

Digital Health Communication Strategy through TikTok: Content Analysis and Audience Response on the @tirtaaaa Account

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abstract

This study analyzes the role and strategies of digital health communication through TikTok as an effective medium for disseminating health information, with a focus on the TikTok account of Dr. Tirta (@tirtaaaa). A qualitative approach was applied, employing content analysis of health education videos alongside audience response analysis drawn from the comments section. The data set comprised 30 health education videos uploaded between January and March 2025, with approximately 500 comments selected through purposive sampling. The results indicate that a communication strategy emphasizing plain language, a persuasive style, source credibility, and engaging visuals proved most effective in raising audience engagement and comprehension. Audience response analysis revealed that approximately 80–85% of comments were positive, characterized by expressions of support, appreciation, and reported behavioral shifts toward a healthier lifestyle, while the remaining comments consisted of neutral responses and criticism. These findings suggest that strategically managed health communication through TikTok can broaden public awareness of health-related matters. This study also identified potential adverse effects of social media use, including the circulation of misinformation and misinterpretation of health messages when content is not delivered responsibly. The findings confirm that TikTok can serve as an effective health communication medium when supported by appropriate, ethical, and digital literacy-based communication strategies. The study carries practical implications for health practitioners, content creators, and policymakers seeking to utilize social media as a channel for public health education.

abstract

Penelitian ini menganalisis peran dan strategi komunikasi kesehatan digital melalui TikTok sebagai sarana penyebaran informasi kesehatan yang efektif, dengan studi pada akun TikTok dr. Tirta (@tirtaaaa). Pendekatan kualitatif diterapkan dengan metode analisis konten terhadap video edukasi kesehatan serta analisis respons audiens melalui kolom komentar. Data penelitian mencakup 30 video edukasi kesehatan yang diunggah selama periode Januari–Maret 2025, dengan sekitar 500 komentar yang dipilih melalui teknik purposif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi komunikasi yang menekankan bahasa sederhana, gaya persuasif, kredibilitas sumber, serta tampilan visual yang menarik terbukti paling efektif dalam meningkatkan keterlibatan dan pemahaman audiens. Analisis respons audiens menunjukkan bahwa sekitar 80–85% komentar bersifat positif, ditandai dengan ekspresi dukungan, apresiasi, dan laporan perubahan perilaku menuju gaya hidup sehat, sedangkan komentar lainnya berupa respons netral dan kritik. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa komunikasi kesehatan yang dikelola secara strategis melalui TikTok mampu memperluas kesadaran masyarakat terhadap isu-isu kesehatan. Penelitian ini juga menemukan potensi dampak negatif penggunaan media sosial, termasuk peredaran informasi yang keliru dan salah tafsir terhadap pesan kesehatan apabila konten tidak disampaikan secara bertanggung jawab. Temuan tersebut menegaskan bahwa TikTok dapat berfungsi sebagai media komunikasi kesehatan yang efektif apabila didukung oleh strategi komunikasi yang tepat, etis, dan berbasis literasi digital. Penelitian ini membawa implikasi praktis bagi tenaga kesehatan, kreator konten, dan pembuat kebijakan yang hendak memanfaatkan media sosial sebagai saluran edukasi kesehatan masyarakat.

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally altered communication patterns in contemporary society, both at the individual and organizational levels. Social media has shifted beyond its initial function as an entertainment platform into a strategic space for information dissemination, education, and the formation of public awareness. In the health sector, this shift has opened new opportunities for digital health communication, enabling health messages to reach broader audiences in a more interactive and accessible manner. Among various social media platforms, TikTok has experienced particularly rapid growth in Indonesia and has emerged as a prominent medium for educational communication, including health education. Its short-video format, algorithm-driven content distribution, and high audience engagement distinguish TikTok from earlier platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube. However, the ease of accessing health-related information on TikTok also presents significant risks, particularly the spread of misinformation, health myths, and misleading advice that may negatively influence public behavior and health-related decision-making. As a result, the presence of credible health communicators who are capable of delivering accurate information through well-designed communication strategies has become increasingly necessary within the digital media environment.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that social media plays an important role in improving public health literacy. Research by Saggaf *et al.* (2021) and Manurung & Pohan (2024) indicates that health-related content on social media is effective in fostering preventive awareness when messages are delivered communicatively, contextually, and in accordance with audience characteristics. Handoko *et al.* (2025) and Santoso *et al.* (2025) further argue that communicators with professional health backgrounds tend to be perceived as more credible and trustworthy than non-expert or anonymous sources. More recent empirical studies have also begun to examine the role of health influencers on TikTok, revealing that informal, relatable, and narrative-driven communication styles often generate higher audience engagement compared to

formal or purely informational approaches. Studies comparing health communication on TikTok and Instagram suggest that TikTok's casual and entertainment-oriented environment encourages audiences to respond more actively through comments, shares, and imitation of demonstrated behaviors. Nevertheless, most existing research focuses on general engagement metrics or platform affordances, while relatively few studies examine how specific communication styles — particularly humor-based and informal strategies employed by medical professionals — shape audience understanding, trust, and behavioral awareness in health contexts.

In this regard, Dr. Tirta Mandira Budi serves as a relevant case study. Through the TikTok account @tirtaaaa, Dr. Tirta actively disseminates health information related to physical fitness, exercise, healthy lifestyles, and the clarification of health myths. His communication style is characterized by humor, spontaneity, everyday language, and occasional use of regional expressions, which distinguishes his content from more formal health communication typically found on institutional or governmental platforms. The inclusion of non-health topics such as football and personal experiences also functions as an audience retention strategy that reduces information fatigue. This phenomenon can be analyzed through the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which posits that the adoption of new ideas or behaviors is shaped by innovation characteristics, communication channels, time, and social systems. As elaborated by Zahbi & Muslimah (2024), the adoption of health knowledge and healthy living behaviors is shaped by the characteristics of the innovation itself, the communication channels used, the time required for adoption, and the social system in which it occurs. In this case, Dr. Tirta functions as an opinion leader who accelerates the dissemination of health messages through TikTok as a popular, visual, and widely accessible communication channel. Social Learning Theory further accounts for the effectiveness of this approach, as audiences learn not only through information exposure but also through observation and modeling of credible figures. As a medically trained physician, Dr. Tirta possesses scientific legitimacy that reinforces audience trust and encourages the adoption of healthy behaviors demonstrated in his content.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital health communication, a clear research gap persists. Existing studies have not sufficiently examined how humorous and informal communication strategies employed by medical professionals on TikTok shape audience responses, nor have they adequately analyzed public reactions in comment sections as indicators of message effectiveness and health awareness formation. Comparative analysis between TikTok-based health communication and similar practices on other platforms also remains limited, particularly within the Indonesian context. Based on this gap, this study seeks to analyze the communication strategy employed by Dr. Tirta on TikTok and to examine audience responses to his health education content. By focusing on both message construction and public interaction, this research aims to contribute to the theoretical development of digital health communication studies, while providing practical guidance for health professionals, influencers, and content creators in delivering accurate, responsible, and audience-appropriate health information through social media.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design, which is considered appropriate for examining the communication strategies used by Dr. Tirta Mandira Budi as a health communicator on TikTok. The qualitative descriptive approach enables researchers to understand meanings, communication patterns, and audience interpretations within their natural digital context, and to systematically describe communication messages, content characteristics, and public responses as they appear in TikTok interactions (Putri & Murhayati, 2025). The primary data source consists of video content uploaded on the TikTok account @tirtaaaa, which focuses on health education, physical fitness, and healthy lifestyle promotion. Data were collected during a three-month observation period from January to March 2025 (Arianto, 2024).

The sampling technique applied was purposive sampling, with the following selection criteria: (1) videos explicitly containing health education

messages covering exercise, healthy lifestyle, and clarification of health myths or facts; (2) videos uploaded within the designated observation period; and (3) videos with high audience interaction, indicated by a minimum of 10,000 views and active comment sections. Based on these criteria, 30 TikTok videos were selected as the main units of analysis, and approximately 500 audience comments were purposively sampled from the selected videos to represent public responses. Supporting data were obtained from secondary sources, including journal articles, podcast appearances by Dr. Tirta, and relevant scientific explanations disseminated through digital media (Arianto, 2024).

This study applies qualitative content analysis to examine both message construction and audience responses. A coding scheme was developed based on literature on health communication, influencer communication strategies, and digital media studies (Adlini *et al.*, 2022). The content analysis framework covers two main dimensions. The first dimension concerns Communication Strategy Categories, which include message theme (exercise, lifestyle, health myths and facts), communication style (humorous, informal, persuasive, educational), message delivery technique (visual demonstration, storytelling, scientific explanation), and use of language (everyday language, regional language, technical or medical terms). The second dimension concerns Audience Response Categories, which include positive responses (support, appreciation, agreement, behavioral intention), neutral responses (questions, clarifications, informational requests), and negative responses (criticism, skepticism, disagreement) (Sugiyono, 2022). The coding process was conducted in three stages: (1) open coding to identify recurring themes, (2) axial coding to relate categories and subcategories, and (3) selective coding to determine dominant patterns of communication strategies and audience responses (Arianto, 2024).

Data analysis followed qualitative descriptive analysis techniques (Ilhami *et al.*, 2024), consisting of three sequential steps: data reduction, by selecting, simplifying, and focusing relevant content and comments; data display, by presenting excerpts of content and representative comments as empirical evidence; and conclusion drawing and verification, by

identifying consistent patterns and interpreting findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks applied. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, several strategies were employed, including theoretical triangulation by interpreting findings through Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Social Learning Theory, source triangulation by comparing TikTok content, audience comments, and secondary references, and peer debriefing through discussion of coding categories with fellow researchers to reduce subjective bias. Although formal inter-coder reliability testing was not applied given the qualitative nature of the study, coding consistency was maintained through repeated review and refinement of coding categories (Mujibur *et al.*, 2023).

This study relies entirely on publicly accessible TikTok data. No private accounts, direct messages, or personal identifying information were collected or disclosed, and all usernames in comment excerpts were anonymized to protect user privacy. Formal ethical clearance was therefore not required, although ethical research principles regarding confidentiality and responsible data use were strictly observed throughout the study. It should also be noted that this research does not employ interviews as a data collection method; all data were obtained through content analysis of TikTok videos, audience comments, and secondary digital sources (Ilhami *et al.*, 2024).

Table 1. TikTok Account Data of Dr. Tirta

TikTok Account	Followers	Content Type
@tirtaaaa	2.3M	Health education, benefits of exercise for physical health, and tutorials on healthy living
@info.healthid	57.1K	Health myths and facts, health education, and factual health information
@motivation_generalll	26.2K	Mental health motivation, mental health discussion, and health education

3. Results and Discussion

Results

Dr. Tirta's Communication Strategy on TikTok

Dr. Tirta Mandira Hudhi graduated cum laude from the Faculty of Medicine at Gadjah Mada University and subsequently completed a Master's degree in Business Management at the Bandung Institute of Technology. Alongside his medical practice at Dr. Sardjito General Hospital, he is recognized as a shoe care entrepreneur and an active content creator across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. In the context of this study, Dr. Tirta's academic and professional background is positioned as a social credential that shapes the credibility of his communication as a health figure on social media, rather than as the primary object of analysis.

Content analysis of Dr. Tirta's TikTok account reveals several defining characteristics of his communication approach. He consistently uses informal speech and colloquial language that aligns

with the communication culture of younger social media users. Medical and scientific terms are routinely accompanied by analogies or everyday examples, making health information accessible to lay audiences. His visual presentation — including colored hair and tattoos — departs from the conventional doctor stereotype, drawing audience attention from the opening seconds of each video. Humor and emotional expression are also embedded throughout his content, making health messages feel approachable without reducing their educational value. His video topics are predominantly centered on health myths versus facts, healthy lifestyles, exercise and fitness, and current health issues. These findings indicate that Dr. Tirta's health communication is oriented not only toward information transfer, but also toward building emotional closeness with his audience.

Audience responses in the comment sections reflect a high level of engagement and understanding. The majority of health content received consistent numbers of likes, comments, and shares, with positive comments predominating. These positive responses include expressions of appreciation, follow-up

questions, and personal accounts related to health. Representative comments include the following:

"I only understood about cholesterol after watching this video, the explanation was really easy."

"At first I was hesitant about exercising because of this myth, but after Dr. Tirta explained it, I became more confident."

These responses provide empirical evidence that the health messages conveyed were not only understood but also influenced audience attitudes and behavioral intentions. The findings align with Social Learning Theory, in which audiences learn through observing figures perceived as credible and socially relatable. Dr. Tirta functions as a non-patronizing health role model who encourages audiences to adopt the healthy behaviors he demonstrates. From the perspective of Diffusion of Innovation Theory, his content operates at the persuasion and decision stages, where health information presented in a simple and persuasive manner encourages audiences to consider lifestyle changes. The clear separation between communicator profile, content analysis, and audience response in this study makes the findings more systematic and academically accountable.

Public Response to Health Education Content

Analysis of audience responses on Dr. Tirta's TikTok account shows that the majority of viewers responded positively to the health education content delivered. This is reflected in the intensity of comments, follow-up questions, and expressions of appreciation that appear consistently across video uploads. Audience comments were classified into three categories — positive, neutral, and negative — with positive responses constituting the clear majority. These positive comments typically include expressions of increased understanding, acknowledgment of the content's usefulness, and stated intentions to adopt healthier behaviors. The following comments illustrate the range of audience engagement:

"The content is really helpful, I only understood the cholesterol myth after it was explained here."

"Doctor, I want to ask, is exercising at night safe for your heart?"

"When Dr. Tirta explains it, I feel more confident, because it's clear and well-founded."

"I usually get confused reading health regulations, but this explanation is concise and makes sense."

"I agree, doc. Now I'm more careful when I get health information on social media."

These responses demonstrate that audiences are not passive consumers of content; they actively engage with it, using Dr. Tirta's account as a reference for health-related questions. The high level of acceptance was also supported by the two-way interaction pattern Dr. Tirta maintains, as he regularly responds to audience questions both through direct replies and by producing follow-up content addressing recurring concerns. His professional background as a physician was consistently cited by audiences as a basis for trust, confirming that communicator expertise directly strengthens the credibility and acceptance of health messages on social media. The content also contributed to building digital health literacy, as audiences reported becoming more selective and critical in evaluating health information encountered on other platforms.

Discussion

The health communication strategy implemented by Dr. Tirta through his TikTok account @tirtaaaa proved effective in attracting audience attention and increasing public health understanding. This section situates these empirical findings within the theoretical frameworks of Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Social Learning Theory. Within the Diffusion of Innovation Theory framework, Dr. Tirta can be positioned as an opinion leader who bridges medical knowledge as innovation and the general public as adopters. The findings support the theory's core premise that innovation adoption is accelerated when information is delivered by a trusted and socially relevant figure. Innovation characteristics such as relative advantage, compatibility with daily life, and simplicity of message are clearly evident in his content, as previously complex health information is repackaged into straightforward, contextual, and applicable messages. These findings extend the understanding of diffusion theory by confirming that informal communication styles and humor are not merely entertainment elements but functional strategies that accelerate the persuasion and decision-making stages of the adoption process (Gushevinalti et al., 2020). At the same time, this study challenges

the classical assumption of diffusion theory that emphasizes the rationality of message recipients. In the TikTok environment, the adoption of health information is shaped not only by message rationality but also by emotional appeal, symbolic proximity, and audience identification with the communicator (Fauzy, 2023; Suardi, 2024).

From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, Dr. Tirta functions not merely as an information source but as a behavioral model. Audiences learn through observing the way he thinks, speaks, and critically engages with health topics. Active interaction in the comment sections, follow-up health questions, and positive responses to calls for lifestyle change all indicate vicarious learning in practice. Humor and a relaxed communication style serve as attention triggers — a prerequisite for the social learning process to occur — thereby expanding the application of Social Learning Theory to algorithm-based social media environments (Nugraeni, 2024; Andriani *et al.*, 2024). One substantive contribution of this study is the demonstration that professional credibility and informal communication styles are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually reinforcing (Santoso *et al.*, 2025). Dr. Tirta's medical authority provides scientific legitimacy to the message, while his assertive and humorous style functions as a relational bridge that brings the message closer to a lay audience. This produces a dual form of trust — expertise-based trust and relational trust — which enriches the discourse on health communication by showing that message effectiveness depends not only on the identity of the communicator but also on how professional authority is expressed in informal digital spaces (Siti Umadiyah, 2025; Ramadhanti *et al.*, 2024; Saragih & Manurung, n.d.).

The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of TikTok-based health communication strategies that simultaneously combine medical credibility, a humorous and assertive communication style, and direct audience interaction. Unlike prior studies that focus primarily on information dissemination or communicator credibility in isolation, this research examines the community learning process that occurs through digital interaction — an area that remains underexplored in Indonesian health communication scholarship. The findings offer a

theoretical contribution by enriching the application of both Innovation Diffusion Theory and Social Learning Theory in the context of TikTok-based digital health communication, and provide practical guidance for health practitioners, content creators, and institutions in designing communication strategies that are credible, accessible, and responsive to audience characteristics (Kautsar *et al.*, 2025; Al Hanif *et al.*, 2023).

This study has several limitations that merit consideration. The analysis relied on publicly available TikTok data without access to internal analytics platforms, limiting the measurement of engagement depth and audience distribution. The study did not involve direct interviews with Dr. Tirta or his audience, which restricts insight into subjective perceptions, motivations, and the long-term behavioral impact of the content. The focus on a single health communicator also limits the generalizability of the findings. These limitations point to opportunities for future research employing mixed methods, incorporating audience surveys or interviews, and comparing communication strategies across multiple health influencers and platforms.

4. Conclusion

This study confirms that TikTok can serve as an effective health communication medium when used strategically by credible communicators who adapt their approach to the characteristics of digital audiences. The findings empirically demonstrate that Dr. Tirta Mandira Hudhi's communication strategy on TikTok was able to increase public attention, understanding, and awareness of health issues and healthy lifestyles. The effectiveness of his digital health communication is determined not only by the speed and reach of the platform, but also by the combination of professional credibility, a bold and humorous informal communication style, and the visual, concise, and interactive nature of TikTok as a medium. A central finding of this study is that a relaxed and humorous communication style, when grounded in medical authority, strengthens audience trust and accelerates the acceptance of health information — a finding that extends the understanding of digital health communication

beyond formal and conventional approaches.

Theoretically, this study contributes to health communication scholarship by broadening the application of Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Social Learning Theory within the context of TikTok as an algorithm-driven communication medium. The findings demonstrate that health education on social media is not merely a process of information dissemination, but also a process of social learning and behavioral adoption shaped by digital opinion leaders. Practically, the findings carry implications for healthcare professionals, communication practitioners, and policymakers. Health communication strategies on social media need to combine scientific accuracy with accessible language and encourage two-way interaction with audiences. Healthcare institutions and governments may draw on this approach when designing digital health campaigns that are more persuasive, inclusive, and relevant to younger audiences.

This study acknowledges several limitations. The analysis relied on publicly available data without access to internal analytics platforms, and did not include quantitative measurement of changes in audience attitudes or behaviors. Future research is encouraged to adopt quantitative or mixed methods approaches to measure content effectiveness more objectively, including its influence on health behavior change. Comparative studies involving multiple health communicators across different platforms such as Instagram or YouTube would also strengthen the generalizability of these findings. Ultimately, this study affirms that effective digital health communication requires not only an appropriate platform, but also a communication strategy that connects health science with the social realities of the audience — making social media a credible and participatory space for public health education.

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