

Practices and Strategies of a Food Photographer as The New Petite Bourgeoisie in Digital Era

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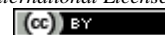
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Abstract

The development of digital media helps in the learning process, starting from seeing various food photo references on digital media platforms. Digital media makes it easier to learn food photography by self-taught until finally being a food photographers who are then ready to fight in the arena of food photography. This research aims to explore the practices and strategies carried out by food photographers to continue to exist in the realm of food photography in the era of digital media. The research method used is virtual ethnography, helped to observed the space for food photographers on Instagram. This research borrows a set of Bourdieu's theories related to the existence of the petite bourgeoisie and its journey to become the new petite bourgeoisie. The era of digital media helped the existence of petite bourgeoisie from self-taught learning as well as food photographers. Photographs in the digital age provide petite bourgeois character, from self-taught learning related to food photography by Pinterest, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. Every food photographer accumulates their capital to continue to move up in these levels in the food photography arena, namely by following the workshop or certification, doing various collaborations with clients, and then posting on social media, becoming a symbolic sign of their capital ownership. Food photographer have a tendency to always look aesthetic in everyday life. Food photography as an industry in the era of digital media and have working logic for the existence of a large number of viewers and likes, don't become unpaid workers.

Keywords: food-photography, food-photographer, petite-bourgeoisie, Instagram.

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1. Introduction

"Taking photos before eating the food, photographing food before eating and then uploading it to social media is commonplace. We can find it, and you could be one of them" [1]. Reza's comment on CNN Indonesia's Weekend Editor's News tries to portray the aesthetic appearance of food and the taste of food as a new need in the world of digital media. I am one of those people who has a habit; taking pictures of my food before praying, later post it on social media. It is not only my habit but is also done by other Instagram users. 5.5 million posts are using #makanan (food), and 2.5 million posts using #makanankekinian (contemporary food) (accessed Monday, September 11, 2023, at 12.00 Western Indonesia Time) used to capture food through photos or videos with a variety of attractive and delicious display (Fig.1).



Figure 1. Example of food photos with the hashtag #makanankekinian on Instagram (Source: Capturing random content with the hashtag #makanankekinian on Instagram – 2023)

Food photos on the digital media platform Instagram show that food no longer talks about meeting the needs of the stomach but also the eyes. The aesthetics in photographing food to upload tastes become a need to be completed. Digital media provides new markets related to the fulfilment of content creation. Content in the digital media space is a space to voice and express identity and social change [2]. Furthermore, seeing the influence of the digital media platform Instagram, there is a need for existence in the digital media space to get various benefits in the creative industry era [3]. The digital revolution in Indonesia's creative industries can create sustainable economic growth and benefit the ASEAN community [4]. In line with "the potential of Cultural and Creative Industries in the economy to alleviate poverty and unemployment" [3].

Instagram is one of the social media that is quite in demand in the digital era. Instagram also offers various features to support its users' existence, for example, by selling blue ticks to get protection against impersonation, increased visibility and priority customer support [5]. The existence becomes an inseparable part of the use of digital media. The presence of Instagram use can be seen from the number of visits to the profile, the number of likes, the number of viewers, the number of followers, etc. In this case, existence requires numbers as a form of

recognition as a content creator; it exists because of the number of likes, viewers, and followers. "The trade-off is that the more people who watch the video, the more income (money) will be obtained [3].

Edrick, owner of Tenun Coffe Roasters located in SCBD, said that at least 3 million rupiahs a month to promote on Instagram for each content, including food photos (product photos) (online interview, September 11, 2023, at 11.00 Western Indonesia Time). Based on his experience, if an Instagram account @tenuncoffee posts without advertisement, then the bar will only reach 20% of followers, while if using advertisement will get all followers and other users outside of their followers. It is undoubtedly essential because it is related to increasing engagement and followers, so people trust Tenun Coffee more. The use of digital media is essential in the Food and Beverage (FnB) world because, according to Edrick, "you eat with your eyes". Hence, it needs food (drink) photos that arouse the appetite of Instagram users, primarily millennials, as the target market of Tenun Coffee (Fig.2). The use of digital media, in this case, Instagram, is beneficial for Edrick's business because the working logic of Instagram digital media helps to reach more precisely and effectively the target audience in the SCBD area who like coffee. Food photos (product) become crucial for potential customers to be more aware of the products offered, reduce fear for products to be purchased, and of course, this aims to increase the confidence of potential customers limited to Tenun Coffee.

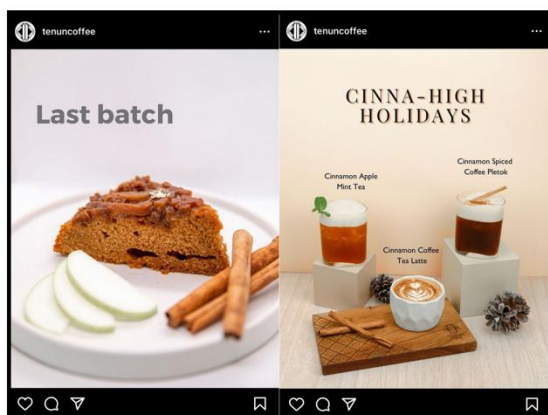


Figure 2. Photo of food (drink) from Tenun Coffee (Source: Capturing feed on @tenuncoffee Instagram – 2023)

The new habit of taking pictures (food photos) before eating to be reposted on social media or for review needs on Google makes eating activities no longer talk about enjoying eating from the taste alone. Other conditions, related to aesthetic values related to the eyes must also be satisfied. FnB in the digital age no longer talks about food eaten because of hunger. I use the term hungry eyes to indicate the need for content creation with aesthetic value to arouse the appetite that is also consumed. Food in

the digital age contributes to creative content creators, making food that initially looks ordinary into ala fine dining. The rapid development of social media has also contributed to the growing art of food photography, especially as it has become easier to learn. Some food photographers use food photos with various strategies to continue to exist in digital media, especially those related to FnB. This study explores the space for food photographers on the Instagram digital media platform as a form of their existence in the world of food.

2. Research Method

This research used a virtual ethnography methodology from the concept suggested by Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Ceila Pearce, dan T.L Taylor in a book entitled *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds* (2012). A virtual world is a space that has various practices, performances, and creativity; even the social in the virtual world is evident. Even every agent in this virtual world has a desire for their action. Ethnography as an approach to observing daily individual or group life provides various and robust resources to learn culture through the virtual world. One of the substantial aspects is that ethnographers must be flexible.

Ethnography research focuses not only on data collecting through participant observation and interviews. Ethnography usually adds other kinds of data collecting, especially when related to the virtual world, which gives access to the data resources. Or when the virtual world is used to collect and form the data to enrich the interview process that will be done. Other collecting data that are useable in the virtual world [6] relevant to this research besides participant observation and online interviews are (1) capturing screenshots, text resources data – chat/caption, and pictures taken from social media posts. (2) capturing video and observing activity at a specific time become easier with the help of several screen recorder applications for various activities of food photographers on story Instagram. (3) capturing audio when interviewing participants, observing participants, or voice – note recorders from facilities provided by several social media. (4) data collection in other online contexts, literature review from online resources. (5) virtual artifacts, virtual objects, in this case, objects that identified the informant and things around the informant. (6) offline interviews and participant observation, various essential things that are impossible to be done virtually, including an offline literature review. Essential things in collecting data are field note taking from all kinds of data collecting and keeping the privacy, the secrecy of informant or the informant anonymity.

Some previous studies related to food photography have explained the relationship between food

photography and the formation of taste images through visual appearance and its use as a promotional medium. Food photography conveys taste through visual displays, helping audiences get to know a country's typical food by applying aesthetic values [7]. Creative strategies and execution of design visualizations for food photos can be used as promotional media for a food brand [8]. Research on food photography focuses more on its photos. This study chose a food photographer as the focus of the investigation. Seeing food photographers as part of cultural intermediaries that practice the new petite bourgeoisie, some Bourdieu theoretical frameworks are borrowed in this study to show the space for food photographers on Instagram in FnB.

Utomo, et al [3] mentioned that Instagram as a digital media platform makes it easier for what is called presumption (production-consumption) in lifestyle practices as a content creator to make a profit, departing from self-taught learning and media platforms in the digital era facilitates the learning process. "Cultural intermediary is a term that emerged in the context of the culture in France when Bourdieu (1984) spoke about the rising petite bourgeoisie" [3]. The author borrows some of Bourdieu's theoretical frameworks to understand the food photographer's space as the new petite bourgeoisie. Food photography at Instagram in this study is the arena (field). Bourdieu explains that, "a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distributions of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc)" [9].

Food photography on Instagram as an arena will explain the battle between each agent to still exist in the arena. Agents, in this case, are food photographers or content creators who create food photos. In the fight in this arena, agents will carry out various strategies. Strategy according to Bourdieu is "The idea of strategy, like the orientation of practice, is neither conscious nor calculated nor it is mechanically determined. It is the intuitive product of 'knowing' the rules of the game" [10]. In other words, the strategy can be done by accumulating capital ownership owned by each agent. There are several capital according to Bourdieu [10], such as "First, economic capital includes the means of production (machinery, land, labor), materials (income and objects), and money that are easily used for all purposes and inherited from one generation to the next generation. Second, cultural capital is the real intellectual qualification produced through formal education or family inheritance,

including cultural capital between other ability to present themselves in public, ownership of high-value cultural objects, certain knowledge and expertise of educational outcomes, and certificates (bachelor's degrees). Third, capital social refers to the social network the perpetrator (individual or group) has concerning the other party with power. Fourth, all forms of prestige, status, authority, and legitimacy accumulate as a form of symbolic capital".

Bourdieu explains the rising petite bourgeoisie with small cultural capital ownership obtained from self-study. In his explanation, Bourdieu mentions that the petite bourgeoisie produces middle-brow culture (in contrast to legitimate culture). The petite bourgeoisie showed its efforts to continue climbing the social ladder with its various strategies by accumulating capital ownership. In this case, the petite bourgeoisie also upgraded every capital owned, which later became known as the new petite bourgeoisie because its capital ownership was no longer small. As an agent who fights in the arena, the new petite bourgeoisie has a goal of recognition. As Bourdieu stated that "The whole relationship of the petite bourgeoisie to culture can in a sense be deduced from the considerable gap between knowledge and recognition, the source of the cultural goodwill which takes different forms depending on the degree of familiarity with legitimate culture, that is, on social origin and the associated mode of cultural acquisition" [11], [12].

Food Photography is understood as 'Photography that focuses on food or uses food as a photographic subject in its expression of a non-food related idea' [13]. The presence of food photography predates the era of social media, where these food photos were originally used only to showcase food menus with appetizing appearances in cafes or restaurants [1]. The variety of styles in food photography means that it is not only used in menus but can also be seen in advertisements, editorial pieces, cookbooks, social media, documentary pieces, food blogs, fine art, art photo books, and more [13]. The development of digital media, especially social media, has further expanded food photography and made it accessible for anyone to learn [1]. In other words, digital media can serve as a self-learning tool for users, assisting in the emergence of the petite bourgeoisie. Food photographers can consume educational materials, tips, tricks, and food photo references from various digital media platforms (Fig.3) and then produce food photos, uploading them back to digital media platforms like Instagram. This involves both consumption and production in the digital space.

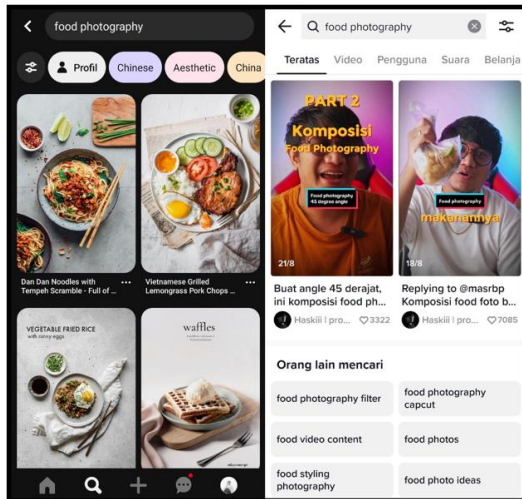


Figure 3. Food photography references on digital media platforms (Source: Capturing food photography in the search column on Pinterest (left) and TikTok (right) – 2023)

Understanding the blurred boundaries between production and consumption spaces, Alvin Toffler (1980) mentioned that the information era demonstrates the development of high mobility information technology in the virtual world, which subsequently marked the digital age [14]. The author attempts to understand this phenomenon through the activities of authors when using the social media platform Instagram. I produce content on my Instagram feed and then consume the comments on my content. Afterward, I produce responses to these comments by adding various engaging emoticons, hashtags, or tags. An interesting aspect of consumption behavior is that consumers do not merely consume; they are not passive but actively participate and engage in activities. Adhe Anisa (online interview, September 11, 2023, at 14.00 Western Indonesia Time) explained that photographers within their creative agency do not necessarily have a basic foundation in food photography. However, when they have clients from the Food and Beverage (FnB) industry, Adhe, the photographer, and the team consume various references from Pinterest, TikTok, and YouTube. They then use these references to create food photography projects for their clients. As the FnB industry grows in Lombok, they have more clients with food photography projects. In this context, Adhe, the photographer, and the team continuously draw inspiration from references, tips, and tricks in food photography to align with the concepts desired by their clients.

3. Result and Discussion

Vicky Yuwono is known as a food lover who started his steps by taking photos of food while eating noodles from its package, then the idea of "having fun" and "funny" noodles with his book in fine dining-style plating. Further in her narration, photography techniques (as well as videography) and scale was self-

taught. Similarly, Richard said that the ability related to food photography was also learned by himself through YouTube and Google. When searching using #tipsfotomakanan, the author found that more than 500 posts were using the hashtag, and one of the accounts, @hadzqan, shared two reels containing food photo tips on the topic of Food Photography Composition. Furthermore, the author's search using #foodphotographer showed that around 3.7 million posts were using the hashtag, and the author got some blue ticks (already verified by Instagram), such as @evan_naka and @deboragabrich who, in their reels, shared behind the scenes photographing food that can be used as a reference in photographing food (Fig.4). Digital media such as YouTube, Google and TikTok contribute to self-taught learning. Searching for writers on TikTok using #foodphotography gives writers a variety of videos, tips and tricks for photographing food from various accounts worldwide. In addition, the author found other keywords or hashtags to help the author learn to photograph food, such as #foodstylingphotography, #foodphotographysetup, #foodphotographyideas, #foodphotographer, etc. Some of these things show that digital media plays a significant role in self-taught learning for the existence of the petite bourgeoisie.

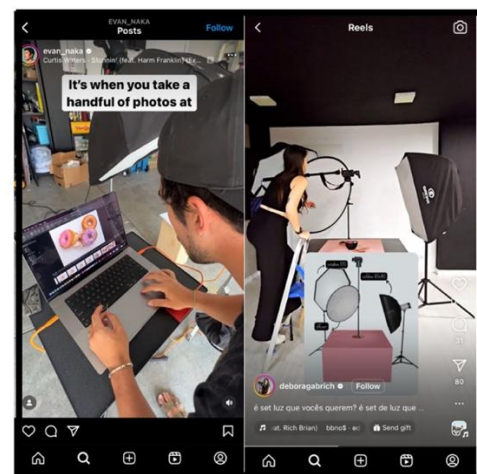


Figure 4. Behind the scene of food photographer's work (Source: Capturing reel on @evan_naka (left) and @deboragabrich (right) Instagram – 2023)

A part from self-taught learning and experience working with private companies that do not require certificates or certifications, Richard said that the essential things that a food photographer must have are style and portfolio. His experience with various clients made Richard find his style, which is a clear, minimalist style. Unlike Richard, Vicky is known for her consistent use of flat-lay style. Photograph food in a flat container from the top position (Fig.5).

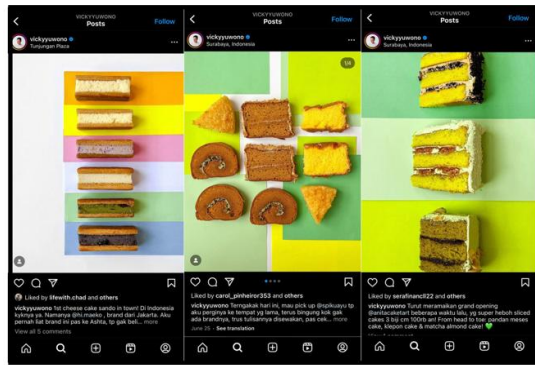


Figure 5. Flat-lay style on Vicky Instagram (Source: Capturing feed on @vickyuwono Instagram – 2023)

The maturity of his food photo style and prototype makes Richard stand out from legitimate culture because of his certificate or certification. Even in his journey as a food photographer, Richard also explained related property needs in food photos, including additional accessories, and one of the other accessories is dried flowers. Based on his experience, the need for this property is carried out with a collaboration system so that each social partner will also get the photo as a portfolio. The experience of working with dried flower suppliers makes Richard a supplier of dried flowers for photo needs. Even the dried flower creations he makes are used for photos and sold (Fig.6). Richard tried to be different, accumulating cultural and social capital to gain more significant economic capital.

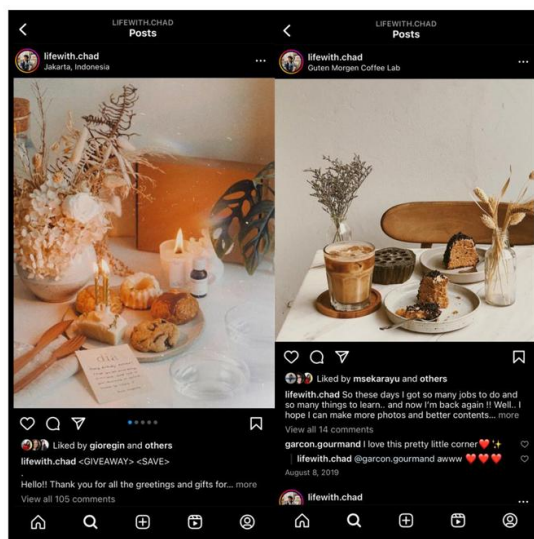


Figure 6. Dried flower creations by Richard (Source: Capturing feed on @lifewith.chad Instagram – 2023)

Working in one of the companies in Jakarta makes Richard continue to learn to provide the best quality food photos, mainly because of the big companies that have been his clients, such as Harvest, Chitato and Yamatoten Restaurant. Vicky also carries out capital accumulation. It can be seen from the collaborations he has done with various parties, such as on his Instagram highlights, Vicky collaborated with Chef SL, Loure Gelato, Hatiku, Baker Swinkel, Pacca Ice Swirl,

Perfect Gourmet and Frutamix. Richard and Vicky have obtained the portfolio. Small cultural capital, which started from self-taught learning in its journey, is now said to be small; even Richard eventually attended various workshops to increase his cultural capital and knowledge related to food photos. Richard and Vicky accumulate cultural capital (knowledge), social (relations), symbolic (portfolio), and, of course, economic prosperity, so in this case, Richard and Vicky can be said to be the new petite bourgeoisie, different from the petite bourgeoisie at the beginning because it is no longer small cultural capital.

Cassandra also carries out the battle in food photos by accumulating capital, starting with a flat lay and then developing it with various shooting angles. It is an upgrade of her cultural capital (knowledge), exploring multiple styles, ideas, and concepts for each client. When the author accessed Cassandra, Richard, and Vicky's Instagram on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at 10:00 WIB, Cassandra had 12.2k followers on @sundaymondayfoodie account, Vicky on his Instagram account @vickyuwono had 53.9k followers, Richard @lifewith.chad had 5162 followers on his personal Instagram account, but on his Instagram bio profile, it was stated that Richard was the creative director at @granovaid with 15.1K followers (Fig.7). In the description on his profile, Richard wants to be known as Content Creator & Bandung Artist, while Vicky chooses to be known as Digital Creator. In the highlights, Richard and Vicky's Instagram account also contains portfolios worked on before. Instagram, with all the features in it, became a symbolic capital to fight in the digital media arena, specifically as a food photographer.

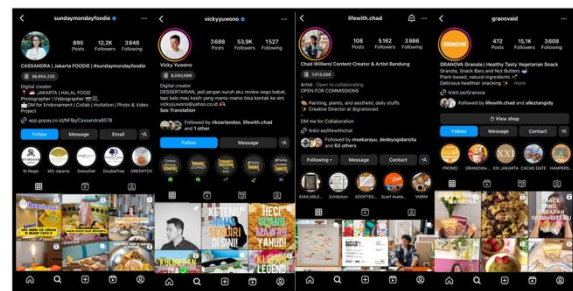


Figure 7. Instagram account food photographers (Source: Capturing profile on @sundaymondayfoodie, @vickyuwono, @lifewith.chad and @granovaid Instagram (left to right) – 2023)

Looking back at the news of CNN Indonesia's Weekend Editor on Monday, November 22, 2021, with the title "Easy to Be a Food Photographer," this coverage also became a symbol and recognition of Vicky and Cassandra's profession as food photographers. Capture this coverage pinned by Cassandra on his personal Instagram account (individual) under the account name @cassandra_dermawan (Fig.8 – left). Become a pride and proof of recognition of what she does. In this report, Cassandra Darmawan shared some tricks for

food photos using mobile phones, including flat lay techniques, lighting, tribute, and composition. Various digital media helped the existence of the petite bourgeoisie through self-taught learning to produce small cultural capital. @captainruby's Instagram account writes his profession as a Food Photographer and his achievements as Influence Asia's Top Food Influencer 2017 on his Instagram profile (Fig.8 – right).

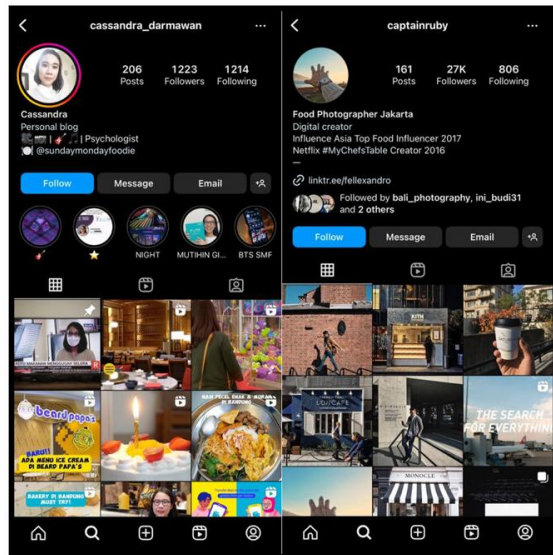


Figure 8. Personal Instagram account of food photographers (Source: Capturing profile on @cassandra_darmawan (left) and @captainruby (right) Instagram – 2023)

Ruby is known as a food photographer expert with the accumulation of capital he already has from the long process he has passed to pursue the world of food photos [15]. Sitting in the expert food photographer class gives Ruby the advantage of being able to do food photography workshops (Fig.9).

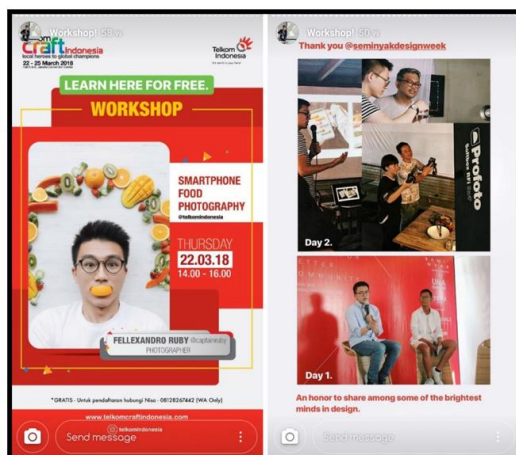


Figure 9. Food photography workshop by Ruby (Source: Capturing story highlight on @captainruby Instagram – 2019)

The food photo battle arena is very hierarchical; Richard places himself as the third-order food photographer with an income that can be obtained around 400,000 – 500,000 rupiah for one photo or 8 –

10 million for one photo package (about 20 shots). Beginner food photographers occupy the fifth and fourth food photographer positions with an income range of 800,000 rupiah for one photo package. Expert or professional food photographers occupy the first and second places with an income of 8 to 16 million for one photo. The hierarchical position in the food photography arena can be seen from the accumulation of capital ownership. In this case, the accumulation of capital in the position of food photographer at the fifth level will undoubtedly be very different from the food photographer in the first position. This difference can be seen from the frequent absence of food photographers in first and second positions to conduct workshops and enter commercial media spaces such as TV and magazines. According to Bourdieu's explanation, the petite bourgeoisie tried to rise to social class by consuming and seeking pleasure. So, in this case, capital accumulation is also done by consumption, buying other equipment and cameras, and paying for courses. It does not rule out the possibility of buying followers and blue ticks to increase the trust of potential customers. It becomes a pleasure to enjoy.

Bourdieu also explained that the new petite bourgeoisie also tends to present itself aesthetically in its life. If you explore Richard @lifewith.chad and Vicky @vickyuwono's Instagram accounts again, these two accounts show practices to show aesthetic values, such as using almost the same tone for each Instagram feed content and eye-catching patterns. In design, known as unity [16], the alignment of design elements and content for each of their posts on social media, even the stories uploaded, are static, unlike Instagram users who use the story feature without thinking about shooting and editing techniques according to the concept (Fig.10). Of course, presenting themselves aesthetically on Instagram is a way to convince potential customers of their profession as food photographers and concern (digital) creators. It explains what Bourdieu said, that there is a class interest to gain honor [10].

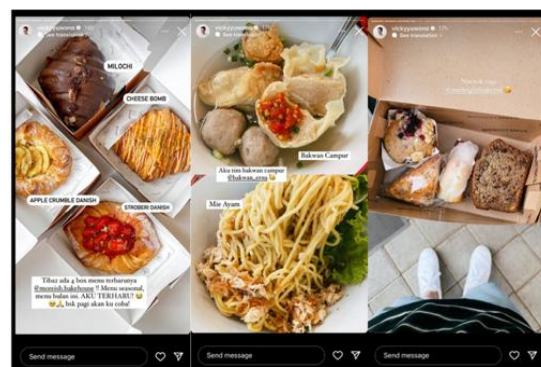


Figure 10. Aesthetic Instagram story on Vicky account (Source: Capturing story on @vickyuwono Instagram – 2023)

4. Conclusion

The digital era provides a new routine; as Edrick said, customers usually, before going to Tenun Cafe, will search first on Instagram and Google, and read reviews. Therefore, the rating on Google becomes essential, and the decision of potential customers is determined by visual capture of the product and its design. Digital media supported the existence of Petite Bourgoise, providing demand for aesthetic value in the creative industry. Edrick further explained that customers come to Tenun to consume food or drinks, take pictures of food, drinks, and the atmosphere at Tenun, upload the review results on Google, and do the production. If someone comments, they will review the comment to reproduce the answer later. Digital media limits the boundaries of consumption and production. It also shows the demand to take aesthetic photos of food (drinks and atmosphere) because, just like Tenun Cafe, it reposts customer stories that come with Tenun. It becomes a pleasure if an account reposts the food photo with many followers. In Bourdieu's explanation, petite bourgeoisie becomes an intermediary that connects producers and consumers, knows what they want, and does production and consumption to increase consumption because of the promotional impact of the products they do or, in this case, through food photos.

Food photos are in demand in this digital era, opening up new job opportunities. Adhe Anisa, a Content Executive from Switch On Lombok, a creative agency that handles social media, said that photographers who work at Switch On are also self-taught to make food photos because most clients from FnB, photographers, and the team at Switch On learn together to produce delicious food photos (online interview, September 11, 2023, at 14.00 Western Indonesia Time). The learning process is also carried out from various digital media platforms. It then brought the Switch On to work with big brands in Lombok, making it the first and best creative agency in Lombok. Back to Richard and Vicky, from their Instagram account, food photos are only one thing that continues to exist in digital media. They use the term content (digital) creator for their profession. Opening up other opportunities is more than just focusing on food photos.

Vicky mentions, "I don't say professional plating either, but because the demand is there and I like it, I'm just a photo of food." Some things are peril noticed. Digital media, on the one hand, is a pleasure because it provides new job opportunities, hones creativity, and increases knowledge and relationships. Production and consumption activities that no longer exist clear boundaries, as well as pleasure, I am happy when I get many viewers, many likes, moreover if it is reposted by accounts with many followers. There is satisfaction, pride and pleasure that cannot be explained if food photos are posted with tags by big brands with a large

number of followers. If you repost the photo, unconsciously it also promotes the brand. Considering digital media as part of the industry, it is necessary to know the logic of the media industry, demanding trending or viral, and it is undeniable that there are agents who are subject to the sense of the media industry [2]. It takes a critical attitude to see that pleasure covers unpaid work presumption (post and repost) in the digital media space.

The development of digital media helps in the learning process, starting from seeing various food photo references on digital media platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram to learning food photography tips and tricks on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. Digital media makes it easier to learn food photography by self-taught until finally being expert. The development of digital media, especially social media, has opened up job opportunities in the creative industry, such as the emergence of creative agencies. Digital media provides a demand for aesthetic value, not only from content such as food photography produced but also the aesthetic value of the daily life of food photographers, having filters for every content posted in feeds, stories, reels, and highlights. Aesthetic value takes away the freedom for inexplicable pleasure. Aesthetic value also ultimately takes away the freedom of posts for the sake of self-branding. Some standards are then created. In other words, you cannot post the photo carelessly. Therefore, sometimes, food photographers also have other Instagram accounts that they can use to post story; because it is not only about aesthetic value.

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