

## HOW BRAND EMPATHY CREATED: STUDY ON ORGANIC VIRAL CONTENT

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### ABSTRACT

This research explores and develops the concept of Brand Empathy which includes cognitive empathy, emotive empathy, and empathic action, in the context of viral content between Indomie and Mie Gaga on the TikTok platform, generated through AI storytelling. This research describes the empathy formed by significant discussions on social media, especially TikTok, regarding the story of Djajadi Djaja, the founder of Mie Gaga, and the journey of establishing the instant noodle brand. The research method uses qualitative content analysis with snowball sampling through social media content and comments on TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. Positive and negative opinions play an important role in shaping Brand Empathy. With AI storytelling technology, viral content triggers intense reactions and leads consumers to Brand Empathy. The development of Brand Empathy involves cognitive empathy in understanding and identifying controversies, emotive empathy in emotional responses, and empathic action in tangible actions. The emotional attachment between the audience and the brand creates a parasocial relationship, which demonstrates consumer loyalty and brand reputation. This research provides deep insight into the complexity of e-WOM and introduces a new approach to understanding audience-brand interactions in the digital age through Brand Empathy. This research also highlights the role of cognitive empathy in Brand Empathy related to information dissemination, especially in the context of viral content about Mie Gaga and Indomie. Audiences actively understood and identified feelings, thoughts and perspectives related to the controversy.

**Keywords:** *Brand Empathy; Audience; Content analysis*



## INTRODUCTION

With so many people browsing social media sites every day, businesses and non-profit organizations can benefit significantly from the broad reach of social media. Any post can go "viral," but storytelling in video format is much better than the written word. Creating custom-made videos allows organizations to tell a unique story specific to the message they want to share with the world. Some literature on storytelling and supporting data shows that storytelling often leads to engagement from social media users (Rummel, 2023). The use of storytelling can be easily found and integrated from various external sources such as testimonials, social media videos, and media coverage. Even without the involvement of these organizations, brand stories can be shared widely. The use of storytelling by brands has relevance for online engagement as the algorithms of social media platforms make it increasingly difficult for marketers to achieve reach organically. A brand's content must be authentic and highly engaging to reach consumers organically, and storytelling provides the means to achieve this goal (Kemp et al., 2023).

The following viral case stems from a busy post on TikTok about the commissioner of Mie Gaga producer PT Jakarana Tama Djajadi Djaja, who is said to be the inventor of Indomie until he finally had problems with Sudono Salim, the current owner of the Indomie brand. Djajadi Djaja and Sudono Salim founded PT Indofood Eterna in 1984. However, in 1993, financial problems befell Djajadi's company until the Salim Group, initiated by Sudono Salim, cut ties, and kicked him out of Indofood. Djajadi continued to sell instant noodles under PT Jakarana Tama. Djajadi is still listed as a commissioner in the company that sells Mie Gaga products.

The case began in 1999 when Djajadi was known to have filed a lawsuit against PT Indofood Sukses Makmur and four former officials over the company's purchase of trademarks in the mid-1980s. Indofood and its four executives, according to lawyers from the Lubis law firm, were sued for engaging in unfair business practices against Djajadi regarding a share purchase agreement in the mid-1980s. Djajadi was forced to sell 11 food brands to the defendants for only 30,000 rupiah. Djajadi sued to have the transaction annulled, alleging that the sale agreement was taken by force. Djajadi insisted that the brands were privately owned and should not have been included as Sanmaru assets (Puspadini, 2023).

The case went viral on social media and originated from a post on TikTok; the author found that an account with the username @hizkiaontiktok did a parody in a storytelling format that told the story of Djajadi Djaja, with the form of AI and POV from Djajadi Djaja. The content received 27.9 million views, 1.7 million likes, 46,400 comments, and 139,600 shares (September 21, 2023). On Twitter, a post was found by @muthiastp explaining a viral TikTok video regarding the Indomie vs. Mie Gaga case. Several content creators who made content would not buy Indomie products anymore. The content received 490,000 views, 1821 reposts, 1,210 quotes, 8,345 likes, and 1,282 bookmarks (September 21, 2023).

Top Brand Award released research results regarding brand comparisons in the Food and Beverage category, specifically in the Instant Noodles in Bag Packaging sub-category. The results show that in the latest data, Top Brand Index Phase 1 2023, Indomie is the Top Brand Index with a score of 72.50%, while Mie Gaga gets 1.70%. Since 2019, Indomie has consistently earned the Top Brand Index title with a consistent score above 70%.

Various reactions, both positive and negative, are generated from the contents. Empathy for positive influence is usually beneficial (Blanke et al., 2015). Brand empathy is a popular concept among practitioners. The researcher adjusted the concept of brand empathy so that it could be further explored as a study derived from the concept of empathy. Empathy plays an essential interpersonal and social role, enabling individuals to share experiences, needs, and desires and providing an emotional bridge that encourages prosocial behavior (Riess, 2017). Brand empathy puts the viewpoints of consumers and brands to understand each other's feelings, emotions, and motivations. How both listen to thoughts and feelings, make observations about the products of the brand, and integrate them into a cohesive perspective, or called empathy (placing oneself in another's point of view). Empathy describes the process of sharing feelings, i.e., resonating with the feelings of others, regardless of valence (positive/negative), but with the explicit knowledge that the other person is the origin of these emotions (Preckel et al., 2018).

The effects of applying empathy in objective marketing include (1) consumer consideration in choosing a brand, (2) after consumers have considered the brand, there is an intention to buy products from the brand, (3) the development of consumer loyalty regarding the brand, (4) consumers can quickly identify the brand, brand identity has a significant role in distinguishing the brand from competitors, (5) and brand essence which is the soul of a brand and has a role as a foundation for the brand to appear consistent and authentic and has the aim of stimulating cognition, affection, and emotions in consumers (Trop, 2021).

In practical terms, empathy can be built from the brand to the consumer (customer empathy) or from the consumer to the brand (brand empathy). Brand empathy is a point of view from both consumers and brands that understand feelings, emotions, and motivations. Empathy has various effects on marketing goals, including consideration, increasing purchase interest, loyalty, brand identification, and brand essence (Trop, 2021). One of the dimensions carried out in measuring brand empathy is (1) cognitive empathy, (2) emotional empathy, and (3) empathic action.

Cognitive Empathy is the first stage in empathic engagement, which is understanding a person's perspective and what that person might be thinking and feeling. Cognitive Empathy occurs at the cognitive level and makes guesses based on one's knowledge and past experiences. Cognitive Empathy tries to put oneself in the position of others, and the ability to put oneself in cognitive experience is closely related to the ability to think. Then, researchers elaborated

on the development of cognitive Empathy, namely the ability to understand someone's perspective and what that person might think and feel.

Emotive Empathy is how to place feelings with someone, involving cognitive and affective. Biologically, tiny neurons fire when we experience an emotion and see someone else experiencing an emotion. Emotive Empathy is our choice to allow ourselves to experience that feeling with them, especially since we are socialized not to allow ourselves to feel uncomfortable feelings. This means emotional adjustment. Emotive Empathy goes beyond the cognitive and is not above or separate from the cognitive. It is biologically connected, with tiny neurons firing when we experience an emotion and see others experiencing it. When we see someone sad, we experience it directly. We choose to allow ourselves to experience that feeling with them, especially since we are socialized not to allow ourselves to feel uncomfortable feelings.

Empathic Action moves people to take Action to help however they can. Various forms of Empathic Action include giving direct help, asking about the help that can be given, or just sitting in silence as a form of empathy (Miller, 2022). Empathic Action. Action means standing and being with someone without directly giving advice or trying to solve or fix a problem. It encourages others to take Action to help wherever possible. This can be considered direct assistance, asking how someone can help. Alternatively, just sit quietly with them and not "do" anything (Miller, 2022).

Due to the lack of previous research on brand empathy by Mie Gaga or Indomie, through the following study, the researcher would like to see how brand empathy created through these organic contents on social media. Researchers will look at the responses given by audiences through brand empathy analysis through content analysis studies and literature studies. The study explores how brand empathy is generated through organic content on social media. This adds to the understanding of the mechanisms through which e-WOM can shape consumer emotions and attitudes toward brands. By analyzing audience responses, the study provides a detailed understanding of how consumers perceive and interact with brands in the context of e-WOM. This can help in designing more effective communication strategies that resonate with the target audience. The findings contribute to communication theory by illustrating how e-WOM functions as a tool for creating emotional connections between consumers and brands. This expands the theoretical framework surrounding e-WOM and brand empathy.

This paper is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of how e-WOM creates brand empathy for both Mie Gaga and Indomie. The paper begins with an introduction that outlines the research background, objectives, and significance of the study. Following this, the literature review section synthesizes existing research on e-WOM and brand empathy, identifying gaps that this study aims to fill. The methodology section details the research

design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques employed, including content analysis and literature studies. In the findings section, the results of the content analysis are presented, highlighting key themes and patterns in audience responses. The discussion section interprets these findings in the context of existing literature, exploring their implications for theory and practice. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main findings, discusses limitations, and suggests directions for future research. This structured approach ensures a logical flow of information and facilitates a thorough understanding of the study's contributions to the field.

## **METHODS**

Researchers use the post-positivist paradigm to examine how to see a single reality and see causal explanations of phenomena that have patterns (Tracy, 2020). The following research uses a qualitative approach from anthropology, sociology, and humanities. Researchers use an interpretivist perspective to explain phenomena, namely how brand empathy that comes from experience and produces knowledge forged by reason (Salmons, 2022); (Helaluddin & Wijaya, 2019). This study employs content analysis instead of interviews requiring key informants because content analysis allows for a broader examination of organic social media content and audience responses without the need for direct interaction with specific individuals.

Researchers use case studies to review e-WOM and brand empathy from content about Mie Gaga and Indomie on online channels. The data on the case is detailed; researchers explain in detail how the following cases are reviewed from the dimensions of e-WOM and brand empathy. The research data, which comes from various sources researchers collect, is varied and broad. The primary data is content from Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, and not limited to comments that fulfill the concept classification of brand empathy from Mie Gaga and Indomie. The data is a sequential sample, one of the non-probability samples used for case finding until no other new information and characteristics about the case are found. The sequential sample is suitable for the following study because the researcher collects content about the case until it reaches saturation (Djamba & Neuman, 2014).

The following research technique will use qualitative content analysis designed for 'text' data types that can be transferred to other data types such as videos, images, and photos. The following analysis is carried out in a systematic and methodologically controlled manner, where there is an understanding of the meaning of the text and the interpretation of the text that focuses on actual content; the following research will look at how the understanding of the concept of brand empathy consisting of cognitive empathy, emotive empathy, and action empathy are reviewed based on content or comments from social media that researchers found about the viral case regarding the competition between Mie Gaga and Indomie. The following content is one of the data types in content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Brand Empathy

Empathy involves understanding and sharing feelings with others (Håkansson Eklund & Summer Meranius, 2021), and in the context of branding, it means the relationship between brands and audiences on an emotional level. In this context, researchers see how audiences from various platforms share their personal experiences about the Mie Gaga or Indomie brands. One of the efforts in building brand empathy through e-WOM is through storytelling. The beginning of the spread of e-WOM about Mie Gaga and Indomie came from content with a storytelling format shared through the TikTok platform.

After the storytelling content from @hizkiaontiktok has gone viral, not a few audiences have returned to share their respective stories about the Mie Gaga and Indomie brands, both stories about the brand acquisition story, or just the audience's personal experience while being a consumer of the two Mi Instant brands. The stories shared by the audience can be felt by other audiences until there is an emotional connection between the audience and the brand being told; in this case, the audience feels that they have something in common with other audiences who have the same experience with the Mie Gaga or Indomie brands.

E-WOM can create brand empathy by utilizing authentic stories, sharing the acquisition story of the Indomie brand, building a sense of community because they feel they are loyal consumers of both Mie Gaga and Indomie, humanizing the brand through social media engagement, where audiences feel compassion, pity, and feel one with Djajadi Djaja, the inventor of the Indomie brand who is considered by the audience to have had the experience of being betrayed by a business partner;

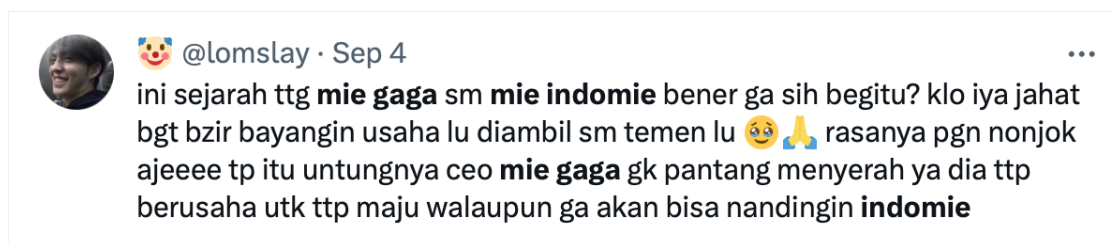
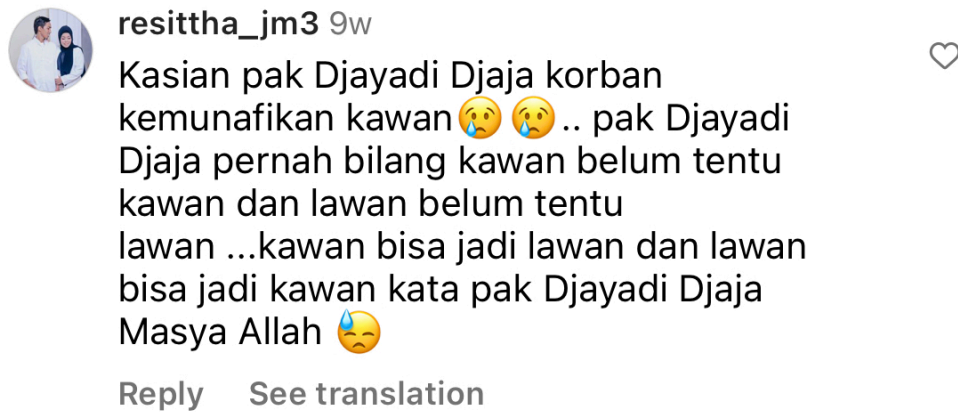


Figure 1. Brand Empathy on Netizen' X Post

Source: X.com

The following is one of the opinions expressed by netizens regarding their empathy for the story that spread about the betrayal of Indomie. Netizens expressed their desire to "hit" the business partner of Mie Gaga but Netizens also felt empathy for his efforts and perseverance.



**Figure 2.** Brand Empathy on Netizen' Instagram Comment

Source: Instagram.com

Netizens also think that Djajadi Djaja is a victim of friends' hypocrisy. Audiences also feel that the following is an opportunity for Mie Gaga to be able to interact with the audience to bring in new customers and maintain loyal customers, as shown below



**Figure 3.** Brand Empathy on Netizen' X Post

Source: X.com

Netizens think that this is a good opportunity for Mie Gaga to reach a larger audience, and then also consumers who were loyal before become even more loyal because they know the story behind it.



**Figure 4.** Brand Empathy on Netizen' Instagram Comment

**Source:** Instagram.com

When audiences feel a genuine connection with a brand, they tend to develop a sense of empathy that leads to loyalty; it has been found that higher levels of loyalty are driven by empathy (Shuqair et al., 2021).

### Cognitive Empathy

Empathy consists of several parts; the cognitive is how the audience puts themselves in the experience that involves the audience's thinking. Audiences try to understand Mie Gaga's perspective, specifically how Djajadi thinks about acquiring the product he has built.

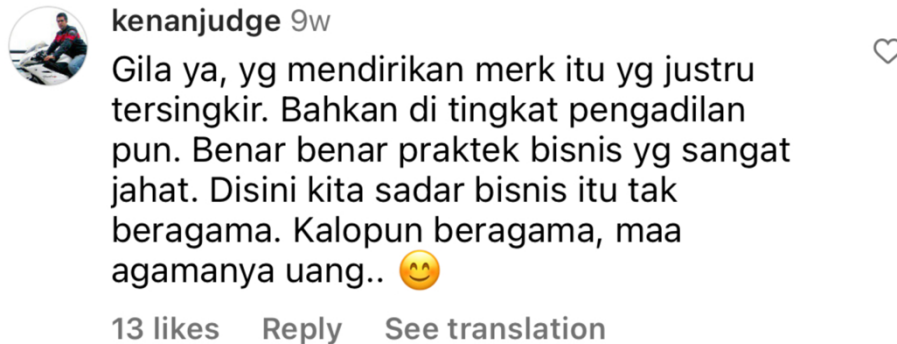


**Figure 5.** Cognitive Brand Empathy on Netizen' X Post

**Source:** X.com

Netizens began to find out how the truth of the following history of the establishment of Mie Gaga. After learning that Mie Gaga was founded by the same person who founded Indomie, Netizens began to try to put themselves in the experience as the following image

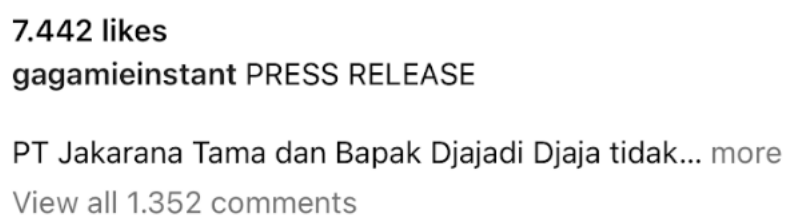




**Figure 6.** Cognitive Brand Empathy on Netizen' Instagram Comment

Source: Instagram.com

The audience's curiosity, which leads to seeking information about the Mie Gaga and Indomie case, is a form of cognitive empathy, which can be seen from how the audience expresses their curiosity. The following explains that audiences can behave exploratively to achieve their goals at the cognitive stage. A high need for an explanation allows audiences to act more openly and feel curious so that audiences will seek and collect more information and invest more effort in completing cognitive tasks (Szumowska & Kruglanski, 2020). In this case, audiences can find out more about the story of Djajadi Djaja, the founder of Indomie, by visiting Mie Gaga's Instagram page and interacting with each other to get the desired truth.



**Figure 7.** @gagameinstant instagram comment section

Source: Instagram.com

In the comments found on the post by Instagram @gagameinstant, the majority of the comments argued for empathy towards Mie Gaga. This finding is an expected thing to see as the viral content spread across social media highlighted the story behind Mie Gaga, rather than the story of Indomie.

Audiences expressed their curiosity with the keyword 'curious.' Some have tried to find variants of Mie Gaga but found it challenging to get. Then, some audiences have not consumed Mie Gaga for years but are now moved to want to know the taste of Mie Gaga; it is interesting to see how e-WOM from viral content can bring back old consumers. The existence of curiosity is also evidenced by audience comments asking what variants are attractive for new consumers to taste to resolve curiosity. In addition, a form of cognitive empathy is also evidenced by how audiences feel curious about trying Gaga Noodles but cannot try them because they cannot consume spicy flavors. This shows how Mie Gaga has achieved cognitive empathy, the audience's curiosity about the taste of Mie Gaga, and the cognition that Mie Gaga has a spicy flavor.

Other audiences also expressed opinions logically but still involved feelings, where the audience commented that there was a difficult situation; if the viral content of Mie Gaga were consistently reported, it would shift the position of Indomie for consumers. Other consumers also argue that Mie Gaga has good taste but is losing market dominance to its competitors; the following audience also hopes that Stalls will start selling Mie Gaga to reach a broader market. In addition to tiny stalls, the audience also began to realize that Mie Gaga is already in a position parallel to Indomie on the Mi Instant shelf, where Mie Gaga is usually placed in a relatively low position.

The massive comments and interactions of the audience regarding the curiosity of the taste of Mie Gaga created a new question for himself. When one of the audience stated that he had known for a long time that Mie Gaga had a delicious taste, but the audience did not know the story circulating about Djajadi Djaja, the audience questioned whether there was something wrong with him, the following empathetic feelings could be developed to a higher level into an affective form even to action.

Feelings of empathy, especially cognitive empathy, are often confused with feelings of sympathy, which is the ability to feel sorry for an event others face and emphasizes passive connections. In contrast, empathy generally involves more active efforts to understand other people's feelings, such as understanding and feeling what others feel (Kliszczak, 2020). Cognitive empathy positions the audience to be able to identify the emotions and state of mind of others while still being based on logic (Villines, 2023). Audiences think that the risk of being involved in big business is scary. This is an association of the feelings involved in being in Djajadi Djaja's position and how the audience thinks about what it would feel like to put themselves in that position. The audience has judged that business practices are evil and decided that business is not based on religion, and if it is, then the religion of business is money. This is a metaphor used by the audience, who feels the injustice of the situation and is surprised that those who founded the brand are the ones who are excluded.

On the official Mie Gaga Instagram page, it has been explained that there is a clarification explaining that Mie Gaga has never ordered, uploaded, or become a source of the viral content circulating. The content was uploaded to avoid the snowball effect of conversations about Mie Gaga and Indomie. Various responses were expressed by the audience, one of which stated that the audience at least knew the facts through the viral content circulating.



**Figure 8.** Cognitive Brand Empathy on Netizen' Instagram Comment

Source: Instagram.com

This does not explicitly explain what facts mean, but the opinion can lead to the perception that what is explained by the viral content is a fact. Mie Gaga did not provide any confirmation but replied to the comment with the statement, "Terima kasih ya Kak :D."

Placing a position on the emotions felt by others can trigger emotional concern, the tendency to approach and support others, and the ability to recognize and identify the emotional state of others. Having cognitive empathy is an ability that can prevent individuals from experiencing anxiety in uncertain situations (Pittelkow et al., 2021). Based on the clarification content uploaded by Mie Gaga, the audience also understands the position faced by Mie Gaga, from various audience comments expressing regret that through the content, Mie Gaga should not have to clarify and take advantage of the situation. Audiences expressed that they understood that the clarification was made to avoid speculation about Mie Gaga being perceived as conducting a black campaign to increase her popularity. Audiences also express tolerance by wishing Djaja got good karma because of the bad things he experienced in the past and hoping that Mie Gaga can soon IPO and compete with other brands.

### **Emotive Empathy**

One of the dimensions of brand empathy is emotive empathy, which is adapted from various academic literature regarding the ability to understand and feel the emotional state of

others (Cuff et al., 2016). The ability to feel the emotions of others by imagining being in that person's position, which affects the shape of the relationship between the two, can be said to be emotive empathy (Schneider, 2021). Many practical approaches have been shown to have links to the field of marketing in a planned manner, one of which is utilising the theory of gratitude or gratitude disclosure. The expression of gratitude can encourage relationships that develop to the commitment stage in the context of consumers and brands (Raggio et al., 2014).

In contrast to the following study, which planned and amplified the application of gratitude to strengthen the relationship between consumers and brands, the following study found various forms of emotive empathy by audiences towards the Mie Gaga brand. Audiences expressed gratitude that, thanks to the viral content, the public understood the story of Indomie's founder. Audiences also think that they are on the right side. Audiences feel grateful for supporting people who are considered good. Audiences think that Mie Gaga is now getting much attention because of netizens. Audiences write that this is the power of netizen conscience with the hashtag #powerofkarma #powerofnetizentiktok.

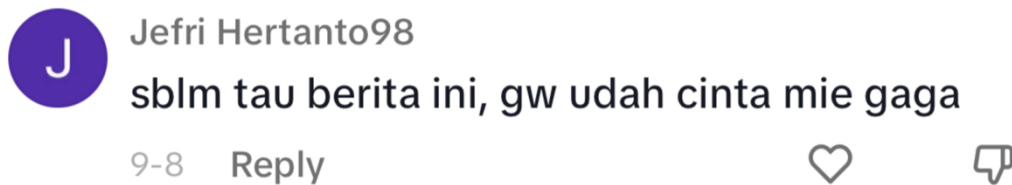
In addition to responses from audiences who have never tried Gaga Noodles, other responses were also expressed by long-time consumers of Gaga Noodles; consumers argued as loyal consumers or referred to themselves as "Team Gaga." the audience felt happy that more and more people realized that Gaga Noodles were delicious as shown below.



**Figure 9.** Emotive Brand Empathy on Netizen' X Post

**Source: X.com**

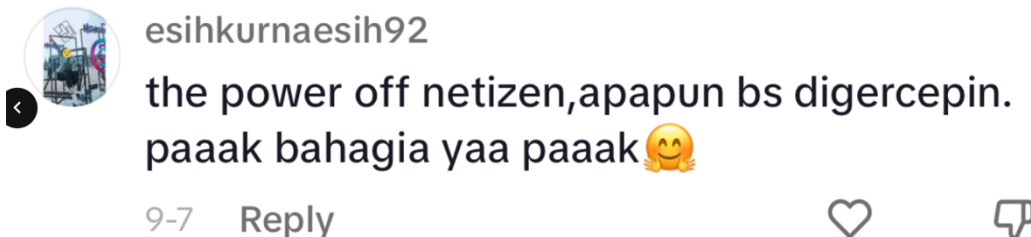
Another audience member also argued that she was already a customer before the story went viral and had grown to love Gaga Noodles after the story went viral.



**Figure 10.** Emotive Brand Empathy on Netizen' TikTok Comment

Source: [tiktok.com](https://www.tiktok.com)

The audience gave an affective statement to calm Mr. Djajadi Djaja, the audience stated "The power of netizens, anything can be accelerated. Sir, be happy sir."



**Figure 11.** Emotive Brand Empathy on Netizen' TikTok Comment

Source: [TikTok.com](https://www.tiktok.com)

This is interesting to research further where the following findings prove that empathy can build parasocial relationships (Scherer et al., 2022). The parasocial form can be seen from how the audience feels close to Djajadi Djaja by giving affective words such as encouraging, feeling sorry, and expressing disappointment. The following parasocial occurs in the form of interaction referred to as parasocial interaction, an interaction carried out only by one party and mediation, where the audience is active in the relationship with a media personality figure. Parasocial relationship describes the audience's response to the media figure as if the media figure is in the same room with them. Parasocial interaction also refers to a relationship, as if the media figure has a close relationship as a friend, even though the audience does not directly have a relationship with the media figure (Kusmardianto & Rahayu, 2023).

The audience expressed Various feelings, some of whom expressed pity for Mr Djajadi Djaja, who was considered a victim of hypocrisy. Audiences also quoted a statement that seemed to be put forward by Djajadi Djaja, where the owner of Mie Gaga once said that friends are not necessarily friends, friends can become opponents, and opponents can become friends. In contrast, the truth of this statement cannot be validated. Other netizens also expressed pity that the viral content could be a boomerang for Mie Gaga, who could potentially be sued, while netizens organically disseminated the content. When discussing pity, researchers found another emotive form with a relationship, where the audience expressed justice. Audiences stated that Mie Gaga did not get justice from the state but got social justice from the community, and it was God's way of the truth that had been covered up.

Various negative feelings were expressed by the audience towards Indomie. In addition to explicitly expressing disappointment with Indomie, the audience also wrote a form of nonverbal communication to express disagreement: "I was shaking my head when I read the news". Head shaking and other gestures are a form of feedback from communication (Kwon & Kotani, 2023). Audiences felt emotionally engaged by questioning the truth of the stories of Mie Gaga and Indomie, and audiences expressed wanting to be rude by 'punching'. Other audiences also stated that Indomie should feel the pain that Mie Gaga had experienced before and attributed it to the law of karma.

Audiences place Mie Gaga and Djajadi Djaja as the main actors in the following viral story by stating that the main actors have the right to be happy. Audiences connect the story with the statement that the viral content is a form of happy ending that Mie Gaga deserves because audiences will immediately switch to consuming Mie Gaga. The response given by netizens is considered fast when it comes to news that involves the emotions of many people. Various prayers are also offered to Mie Gaga, either prayers to Mie Gaga as a brand or prayers to Djajadi Djaja personally, as the leading actor considered by the audience. Emotional involvement also brings the audience to tell personal experiences with the Mie Gaga brand; there is a nostalgic story that Mie Gaga is a product that was often consumed when they were children and another nostalgic story of how Mie Gaga is considered personal because of a gift from a closest friend.

### **Empathic Action**

One dimension of empathy is empathic action, which leads to actions that either directly or indirectly affect the other party. Empathic action tries to understand others and moves to take action to help at any cost (Miller, 2022). Empathy is not something that can be triggered simply by looking at data. Empathy requires the audience to see the stories and people behind the data, feel the suffering, and develop emotional empathy by generating audience empathy (Schneider, 2021). The form of direct action in brand empathy can move the audience to be able to help someone else, such as the audience who responded to the viral content of Mie Gaga

and Indomie. Various forms of direct action, such as buying products from Mie Gaga, stopping consuming Indomie, or even as simple as reposting posts from the Mie Gaga and Indomie story.

If in emotive empathy, one of the comments from the audience expressed his hope that Gaga Noodles "get a happy ending", in empathic action, the audience took any action actively to help Gaga Noodles by commenting "keep guarding until the pioneer happy ending", what distinguishes it from emotive empathy is to take direct action, as the keyword "keep guarding". The audience also discussed how the massive action that impacted the sales of Gaga Noodles was the impact of the power of netizens, especially TikTok netizens, who could take massive action quickly. Audiences also revealed that the virtual world acts, but the effects are felt in the real world, as netizens who enlivened the story of Mie Gaga and Indomie but had an impact on the sales of Mie Gaga. Solidarity is ideally the goal of using social media (Ria & Setiawan, 2021). Solidarity is evidenced by audience comments stating that Indonesian netizens have high solidarity on social media and urge Djajadi Djaja and Mie Gaga not to be afraid of threats that might occur in the future because there are netizens who will support Mie Gaga. Audiences also mentioned that Djajadi Djaja needs to be thanked because of the viral content; audiences learned the absolute truth and impacted Mie Gaga's sales.

Empathic action needs to be obtained in various ways, and direct experience makes empathy stick and makes audiences take action (Schneider, 2021). Audiences take direct action through various activities, such as buying products massively doing brand switching to Mie Gaga, changing instant noodle products to Mie Gaga not only for themselves but also for family, or even on things done through social media such as reposting, and recommending Mie Gaga both to their immediate environment or even people abroad. Before the audience decided to do brand switching, the audience asked whether the quality of Mie Gaga could be equal to Indomie so that the audience would switch to Mie Gaga and use the hashtag #Ayomakanmiegaga. Unlike the previous audience, who asked before deciding, some audiences expressed their desire to consume Mie Gaga and said they would go to the supermarket. The massiveness of the movement made Gaga Noodles much sought after by the audience, and the audience complained that the stock of Gaga Noodles was challenging to find because many were looking for it. As new consumers, the audience stated that Gaga Noodles had a better taste than its competitors and regretted not buying Gaga Noodles earlier.

The existence of emotional resonance between consumers and brands actively showing empathy through actions can create a competitive advantage in brand switching efforts, with the data found that the audience expressed their attitude firmly to switch to Mie Gaga. Audiences also stated that they have never tried products from Mie Gaga or other competitors of Indomie. However, audiences realize it takes a small company to create delicious instant noodles. Audiences expressed support for Mie Gaga by not buying any more Indomie. Consumers who have been loyal to Indomie also expressed their antipathy by tweeting, "Even though I used to love Indomie so much, now after eating, I immediately vomit". The audience

also stated that when he took Indomie, she/he became the centre of attention because this is contrary to the empathy expected by the audience. Brand switching is done by the audience, not only for themselves but also for people around them, such as family. The audience revealed that both husbands, parents, and children of the audience directly changed brand preferences from Indomie to Mie Gaga. Then, commercially, stall businesses also began to change their stock of Indomie to Mie Gaga to support Djajadi Djaja. Not only limited to tiny stalls, but the audience also called for the sale of Mie Gaga to reach foreign markets, such as one audience member who hopes that Mie Gaga will be exported to the UK.

In contrast to the audience's direct actions in purchasing, consuming, and switching brands to Mie Gaga, the audience also took actual empathic actions through social media. The form of the real action is a reposting as the audience states that they cannot buy Mie Gaga products; they can only repost. This follows the definition of empathic action, which is an action to help at any cost (Miller, 2022). Audiences need to spread the good news; everyone should know that Gaga Noodles tastes delicious. Audiences who have become loyal consumers also always recommend Mie Gaga to a broad audience, to the point of recommending it to foreigners.

The existence of emotional attachment makes the audience feel close to a brand. In this case, the audience stated that this applies to the viral Gaga Noodles that many consumers buy based on emotions, especially the feeling of pity. Audiences explicitly mentioned that consumers who bought Mie Gaga products were 'viral victims', and the virality was considered to spread and cause the fear of missing out (FOMO) phenomenon, namely the audience's curiosity about Mie Gaga.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study shows that the phenomenon of TikTok content, especially the story of Djajadi Djaja and his business journey in creating the instant noodle brand "Indomie," can trigger the intensity of conversations on various social media platforms. Emotional engagement, such as sympathy, disappointment, and pity, is critical in shaping the relationship between audiences and brands. Therefore, this research provides deep insights into the complexities of brand empathy.

In addition, this research highlights the role of cognitive empathy in brand empathy regarding information dissemination, especially in the context of viral content regarding Mie Gaga and Indomie. Audiences actively understand and identify feelings, thoughts, and perspectives related to the controversy. The cognitive empathy process is limited to cognitive aspects and creates space for more profound empathy, influencing consumer attitudes and actions towards the Mie Gaga brand. In brand empathy, the dimensions of emotive empathy and empathic action play a key role. Emotive empathy is reflected in the audience's response



to the controversy, with expressions of pity, justice, and disappointment towards the Indomie brand. Empathic action is reflected in the audience's concrete actions, such as brand switching, massive purchases of Gaga Noodle products, and the spread of viral content through social media. The emotional attachment between the audience and the brand creates a solid parasocial relationship, strengthens consumer loyalty and positively impacts brand reputation. Overall, this research provides a comprehensive overview of the complexity of e-WOM and brand empathy interactions in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviour in the digital era.

Through the following research results, the researcher provides suggestions for future research to develop sustainable studies on new concepts found in this study, especially on brand empathy, considering how brand empathy has a role in consumer behaviour, especially in the digital era. The limitation of this study is the method used, where researchers have limitations on the digital content examined so that it illustrates how audience empathy are depicted on the Mie Gaga and Indomie brands through viral storytelling content on TikTok. In the following research, it can be developed into a method that shows more generalization from the audience; it can be through mixed methods to see how the content illustrates the complexity of e-WOM interactions and brand empathy that is formed, as well as generalizing how audience attitudes about the viral content.

This study offers valuable insights for marketers and brand managers, highlighting the importance of e-WOM in fostering brand empathy. By understanding the emotional connections consumers form through organic social media content, brands like Mie Gaga and Indomie can develop more effective communication strategies that resonate with their audience. Marketers can leverage these findings to create campaigns that enhance consumer engagement and loyalty, ultimately driving brand success. Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The reliance on content analysis means the findings are based solely on publicly available social media content, which may not capture the full spectrum of consumer sentiments. Additionally, the study focuses on specific brands, limiting its generalizability to other contexts. Future research could incorporate interviews or surveys to gain deeper insights into consumer perspectives and extend the analysis to a broader range of brands and industries to validate and expand upon the findings.

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