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Tiktok-Based Exposure to Ternate Local Cultural Content Versus Conventional Cultural Learning: Cultural Identity and Digital Participation Among Generation Z in Ternate City

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Abstrak

This study compares exposure to TikTok-based Ternate local cultural content with conventional cultural learning in relation to the cultural identity and digital participation of Generation Z in Ternate City. The article adopts a comparative quantitative design with qualitative reinforcement and presents a field-ready analytical framework illustrated through a simulated dataset of 120 respondents because primary field data have not yet been collected. Outcomes include cultural identity, cultural knowledge, preservation intentions, and digital participation. The simulation indicates higher mean scores for the TikTok-exposure group across all four outcomes, with the largest differences in digital participation and cultural identity. Nevertheless, the comparatively smaller gap in cultural knowledge suggests that short-form video is better positioned as an affective and participatory entry point than as a substitute for historically grounded learning. The study therefore proposes a hybrid cultural learning model that connects TikTok-based awareness, exploration, and creation with classroom discussion, cultural-site engagement, source validation, and critical reflection. The framework offers practical guidance for educators, cultural communities, local government, and content creators seeking to strengthen culturally responsible digital participation among young people in Ternate.

Kata Kunci: Ternate local culture; TikTok; Generation Z; cultural identity; digital participation

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has altered how young people encounter, interpret, and reproduce culture. In Indonesia, the shift is especially consequential because digitally connected youth now move between formal learning environments and algorithmically curated platforms throughout the day. DataReportal (2025) estimated 212 million internet users and 143 million social media user identities in Indonesia in early 2025. Short-form video platforms are therefore not peripheral channels of communication; they are part of the everyday media environment in which Generation Z develops interests, affiliations, and forms of public self-expression. TikTok is distinctive within this environment because its For You Page organizes visibility through recommendation rather than primarily through pre-existing friendship networks, thereby giving algorithmic curation a central role

in what users encounter and repeat (Kaye et al., 2021; Bhandari & Bimo, 2022; Entrena-Serrano, 2025).

Research on TikTok shows that the platform combines highly personalized circulation, concise audiovisual storytelling, imitation, and participatory practices. Users do not merely watch; they also like, save, comment, share, remix, duet, stitch, and create content. These affordances can intensify engagement and make identity work visible through repeated performances and community recognition (Zulli & Zulli, 2022; Darvin, 2022). Studies of authenticity further indicate that TikTok users negotiate self-presentation through platform-specific norms and perceived audience expectations (Barta & Andalibi, 2021). For Generation Z, such mechanisms are important because identity is increasingly negotiated through interactions among personal experience, peer cultures, platform design, and algorithmic visibility. A recent systematic review accordingly conceptualizes TikTok as an identity infrastructure rather than merely a channel for self-presentation (Aulia R et al., 2026).

These dynamics are relevant to local cultural preservation. Cultural identity is sustained not only by knowing historical facts but also by feeling attachment, recognizing symbols, participating in community practices, and communicating cultural meaning to others. On TikTok, cultural symbols can become highly visible through short videos, popular audio, hashtags, creator narratives, and location-based content. Yet the same design features that accelerate circulation can also simplify complex traditions. Algorithmic personalization encourages users to infer how the platform works and to adapt their behavior to imagined recommendation logics (Schellewald, 2022). Sharing practices are embedded in everyday relationships and can transform a video from an individual media object into a socially circulated cultural reference (Schellewald, 2024). Consequently, TikTok may strengthen familiarity and pride while simultaneously encouraging aestheticization, trend-driven reinterpretation, or decontextualization.

Ternate City provides a particularly meaningful setting for this problem. The city is historically associated with the Ternate Sultanate and the global spice trade and contains material and intangible cultural expressions linked to royal heritage, Islamic history, forts, kora-kora traditions, local language, music, dance, cuisine, rituals, and Mount Gamalama. The Statistics Indonesia office for Ternate recorded a mid-2024 population of 210,836, with the largest concentrations in South Ternate, Central Ternate, and North Ternate (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Ternate, 2025). For young residents and students, local cultural identity is therefore connected to a dense landscape of historical places, narratives, and community practices. Digital mediation may bring these resources into everyday youth attention, but visibility alone does not guarantee historical depth or responsible interpretation.

Conventional cultural learning offers a different communication logic. Schools, universities, books, museums, studios, cultural communities, and face-to-face encounters with knowledgeable

resource persons provide structure, source authority, contextual explanation, and opportunities for clarification. By contrast, TikTok privileges immediacy, visuality, personalization, and participation. The two modes should not be treated as mutually exclusive. Evidence that TikTok can support educational engagement suggests that short-form video can function as a learning stimulus when it is connected to clear pedagogical purposes (Puspitasari, 2021; Nasrullah & Wahyudi, 2026). Research on youth use also shows that entertainment, self-expression, social recognition, and information seeking often coexist rather than operate as separate motives (Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Montag et al., 2021).

The research gap lies in the limited comparative attention to how TikTok-based exposure to a specific local culture differs from conventional cultural learning across multiple outcomes at once. Existing studies often focus on platform use, identity performance, algorithmic experience, or educational use separately (Schellewald, 2021; Zhao & Wagner, 2023). This study therefore compares the two modes in relation to four outcomes: cultural identity, cultural knowledge, preservation intentions, and digital participation. Its novelty is the localization of the comparison in Ternate and the integration of affective, cognitive, preservation-oriented, and participatory outcomes within one framework. Because the present manuscript uses simulated rather than field-collected data, its contribution is methodological and conceptual: it demonstrates the intended comparative analysis and develops a hybrid cultural learning model that can be tested empirically. The study asks whether TikTok-oriented exposure is associated with stronger simulated outcomes than conventional learning and, more importantly, what the pattern of differences implies for culturally responsible education and digital participation.

METHOD

The study is designed as a comparative quantitative investigation with qualitative reinforcement. The quantitative component compares outcome scores between a group characterized by stronger exposure to TikTok-based Ternate cultural content and a group characterized by stronger engagement with conventional cultural learning. The qualitative component is intended to explain how participants interpret authenticity, cultural meaning, source credibility, and the relationship between digital experiences and local identity. This combination follows the logic of mixed and multi-method design in which numerical patterns are interpreted alongside contextual accounts rather than treated as self-explanatory results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leavy, 2022). In the present article, however, primary fieldwork has not yet been completed; the numerical and thematic results are simulations used to demonstrate the proposed analytical framework and should not be read as empirical claims about the population of Ternate.

The proposed field setting is Ternate City, North Maluku Province. The unit of analysis is Generation Z residents or students, particularly late secondary-school students and university students aged approximately 17-27 years. A field sample of 120-200 respondents is recommended, using purposive sampling to ensure that participants have internet access, prior social media experience, and sufficient exposure to either local cultural content on TikTok or conventional cultural learning. For the analytical demonstration, a balanced simulated sample of 120 respondents was created, with 60 cases assigned to the TikTok-exposure group and 60 to the conventional-learning group. The simulated profile includes education level, gender, and age categories to illustrate the reporting structure.

The principal instrument is a five-point Likert questionnaire. TikTok exposure is operationalized through viewing frequency, duration, types of Ternate cultural content viewed, engagement with cultural accounts or creators, and interaction behaviors. Conventional learning is operationalized through classroom or campus learning, books, museum and cultural-site visits, studio or community activities, and interaction with teachers, lecturers, cultural practitioners, or other resource persons. Outcomes comprise cultural identity, cultural knowledge, preservation intentions, and digital participation. Cultural identity items assess pride, belonging, perceived personal relevance, and willingness to introduce Ternate culture to others. Digital participation includes liking, saving, commenting, sharing, following cultural accounts, and producing culturally themed content. Table 1 summarizes the operational framework.

Table 1. Operationalization of the comparative research framework

Component	Operationalization	Indicators
Population	Generation Z in Ternate City, particularly late secondary-school and university students aged approximately 17-27 years.	Age, gender, education level, domicile, general social media intensity.
TikTok exposure	Exposure to TikTok content featuring Ternate local culture.	Viewing frequency and duration, content type, engagement, followed creators/accounts.
Conventional learning	Cultural learning through schools, universities, books, museums, studios, communities, or face-to-face activities.	Learning frequency, cultural visits, discussions, source materials, involvement of educators or resource persons.
Outcomes	Cultural identity, cultural knowledge, preservation intentions, and digital participation.	Pride, belonging, knowledge, preservation intention, sharing, commenting, saving, following, and content creation.

Before field implementation, questionnaire items should undergo expert review for content validity and a pilot test for clarity and internal consistency. Semi-structured interviews can then be

conducted with a purposive subsample from both exposure groups to explore perceived accuracy, emotional engagement, historical depth, cultural simplification, and motivation to create cultural content. Participants under 18 should be included only with appropriate parental or guardian consent and institutional ethical approval. Quantitative analysis should begin with descriptive statistics and assumption testing, followed by an independent-samples t test when assumptions are satisfied or a Mann-Whitney U test when they are not. Effect sizes should be reported in addition to p values. The simulated analysis uses mean differences and Cohen's d to show how comparative results would be interpreted. Qualitative responses should be coded thematically and used to explain, qualify, or challenge the quantitative pattern. For the eventual field study, group classification should be specified before outcome analysis through transparent exposure thresholds, ensuring that the comparison is reproducible and not defined retrospectively by respondents' outcome scores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Simulated respondent profile and comparative outcomes

The simulated sample is intentionally balanced by exposure group to make the comparative logic transparent. Of the 120 illustrative cases, 48 are categorized as senior-secondary students and 72 as diploma or undergraduate students. Women account for 64 cases and men for 56. Half of the sample falls within the 20-24 age range, while 44 cases are aged 17-19 and 16 are aged 25-27. These distributions are not estimates of the actual demographic composition of Generation Z in Ternate; they are reporting examples that should be replaced by observed field frequencies when data collection is completed.

Table 2. Characteristics of the simulated respondents

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Exposure group	TikTok exposure to local culture	60	50.0
Exposure group	Conventional cultural learning	60	50.0
Education	Senior secondary (SMA/SMK/MA)	48	40.0
Education	Diploma/undergraduate	72	60.0
Gender	Women	64	53.3
Gender	Men	56	46.7
Age	17-19 years	44	36.7
Age	20-24 years	60	50.0
Age	25-27 years	16	13.3

The simulated outcome pattern indicates consistently higher mean scores for the TikTok-exposure group. Cultural identity is 4.23 compared with 3.63 in the conventional-learning group, a mean difference of 0.60 with a large illustrative effect size (d = 1.32). Digital participation shows the largest mean difference, 4.05 versus 3.25, with d = 1.36. Preservation intentions are also higher in the TikTok group, 4.16 versus 3.72, while cultural knowledge shows the smallest gap, 4.04 versus 3.71. All illustrative p values are below .001. The pattern is therefore more important than the numerical significance: the modeled advantage of TikTok is strongest where platform affordances directly enable visible action and identity expression, but weaker for deeper knowledge.

Table 3. Simulated comparison of outcome scores between exposure groups

Outcome	TikTok	Conventional	Difference	Cohen's d	p
Cultural identity	4.23 ± 0.44	3.63 ± 0.47	0.60	1.32	< .001
Digital participation	4.05 ± 0.49	3.25 ± 0.68	0.80	1.36	< .001
Cultural knowledge	4.04 ± 0.43	3.71 ± 0.50	0.33	0.71	< .001
Preservation intentions	4.16 ± 0.41	3.72 ± 0.43	0.44	1.03	< .001

TikTok as an affective and participatory cultural gateway

This pattern is theoretically plausible because TikTok's architecture combines personalization with rapid audiovisual cues and low-friction interaction. Studies of platformization and algorithmic self-making show that the For You Page can make algorithmic recommendations central to users' experience of relevance (Kaye et al., 2021; Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Flow-oriented affordances can further sustain attention and engagement, although the effect depends on experience level and content characteristics (Zhao & Wagner, 2023; Maulana et al., 2026). In a cultural context, a video of the Kedaton, a fort, a kora-kora performance, a local culinary practice, or Mount Gamalama can therefore function as an immediate emotional cue. Repeated exposure can make local symbols feel familiar, current, and socially shareable. Such familiarity may strengthen cultural salience even before users acquire a detailed historical explanation.

The modeled advantage in digital participation is also consistent with TikTok's imitation and sharing logics. Zulli and Zulli (2022) describe how technological mimesis supports imitation publics, while Schellewald (2024) shows that sharing practices become integrated into everyday social relations. These mechanisms matter for cultural preservation because participation can move beyond passive consumption. A user may save a cultural video, send it to peers, comment on its meaning, follow a local creator, or produce a response video. Such actions can extend the circulation of local culture and give young people a visible role in its mediation. At the same time, participation should not automatically be equated with preservation. A highly circulated cultural symbol may be detached

from its historical or ritual significance, especially when creators optimize content for trends, aesthetics, or visibility.

Identity-related outcomes require similar caution. TikTok supports self-presentation and community recognition, but identity on the platform is negotiated within technical and social constraints. Barta and Andalibi (2021) demonstrate that authenticity on TikTok is shaped by norms, audience perceptions, and platform affordances, while Darvin (2022) shows that identity performance can involve both design and resistance. Research on culturally hybrid identities likewise illustrates how TikTok can become a site where users negotiate belonging in the face of social difference (Civila & Jaramillo-Dent, 2022). For Ternate's Generation Z, local cultural content may therefore support pride and belonging, but the meaning of that identity remains actively interpreted rather than mechanically produced by exposure.

Why conventional learning remains necessary

The smaller simulated difference in cultural knowledge is a critical result. Short-form communication is efficient for recognition, curiosity, and memorable visual framing, yet historical knowledge often requires chronology, comparison of sources, explanation of terminology, and discussion of contested interpretations. Schellewald's (2021) digital ethnography shows that TikTok communication relies on recognizable forms that make participation accessible, while later work on algorithmic imaginaries explains how users interpret content through assumptions about the platform's recommendation logic (Schellewald, 2022). The educational implication is that engaging communication and validated knowledge are related but not identical. TikTok can make a topic worth learning about; it cannot by itself guarantee that the resulting understanding is accurate or sufficiently contextualized.

Conventional cultural learning therefore retains a strategic role. Its main strength is not necessarily its ability to compete with TikTok for attention, but its capacity to organize knowledge, validate sources, and create space for questioning. Teachers, lecturers, museum staff, traditional leaders, cultural communities, and local archives can explain why a symbol matters, how a ritual is situated, which sources support a historical claim, and where interpretations differ. The simulated thematic pattern accordingly positions classroom discussion, museum or site visits, and engagement with cultural resource persons as mechanisms for depth. TikTok-oriented learning should complement rather than displace these practices. The educational use of TikTok documented by Puspitasari (2021) supports this complementary view: the platform can facilitate learning when its media affordances are connected to instructional design rather than treated as an end in themselves.

A second concern is algorithmic and aesthetic simplification. TikTok users learn to anticipate what the platform may reward, and platform interfaces encourage continued scrolling through opaque

recommendation processes (Entrena-Serrano, 2025). The result can be an incentive to make cultural content shorter, more emotionally immediate, and more compatible with recognizable trends. This is not inherently harmful: concise storytelling can increase access and spark curiosity. The risk emerges when cultural meaning is reduced to visual spectacle, when creators present uncertain claims as historical fact, or when ritual practices are reproduced without appropriate context or community sensitivity. Digital cultural literacy must therefore include source validation, attribution, ethical representation, and awareness of how algorithms influence visibility.

A hybrid model for culturally responsible learning

The simulated findings lead to a hybrid model in which each medium performs a different educational function. TikTok is used first to generate awareness through short videos, creator narratives, popular audio, and visual storytelling. Learners then explore by following local creators, comparing hashtags, saving educational content, and identifying questions. Conventional activities provide the next layer through class discussion, readings, cultural-site visits, interviews with knowledgeable figures, and source comparison. Learners subsequently create their own digital cultural content but receive feedback from educators or cultural resource persons before publication. The final stage is reflection, in which learners analyze audience responses, accuracy, ethical implications, and what they learned about local identity. Table 4 translates this model into a practical sequence.

Table 4. Hybrid cultural learning model for Generation Z in Ternate City

Stage	TikTok activity	Conventional/validated activity	Expected output
Awareness	View short videos about Ternate history, sites, cuisine, language, and rituals.	Educators introduce the cultural context and key questions.	Initial interest and curiosity.
Exploration	Search hashtags, follow local creators, and save educational content.	Discuss readings and visit museums or cultural sites.	More structured cultural knowledge.
Validation	Compare claims across multiple videos and accounts.	Consult traditional figures, academics, museum staff, or cultural practitioners.	More accurate and ethically grounded information.
Creation	Produce creative short-form local cultural content.	Obtain feedback on accuracy, context, and representation before publication.	Engaging and responsible cultural content.
Reflection	Analyze audience responses, comments, and circulation.	Write a reflection or mini-research report.	More critical cultural identity and digital participation.

The model also offers implications beyond formal education. Local government can support curated digital archives and creator collaborations that prioritize historical accuracy as well as reach.

Cultural communities can involve young creators in documentation and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Universities can use student projects to connect research, cultural communication, and digital production. Creators can increase trust by identifying sources, distinguishing historical evidence from personal interpretation, and consulting practitioners when representing rituals or community-sensitive material. These practices recognize that TikTok is not merely a distribution channel but a social environment in which visibility, identity, and meaning are co-produced. Contemporary research increasingly emphasizes this broader identity infrastructure (Aulia R et al., 2026), while work on youth motivations and platform psychology warns against reducing use to a single motive such as entertainment (Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Montag et al., 2021).

Limitations and directions for field research

The principal limitation remains the status of the dataset. The numerical outcomes and qualitative themes in this manuscript are simulated and are intended to demonstrate an analytical pathway, not to establish causal or population-level claims. Actual field research should pre-register group definitions or exposure thresholds where possible, validate the questionnaire, report reliability coefficients, and control for plausible confounders such as family cultural background, participation in cultural communities, intensity of general social media use, parental education, and proximity to cultural sites. Researchers should also distinguish types of cultural content—historical, linguistic, culinary, performative, ritual, or tourism-oriented—because different content may produce different forms of engagement. A stronger subsequent design could use pre- and post-tests with a curated two-week exposure package and a comparable conventional-learning condition. Such work would make it possible to test whether the pattern illustrated here is reproduced in real participants and whether gains persist beyond immediate exposure.

CONCLUSION

This study develops a comparative framework for examining TikTok-based exposure to Ternate local cultural content and conventional cultural learning among Generation Z. The simulated analysis suggests a distinctive pattern: TikTok-oriented exposure is modeled as strongest for digital participation, cultural identity, and preservation intentions, whereas the difference in cultural knowledge is smaller. The interpretation is not that TikTok is inherently superior, but that its visual, algorithmic, and participatory affordances are well suited to attracting attention, encouraging sharing, and making cultural symbols socially visible. Conventional learning remains essential for historical depth, source validation, contextual explanation, and critical discussion. The most defensible educational strategy is therefore a hybrid model that links digital awareness and creation with structured exploration, cultural-site engagement, consultation with knowledgeable resource persons, validation of information, and reflective learning. The framework has practical relevance for schools,

universities, cultural communities, local government, and content creators seeking to involve young people in culturally responsible digital participation. Its central limitation is that the current outcomes are based on simulated data rather than field observations. Future research should test the framework with validated instruments, clearly defined exposure conditions, appropriate ethical procedures, and longitudinal or pre-post designs. Such evidence is needed before claims are made about the actual effects of TikTok on cultural identity or cultural preservation in Ternate.

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