustainability. The data obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques through the process of coding, theme grouping, and interpretation of meaning to identify patterns of human-oriented digital communication experiences and processes. The validity of the data is maintained through the consistency of findings between informant answers and interpretations based on the empirical context of the research.

The results of the study were obtained through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with micro and small business actors (MSMEs) who actively use TikTok as a business communication medium. The analysis focused on how (MSMEs) actors interpret the use of TikTok, interaction patterns with customers, and their subjective experiences in building humanitarian-oriented digital communication relationships.

Table 1. Results of Thematic Analysis of Interviews of MSME Actors and TikTok Users

Tema Utama	Thematic Indicators	Informant Representative Quotes	Meaning of Findings
Adopting TikTok as a Business Media	Duration and purpose of use	"I've been on TikTok for 5 years... to expand my business market."	TikTok is interpreted as a strategic means to expand the reach of the MSME market.

Platform Algorithm Optimization	Algorithm and hashtag	"The use of hashtags... to further expand the spread of our business content."	TikTok's algorithm is perceived as an opportunity to increase business visibility.
Changes in Interaction Patterns	Customer initiatives	"Customers are looking for us and asking about our products."	There has been a shift in communication from the active approach of business actors to the interest of the audience.
Digital Trust Building	Testimonials and live broadcasts	"Posting testimonials and live broadcasts... convince customers."	Trust is built through social proof and a sustainable digital presence.
Implications for Business Resilience	Customer interest and interest	"Interesting content makes customers 'wonder' about the taste of the product."	Visual-emotional communication triggers repetitive interactions and business sustainability potential.

Source: Primary Data, Informant Interviews (2026)

Overall, the results of the study show that TikTok is used by (MSMEs) actors as a communication medium that not only serves as a promotional medium, but also as a space for social interaction with customers. The popularity of the platform and the characteristics of its algorithm are understood as factors that help businesses reach relevant audiences, particularly in the food and beverage sector.

The results of the study also revealed a change in communication patterns between business actors and customers. Through TikTok, interactions are no longer fully initiated by business actors but arise from customers' interest in the content presented. Attractive visual content and narrative are considered to be able to foster customer curiosity about product quality, which further encourages follow-up communication.

The aspect of trust and digital proximity is a central theme in the research findings. Informants build customer trust through testimonial uploads and live broadcasts that are carried out consistently. This practice is interpreted as a way to show the existence of a real business and increase customer confidence in the credibility of the business.

Although the informant did not make an explicit statement about the influence of TikTok communication on business sustainability, the narrative that was consistently disclosed showed that the digital communication was understood as a factor that supported business resilience. Customer initiatives to seek information, increased interest in products, and trust-building practices through testimonials and live broadcasts indicate the formation of repeat interactions. In the context of qualitative research, this pattern is seen as a substantive indicator of business sustainability, because sustainability is interpreted through communication practices that are continuously carried out and maintained by business actors.

This discussion is not intended to generalize the findings, but to explore in depth how (MSMEs) actors interpret and carry out human-oriented digital communication practices in the context of using TikTok. With an exploratory qualitative approach, the focus of the discussion is directed at exploring the meaning, process, and subjective experience of business actors in interacting with customers in the digital space.

The research findings show that communication through TikTok allows for more personal and interactive interactions than direct communication that is limited in space and time. Psychological dimensions, such as trust, empathy, and the perception of social presence, emerged as important elements in the digital communication practices of (MSMEs) actors. This is in line with the study of the psychology of digital communication which emphasizes the role of *social presence* and audiovisual-based communication in building psychological closeness between business actors and customers (Zhao et al., 2022; Marcoux, 2024).

The practice of using testimonials and live broadcasts consistently reflects a *human-centered communication* approach, where (MSMEs) actors strive to bring authenticity, transparency, and responsiveness in digital interactions. This approach not only serves as a marketing strategy, but also as a mechanism for building customer trust and loyalty. These findings reinforce the results of previous research that showed that authentic content and personal narratives on short video platforms can increase engagement and long-term relationships between businesses and consumers (Barta et al., 2023; Verhoef et al., 2021).

From the perspective of digital entrepreneurship, the results of this study show that the quality of digital communication contributes to the resilience of (MSMEs) businesses. The use of TikTok's algorithm, the use of hashtags, and the presentation of content that is able to evoke emotional responses allows businesses to reach a wider market and maintain interaction with customers. Recent literature confirms that adaptive and human-centered digital communication strategies are an important factor in increasing business resilience amid economic uncertainty (Kraus et al., 2022; Xanthopoulou et al., 2023).

In a broader context, human-oriented digital communication practices carried out by (MSMEs) actors through TikTok can be understood as a micro-contribution to the sustainable global economic recovery. By strengthening social relationships, trust, and customer involvement in daily economic activities, (MSMEs) not only maintain the sustainability of their business, but also contribute to strengthening the foundation of an inclusive and sustainable digital economy.

Based on the results of the research and discussions that have been conducted, it can be concluded that human-oriented digital communication has a significant role in the entrepreneurial practices of micro and small enterprises (MSMEs), especially through the use of TikTok social media. This research shows that TikTok is not only understood as a means of product promotion, but also as a space for social interaction that allows the building of psychological relationships between business actors and customers.

The results of the thematic analysis revealed that digital communication practices that emphasize building trust, empathic communication, clarity of message delivery, and strengthening digital interpersonal relationships are key elements in maintaining customer engagement and loyalty. Through audiovisual content, testimonials, and live broadcasts, (MSMEs) actors are able to present a social presence and emotional closeness that strengthens

the perception of business credibility. The pattern of interaction that is repetitive and initiated by customers shows that digital communication is perceived as a relational experience, not just an economic transaction.

Furthermore, although the informants did not explicitly link digital communication practices to the concept of economic recovery in macro terms, the findings of this study show that human-oriented digital communication contributes to business resilience at the micro level. This resilience is reflected in the ability of (MSMEs) actors to maintain interaction with customers, foster sustainable interest in products, and maintain business continuity amid uncertain economic dynamics.

Conceptually, this study emphasizes that the psychological dimension in digital communication is an important foundation for the sustainable development of digital entrepreneurship. By placing people, social relations, and the meaning of communication at the core of digital practices, (MSMEs) actors not only strengthen their own business positions, but also make a micro-contribution to a sustainable global economic recovery. Therefore, the human-oriented approach to digital communication psychology is relevant to be considered in the MSME development strategy in the digital economy era.

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- Author Contribution Statement:** The first author conducted the research including conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript drafting. The second author provided academic supervision and guidance throughout the research process and approved the final version of the manuscript.
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