

# POSITIONING THE ‘EXPERT-FRIEND’ IN THE DIGITAL KITCHEN A Multimodal-Pragmatic Analysis

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**Abstract** – This contribution presents a multimodal-pragmatic analysis of *BuzzFeed’s Tasty*, a US-American digital food media brand, launched in 2015 and rapidly grown into a brand with a strong social media presence. *Tasty* can be considered as a ‘digital cookbook’ revitalising the traditional ‘recipe book’ genre through multimodal formats and multisensory content, which is a successful strategy to attract Gen-Z and Millennials (Battista 2025b). Considering a sample of videos posted in 2023 on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, this study examines how *Tasty* orchestrates verbal and non-verbal elements to construct meaning, focusing on interpersonal pragmatics to explore the ‘expert-friend’ persona (Battista 2025a). The methodology adopts a cross-platform perspective (Brunner and Diemer 2022) and integrates multimodality (Kress and van Leeuwen 2020), (im)politeness strategies (Culpeper *et al.* 2017), stancetaking (Kiesling 2022), and speech act theory (Austin 1962). Findings reveal that *Tasty* creators construct an ‘expert-friend’ persona blending expertise and relatability through humour, softened directives, self-disclosure and self-mockery. The cross-platform approach shows that Facebook videos foreground narrative empathy and playfulness, Instagram videos rely on concise and visually driven instructions, while TikTok prioritises personal storytelling and cultural/traditional references. Across all platforms, multimodal cues reinforce clarity and engagement, pragmatically intensifying instruction and affiliation, thus shaping user engagement and trust in digital food discourse.

**Keywords:** recipe video; social media; pragmatics; multimodality.

## 1. Introduction and background

Social media platforms have transformed how people create, access, and consume content, with short-form videos becoming popular over the last decade (Zhang *et al.* 2022). This is particularly evident in the domain of food and cooking, where social media platforms have contributed to the transformation of recipe videos into multisensory interactive digital cookbooks, whose features include catchy music, on-screen text, and engaging the audience (Battista 2025a). Short and engaging videos permeate social media; however, systematic frameworks for their unique communicative and aesthetic features remain limited (Wang 2021), and more research on their

formal and aesthetic attributes is needed (Grzenkowicz and Wildfeuer 2025; Schlüssel and Frosh 2023). While studies on multimodal meaning-making in digital environments exist (Adami and Jewitt 2016; Bouvier and Machin 2018; Zappavigna 2015), research on the pragmatic value of multimodal resources in social media videos remains scarce. In particular, little is known about the use of multimodal strategies in social media videos for persuasive, humorous, or instructional goals (for a recent, comprehensive overview of the issue, see Jucker 2024).

This paper explores meaning-making processes on social media by considering *BuzzFeed's Tasty* as a case study and relying on well-established linguistics and pragmatics theories. More specifically, this paper investigates the use of multimodal pragmatic strategies to balance instruction, humour, and engagement across three social media platforms, namely Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

Theories in discourse and genre studies have provided scholars with frameworks originally conceived for the analysis of communication in traditional contexts, such as print news, academic writing, and face-to-face conversations (Bhatia 2008; Kress and van Leeuwen 2020). Nevertheless, the constant and rapid evolution of genres in the digital age poses some challenges. Social media content is inherently multimodal, blending speech, text, visuals, and sounds, while also seeking to engage users and to interact with them in more or less direct ways (for different perspectives on the topics of social media content and interaction, see Ashley and Tuten 2015; Cunningham and Craig 2021; Kang *et al.* 2020). This explains how once familiar genres have changed under the influence of digital formats and social media, serving their purposes but in more complex ways, mediating form, content, action, and medium (Miller 2015). As a consequence, online genres such as recipe videos cannot be comprehensively analysed by focusing on text only. Multiple semiotic modes should be considered at once, as their interaction contributes to the genre's social action (Austin 1962; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 2020; Miller 2015). This perspective aligns with recent developments in multimodal pragmatics, which view speech, gestures, images, and sounds as interconnected semiotic resources and highlight that illocutionary force is not limited to verbal utterances but involves multiple semiotic modes (Payrató 2017; O'Halloran *et al.* 2014). Nonetheless, discourse theories need to be recalibrated to fully adapt to the distinctive features and participatory nature of social media.

Recipe videos can be an interesting case study in this sense. Recipes are an ancient genre, dating back to the II Millennium BC (Arendholz *et al.* 2013; Notaker 2024), and can be described as stable and classic, since its main goal (instructing) and structure (Arendholz *et al.* 2013; Garzone 2017; Görlach 1992) have remained unaltered. However, online forms of communication have impacted them, leading to food blogs (Cesiri 2020), branded webpages

and social media accounts, such as *BuzzFeed's Tasty*. Launched in 2015 as a Facebook page, *Tasty* pioneered the so-called 'top-down' videos: short, overhead-style recipes, with upbeat music and text overlays for instructions. This format allowed the brand to retain the instructional goal of a recipe while adapting it to the quick pace of social media (Battista 2025b). Then, with the advent of other platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, *Tasty's* videos have become more elaborate, with 'food-porn' and ASMR/satisfying aesthetics (Del Campo and Kehle 2016; McDonnell 2016), occasionally presenting food-themed challenges alongside recipes, resulting in a hybrid *infotainment* discourse (Vidgen 2016). This hybridisation reflects broader trends in online discourses, where traditional genres are constantly reshaped through participatory affordances and because of the conventions that emerge around them (Abidin 2018; Baldauf *et al.* 2017; Pérez-Llantada 2024). Furthermore, social media recipe videos entertain the audience through storytelling, humour, and informal conversational tones, while still being instructive; one of the distinctive features of *Tasty's* videos is that of the 'expert friend' persona, which is pragmatically constructed through stancetaking and politeness strategies and blends culinary expertise with informality, friendliness, and accessibility (Battista 2025a). This persona is not merely linguistic; it is pragmatically and multimodally constructed, which resonates with other studies suggesting that authority blends expertise and relatability and is multimodally negotiated (Abidin 2018). Therefore, this article proposes that one of the most successful communicative strategies used by *Tasty* is precisely the use of multimodal resources to perform pragmatic functions contributing to both the instructional and engaging goals of its videos. The 'expert friend' persona aligns with current views of interpersonal pragmatics and with stancetaking and relational engagement seen as central components of digital identity construction (Kiesling 2022). Through multimodal stance cues, such as evaluative language, direct address, and humour, the creator maintains both epistemic authority and affiliative proximity, which can benefit engagement. By considering a selection of videos posted in 2023 by the brand, this study shows how pragmatic theories – namely speech acts (Austin 1962), terminology (Cesiri 2016), stancetaking (Kiesling 2022; Kiesling *et al.* 2018), (im)politeness (Andersson 2024; Culpeper *et al.* 2017; Turkle 2015) – can be used to analyse multimodal digital content while bridging the gap between pragmatics and multimodality. These frameworks enable the analysis of pragmatic functions in multimodal digital contexts and contribute to the conceptualisation of how digital genres adapt to new participatory and sensory environments (Sanfilippo 2023; Schlüssel and Frosh 2023). Furthermore, the communicative strategies used by creators are shaped by each platform's affordances, which also influence audience engagement (Bouvier and Machin 2018). Overall, this study contributes to the still underexplored field of research on multimodal pragmatics in digital contexts, in which meaning is dynamically

constructed through the interaction of verbal and non-verbal, linguistic and paralinguistic semiotic resources. By combining established pragmatic frameworks in multimodal analysis, it highlights how creators strategically integrate humour, stance, and visual/auditory stimuli to construct meaning and shape user engagement on social media.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Materials

This study examines three *BuzzFeed's Tasty's* recipe videos selected among the files composing a larger corpus, the *som\_cor*, the composition of which is shown in Table 1 (Battista 2025a). The *som\_cor* considers Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, as the most popular social media platforms at the moment of writing for three age cohorts: Facebook attracts people aged 25 to 34, Instagram users are typically 18 to 24, while TikTok is widely used by the youngest cohort. The *som\_cor* considers two timespans: January 1<sup>st</sup> to January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (the week before the first COVID-19 case in the USA), and May 11<sup>th</sup> to May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (the week immediately following the end of the pandemic-related emergency state). Additionally, all posts met the following criteria: being in a video format; showing a recipe; featuring at least one *Tasty* creator; being an original *Tasty* production (as opposed to videos created by other brands and reshared by *Tasty*). Each video was assigned an identifier based on its social media platform, publication year, and progressive ID number; then, they were transcribed retaining fillers, self-repair, laughter, and any other pragmatically relevant feature.

	Source	Year	Tokens	Number of selected videos	Average duration of videos
	Facebook	2020	23,195	3	3:39 minutes
		2023		19	4:59 minutes
	Instagram	2020	3,140	0	-
		2023		7	50 seconds
	TikTok	2020	2,628	0	-
		2023		8	57 seconds
<b>Total</b>			<b>28,963</b>	<b>37</b>	

Table 1  
Composition of the *som\_cor* (Battista 2025a, p. 70).

As this explorative study intends to show how well-established frameworks can be adapted to the analysis of social media content, one video per platform was randomly selected by entering the video IDs into an online random choice generator (RandomJet, n.d.). The materials analysed for this article are: FB23\_5 (*Tasty* 2023c); IG23\_9 (*Tasty* 2023a); TT23\_5 (*Tasty* 2023b). While limited, this exploratory corpus ensures genre consistency across three platforms, since all the videos share the same features (see the abovementioned selection criteria for the *som\_cor*), facilitating comparative analysis. Moreover, considering multiple social media networks enables a cross-platform analysis (Brunner and Diemer 2022), which mirrors the brand's approach to content creation (Battista 2025b) and offers an insightful perspective in the analysis of online discourse.

## 2.2. Methods

This study relies on a multimodal discourse analysis approach bridging multimodality and pragmatics. In line with recent research emphasising the importance of considering multiple semiotic modes (Vásquez 2022), the aforementioned *BuzzFeed's Tasty's* videos have been treated as multimodal texts.

Each video has been annotated for its multimodal features using a dedicated digital tool, ELAN (Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics 2023), which allows researchers to create their own custom annotation tiers and to generate annotation plots. The annotations (Figure 1) considered camera shots (close-up, medium, long), vertical camera angles (high, eye-level, low) and creator/food screen time.

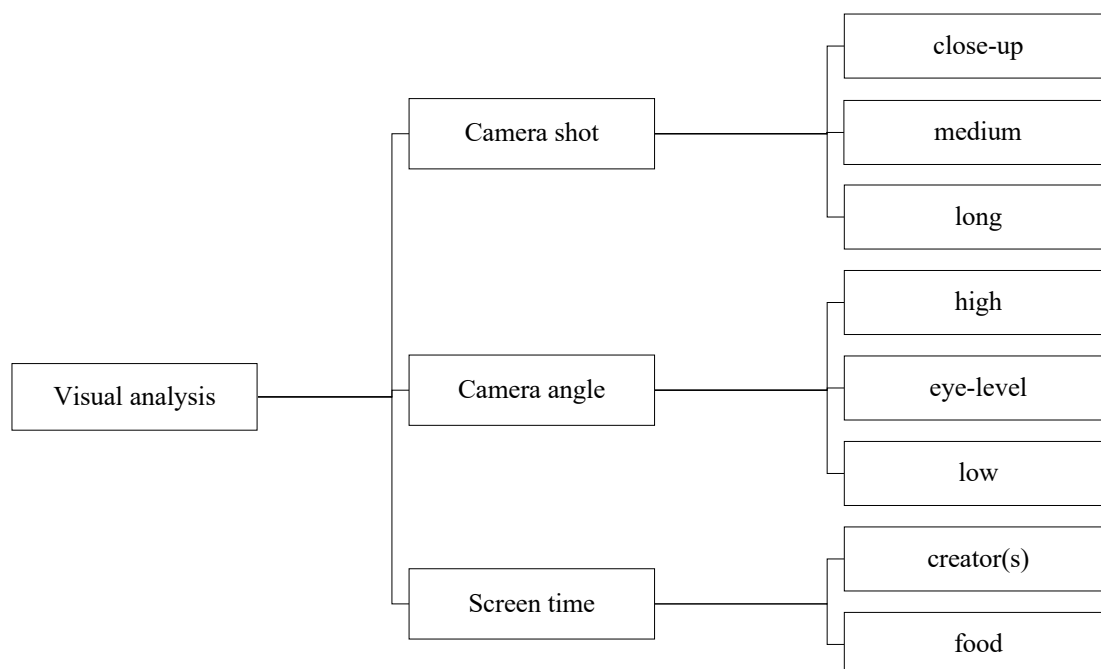


Figure 1  
ELAN annotation tiers.

Creator/food screen time acts as a proxy for interactional focus across recipe stages (for instance, interpersonal function and procedural evidence). Camera shots and angles are recognised in multimodal discourse analysis as key tools to visually enact interpersonal relations and pragmatic meanings (Kress and van Leeuwen 2020; Machin and Mayr 2023). More specifically, shot distance indexes social distance and proximity and involvement, while vertical angles encode relative power or alignment between participants (viewers and creators, in this study). However, camera shots and angles may also depend on the specific function of the audiovisual product; in the context of a recipe video, these parameters (as well as creator/food screen time) may contribute to visually mediating sensory perceptions and may carry pragmatic values.

Consequently, the videos have been analysed manually for their pragmatic functions, namely for the illocutionary force (Austin 1962) of specific segments of the videos; stance markers, specifically adjectives, revealing the speakers' affective or evaluative stances (Kiesling *et al.* 2018; Kiesling 2022); and (im)politeness strategies, both linguistic and non-linguistic (Culpeper *et al.* 2017). Austin's speech act theory (1962) guided the analysis of the illocutionary force, which is the communicative intent behind utterances, thus distinguishing between directive instructions, assertive statements, and expressive evaluations. This made it possible to analyse the acts the speakers perform and allowed the researcher to better identify instructional, interactive, and engaging moments in the videos. For this part of the annotation, both linguistic and non-linguistic or contextual cues have been considered. In

addition to speech acts, this study explored the speakers' personal stances and positioning to express alignment or misalignment with content or interlocutors. Stance markers such as evaluative adjectives, intensifiers, hedges, and other verbal cues potentially disclosing affective or epistemic attitudes have been identified (Kiesling 2022). The videos have been annotated for evaluative words describing foodstuffs and cooking processes, markers of certainty and doubt during the preparation, and any kind of linguistic resource signalling social involvement. Non-verbal cues have also been noted, since stance can be conveyed multimodally. This type of analysis can help understand how speakers position themselves, and how they evaluate actions and ingredients. Politeness strategies describe how speakers save or threaten one's and others' faces through the use of friendly language, hedges, humour (Culpeper *et al.* 2017). Although impolite expressions are not necessarily offensive, they may also be used playfully to foster social affiliation (Culpeper *et al.* 2017). As for the previous frameworks, non-verbal signals, and gestures specifically, have been considered. This part of the analysis contributed to the understanding of how *Tasty* creates and maintains user engagement and social alignment in the presence of multiple speakers.

Since the materials were posted on three different platforms, a cross-platform approach has been adopted (Brunner and Diemer 2022). This involves comparing the annotated features across distinct social media platforms, possibly due to varying goals and intended audiences. As a matter of fact, the descriptive annotations provided by ELAN supported the qualitative insights, indicating the frequency and distribution of multimodal strategies across platforms, which allows the researcher to jointly consider multiple pragmatic and multimodal cues contributing to meaning-making processes in online discourses. However, these strategies have also been examined relying on speech act theory, stancetaking, and politeness strategies to determine how they function in context, in which way(s) they contribute to meaning-making processes, and with which aims. Taken together, these frameworks provide a multimodal pragmatic perspective on the interaction between speech acts, stance, politeness, and multimodality in the construction of the 'expert-friend' persona and user engagement across platforms.

### 3. Analysis

This section of the paper presents the analysis in three separate subsections, one for each video and social media platform, namely Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Then, the resulting insights will be commented and compared in the Discussion and Conclusion section of the article.

### 3.1. Facebook

This Facebook video shows how to prepare a delicious, homemade Mac ‘n’ Cheese. The visual annotation of the video demonstrates that visual deixis supports verbal instructions. More specifically, medium, eye-level shots dominate throughout the preparation phase, while close-ups are preferred when the focus is on textures or showing ingredients in greater detail; cooking-related sounds can occasionally be heard, such as sizzling, which makes the food particularly appealing. Nevertheless, this is the only sensory perception which users can access, as the focus is not on the sensory/sensual appeal of the dish, but on its status as a comfort food. A cross-comparison of the visual annotation with the rhetorical structure of the video shows a pattern. The creator mostly appears at the beginning and at the end of the video to initiate and close the interaction and is only shown during the preparation of the food when making jokes. This results in contributing to user engagement, while keeping interpersonal work as distinct from instructions.

The second step of the analysis involved a manual annotation of the transcript to identify speech acts. Assertives dominate, contributing to the narrative organisation of the video. Directives follow, as is predictable in a recipe video (e.g. “Crush up some crackers”); however, only half of them are procedural imperatives, while the others are inclusive acts used to introduce a new step (e.g. “We’re gonna make our topping”) or to make a funny remark (e.g. “Let’s get cheesy!” when adding a considerable amount of cheese). To conclude, some acts are used as engagement devices, namely questions, as in “This recipe is definitely not healthy, but you know. **Who’s keeping track these days?**” (emphasis added).

The third step of the analysis is the identification of stancetaking devices. In this transcript, evaluative language dominates and is used to describe the dish with sensory adjectives, such as *cheesy* or *silky*, alongside more general use words, for instance *perfect*, *ultimate*, and *beautiful*. These evaluatives are frequently accompanied by intensifiers, such as *so* and *extra*. They serve a double function: on the one hand, they provide useful cues for users who may wish to replicate the recipe at home; on the other hand, they provide accurate descriptions of the sensory qualities of the food which people watching the video would never otherwise be able to experience. Furthermore, evaluatives are relevant as in this video there are no explicit sensory cues (the only exception being the background sizzling sound).

This connection with the audience is further reinforced through the use of positive politeness, as shown by the extensive use of the pronoun *we*, the second person singular pronoun *you*, *let’s*, and the vocative *guys*. These linguistic devices preserve solidarity and create social affiliation, allowing users to make their own cooking choices while also asserting Alix’s expertise, as in “You can also use whatever kind of cheese you’d like. Again, **we’re not**

**being picky here**” (emphasis added). Multimodally, social affiliation is conveyed by the setting of the video, which is Alix’s own home kitchen and not a professional studio, as this video was originally shot during the COVID-19-related time of social isolation, which pragmatically indexes authenticity and relatability. Similarly, the creator often makes playful remarks and engages in self-mockery which fosters affiliation, as in the abovementioned rhetorical question about not really caring about eating healthy food, or in the following example: “So it’s not exactly ideal to use this metal whisk on my non-stick pan, but it’s all I got right now. Don’t come for me, Internet. Be gentle with me. I’m fragile right now. I’ve been alone so long” (it should be noted that Alix used to make fun of herself for not having been in a relationship for a long time in most of her videos). It is in these funny moments that multimodal cues contribute to accurate interpretations based on the creator’s gestures, facial expressions, and laughter. Finally, the concluding move “I hope it inspires you to do some good cooking of your own. If you want me to try out anything else, let me know, and I’ll see you guys later” maintains rapport and establishes continuity, invites user feedback, and explicitly signals Alix’s commitment to creating more videos, possibly in response to users’ suggestions.

Overall, the Facebook recipe video foregrounds clarity while relying on multimodality for sensual and sensory appeal to attract users. Alix positions herself as an expert and a down-to-earth, relatable, and fun person. Moreover, multimodality contributes to a pragmatic scaffolding of the video, marking interpersonal solidarity and technical instructions.

### 3.2. Instagram

The Instagram video considered in this analysis shows how to make a dupe version of the famous Crumbl Cookies. The longest section of the video is the preparation, which is followed by a presentation of the final result. The introduction shows the cookie for a second, just enough to break it in half and attract users. Then, a playful moment follows. It is organised in such a way as to evoke TV quiz shows: the creator holds a tiny microphone and presents two cookies on two tables, challenging users to identify the original Crumbl Cookie and its dupe and share their guesses in the comments. Additionally, the two cookies are shown in detail through a magnifying glass and are both positioned on a Crumbl Cookies packaging box, further reinforcing the visual comparison between the original product and the dupe. This is a popular and effective strategy to capture users’ attention and encourage engagement, as it motivates them to watch the whole video and participate actively, in line with the viral and participatory culture of social media content (Jenkins 2006). Furthermore, the two cookies are shown in detail using a magnifying glass and both positioned on a Crumbl Cookies packaging box.

The visual annotation of the video shows a dominant presence of medium shots at eye-level or from a high angle: the former highlights details, while the latter is reminiscent of the so-called ‘top-down’ videos. As a matter of fact, this video heavily relies on multimodality to efficiently provide instructions in a limited span of time (59 seconds).

The presence of on-screen ingredients, which function as visual deixis anchoring and compressing procedural information, allows the creator to save some time, taking advantage of the fact that social media videos can be rewatched by users at any time. Similarly, the last scene of the video shows a close-up of a cookie being broken in half with an on-screen caption reading “Get the full recipe on Tasty.co!”, which redirects users to the brand’s website for a written recipe, while allowing the creator to shoot a short and essential video.

Close-ups are used to show the most luxurious ingredients, such as chocolate chips, or the consistency of the dough. Therefore, camera shot choices convey sensory perceptions. Sensory perceptions are also expressed through language. This is done by using assertive speech acts, which account for about 83% of the transcript, and creative language as in “It’s time to fluffify” when using a stand mixer to mix all the ingredients; although the verb *fluffify* does not exist in standard English, it is easy to understand that it describes the final consistency that the dough should have. Thus, it acts as a controller, namely as additional instruction ensuring a recipe step has been successfully completed (Diemer 2013). In spite of this burst of creativity, the video does not make extensive use of evaluative language or playful remarks, which, when present, are wisely blended with the instructions, thus making the style direct and essential, providing accurate instructions while still being engaging. This may be due to the affordances of the means: Instagram videos are typically short, and this one only lasts 59 seconds, so it is paramount to effectively balance accurate procedural steps and user engagement strategies.

Another relevant category of speech acts is that of directives, which are typically softened, as in “You’re gonna scoop the cookies,” rather than realised as bare imperatives, such as “Mix it all together,” thereby exemplifying positive politeness strategies. Multimodally, they align with medium eye-level shots, which contribute to clarity. This and the use of the inclusive *we* and mitigated directives via *you’re gonna* + verb contribute to both positive politeness and social affiliation between the creator and the audience. Additionally, there are a lot of moments in which the creator tries to engage her audience, for instance by encouraging user feedback (“Let us know in the comments”).

A multimodal inspection of the video reveals that it is shot by the creator in what seems to be a private kitchen, which reinforces social affiliation with the audience. Moreover, food is allocated more screen time than the creator, who is foregrounded in specific moments, namely brief jokes (as in “It is the

next day and I've got a sweet tooth” to suggest the appealing look of the cookies after resting in the fridge overnight and before baking) and technical details (e.g. “Now I hold in my hands two room temperature eggs that we are going to add in, why? Because they mix better with the batter and they rise more easily”). The combination of accessible technical explanations, and playful and relatable remarks contributes to signalling expertise and friendliness at the same time.

To conclude, the Instagram recipe playfully merges a fun style with accurate technical instructions. The creator Krista positions herself as an expert and a fun friend, who uses a variety of strategies, such as politeness and jokes, to make the recipe accessible and build solidarity with her audience.

### 3.3. *TikTok*

Jasmine's video posted on *Tasty's* TikTok account features a special guest for a special occasion: the creator's mum for Mother's Day. The brief introduction foregrounds the affective and authentic nature of the recipe, as it presents Taiwanese cold noodles with sesame sauce as prepared by Jasmine's mother. A longer preparation phase follows and includes some digressions with heritage positioning (Jasmine has Taiwanese origins) and affective stance (due to the relationship between the two cooks). The video ends with a tasting moment on the same heritage-related and affective-focused notes characterising the content.

The visual annotation indicates a dominance of medium shots with some close-ups of the noodles or the sauce being poured. The creator and her guest are shown throughout the video as they cook in a home setting, which further reinforces a sense of relatability and authenticity.

The analysis of speech acts reveals that assertives dominate and are mostly used to describe the dish's appearance and sensory qualities, as in “The sauce is really nutty”. Directives are used to provide instructions, but they are mostly softened, either by being presented as suggestions or through positive politeness strategies and inclusive forms such as “You want to make sure the noodles are cold” and “We're gonna toss the noodles.” The video also makes frequent use of expressives, for example “Oh my gosh, that looks amazing,” and rhetorical questions that promote audience engagement, as in “Who doesn't love cold noodles in summer?”. Furthermore, there are some humorous exchanges between Jasmine and her mother, which contribute to authenticity, spontaneity, and relatability. For instance, because the video is shot to celebrate Mother's Day, Jasmine offers to shred the chicken to help her mother; however, the woman had already completed the task, which makes her daughter's help superfluous.

Stancetaking reveals that the creator's tone conveys expertise, relatability, and affection at the same time. Evaluative adjectives are not

particularly frequent and are used either to provide useful procedural information or to describe the food at the end. The main stance is related to Jasmine's identity: the recipe becomes a way for her to connect with her origins and with her mother, while also showcasing relatable expertise. In this way, she connects with her audience through parasocial interaction (Horton and Wohl 1956).

In spite of being relatively short (1:14 minutes), this video relies on multimodality to add a layer of complexity to the recipe. Firstly, it has already been mentioned that the setting is Jasmine's private kitchen, which contributes to solidarity and 'relatable coolness'. Secondly, the camera is positioned on the counter in front of a colourful portable stove with a *Tasty* pot, which is a smart marketing move, suggesting that creators use the brand's products on a daily basis without necessarily promoting them. Thirdly, the full recipe can be accessed in the video description, and on-screen captions are only used at the end of the video, during the food tasting, when Jasmine and her mother speak Taiwanese, which further reinforces the heritage and identity positioning of the creator and her guest.

Jasmine's recipe can be described as a typical social media video, providing instructions, while making use of the affordances of the means to provide accurate, rich, but not tedious content. Indeed, as the creators only mention the steps of the recipe (as the automated subtitles also show), leaving more detailed information in the video description, for instance regarding the needed quantity for each ingredient. Furthermore, multimodality contributes to the accessibility of video by using on-screen captions to translate Taiwanese into English, so that the spontaneity and authenticity of the interaction between the creator and her mother are preserved.

## 4. Discussion

The analysis section adopted a descriptive approach to present the three videos randomly selected for this study from a wider corpus of *Tasty* videos. As previously mentioned, since the videos were posted on three different social media networks, a cross-platform approach (Brunner and Diemer 2022) will be integrated to highlight similarities and differences.

### 4.1. 'Expert-friend' persona

*BuzzFeed's Tasty's* videos have a distinctive feature regardless of the posting platform since they blend instructional content with entertainment, thus fully aligning with *infotainment* content, which has gained popularity on the Internet (YEC, n.d.). This emerges from the videos analysed here: the creators instruct viewers on how to cook a dish, while engaging and entertaining them. All three

videos construct an approachable “expert friend” persona, pragmatically and multimodally negotiated through a balance between expertise and relatability, which makes the content accessible and, at least seemingly, authentic (Battista 2025a). These findings illustrate how the methodological frameworks used for the analysis intersect and operate as a unified set of layers. For instance, stance is conveyed both linguistically and visually; politeness is expressed via verbal humour and camera shots; speech acts gain force through multimodality. This extends existing models of influencer authority (Abidin 2018) by showing the balance between expertise and relatability in specialised multimodal digital contexts. Nonetheless, the tone, style, and interactional features vary across Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, reflecting previous research on the topic (Haenlein *et al.* 2020).

Alix, on Facebook, adopts a narrative and empathetic tone. She warmly welcomes the audience into her apartment – albeit only virtually – and sympathises with them, as everyone at that time was experiencing social isolation. This situates the video as a source of entertainment during the difficult period of the pandemic, when social media was one of the few, if not the only, forms of escape from the real world, and fosters an emotional connection with viewers. Furthermore, Alix makes several jokes, even relying on self-mockery, which makes her appear entertaining, approachable, and human (Matwick and Matwick 2019). This is possible due to the generally longer length of Facebook videos as opposed to other platforms. This abundance of humour, together with the use of informal language, serves as a positive politeness strategy, making the audience feel like close friends rather than an anonymous mass to instruct (Jones 2024). This can foster trust, familiarity, and can position the host as an authoritative cook and as a relatable peer at the same time, thus epitomising the expert/non-expert balance which is a key feature in food blogging (Cesiri 2016).

On Instagram the tone is upbeat and concise. The entertaining side of the video is achieved through a playful hook presenting the content as a challenge for users to guess which is the original and which is the dupe Crumbl Cookie. While this move encourages user participation, this is also a ‘fake’ challenge, since its real purpose is to demonstrate that there are no visible differences between the two cookies, thereby enhancing the perceived appeal and quality of the recipe. Additionally, this situates the video within the trend-driven social media culture, where content often revolves around viral challenges or ‘hacks’ (Barros *et al.* 2025; Biolo 2023). The language is friendly and colloquial, but focused on action, visual instructions, and visual appeal rather than on personal narratives or digressions. As a matter of fact, the creator highlights the originality of the recipe, which makes a popular product accessible to anyone who is willing to cook, and conveys relatability and fun through Krista’s communicative and creative style. As a result, the ‘expert’ persona here is more

of a relatable presenter/entertainer rather than a close friend due to the lack of intimate, heart-to-heart exchange.

The TikTok video exemplifies authenticity and personal storytelling on social media, reflecting TikTok creators' tendency to adopt a casual and relatable style and to share real, and even vulnerable, moments (Barta and Andalibi 2021). Although the case study of this article is a brand and not a personal profile, some of the *Tasty* creators stand out for personal storytelling. This has already emerged in Alix's video, as she usually mocks herself for being single, but it is even more evident in Jasmine's content, who often invites her personal acquaintances in her videos and typically cooks Taiwanese(-inspired) dishes. In this specific video, the creator is with her mother for Mother's Day at her own apartment, which immediately creates a warm family atmosphere. The tone is intimate, the emotional bond is central, and it is clear that some of the dialogue between the two is spontaneous, for example when Jasmine offers to help shred the chicken – which her mum had already finished doing – and when her mother shyly reacts to Jasmine saying, “I love you so much!”. These genuine interactions and Jasmine's typically relatable style situate this video within the ‘slice of life’ trend and foster authenticity (Barta and Andalibi 2021; Yau and Reich 2019). Consequently, the creator positions herself as the prototypical ‘expert-friend’, introducing her own family to viewers, showing her pride for her origins, as well as enthusiasm for quality family time and, of course, cooking (Zeng *et al.* 2021), thus associating expertise and relational authenticity, creating both affective and affiliative bonds (Kiesling 2022).

Overall, it can be concluded that the three videos considered for this study aim at authenticity, aligning with social media strategies for user engagement and, consequently, monetisation (Cascio Rizzo *et al.* 2023; Nunes *et al.* 2021). However, different strategies are adopted: Facebook emphasises personal narratives, solidarity, and humour; Instagram focuses on trendy and fun engagement; TikTok prioritises personal storytelling and realness. This proves that the ‘expert-friend’ is both a successful and an adaptable strategy.

## 4.2. *Speech acts and stance*

The annotation of speech acts confirmed a dominant pattern, namely the dominance of assertives and directives across the dataset. While this is not surprising due to the instructional nature of the videos (Lacsina 2023), it is interesting to observe how their form and pragmatic force vary across platforms.

A recurring pattern is that of softening directions. On Facebook, this is achieved through the use of inclusive pronouns and narrative, personal framing. On Instagram, directives are concise and paired with visual support, which is an efficient use of multimodal resources to keep the video essential

and short. On TikTok, directions are presented as suggestions, which aligns with Jasmine's affiliative style and with previous pragmatic research (Shaarawy 2015) suggesting that the nature of imperatives depends on agent type. In this case, the softened use of directives resonates with the "expert friend" persona.

Assertives are equally relevant and variable: mostly descriptive on Facebook, procedural on Instagram, and affective or evaluative on TikTok. This pattern reflects Kiesling's (2022) insight that stance is a layered process, since epistemic stance prevails on Facebook, procedural stance on Instagram, and affective stance on TikTok.

Another important finding concerns politeness. Although impoliteness can sometimes be used playfully to foster social affiliation, this was not observed in the videos analysed. Instead, all three videos rely on positive politeness to reinforce solidarity through inclusive we pronouns, hedged directions, humour, and personal storytelling. This may suggest that affiliation, together with the creation and maintenance of a safe environment, is a priority for a commercial brand like *Tasty* (Creelman 2022; Vandevyvere 2016).

### 4.3. Engagement

A common feature that these videos display is inviting audience engagement. Instagram is the most explicit as it directly asks users to make their guess about the cookies in the comments. This strategy fosters a participatory experience revolving around the core of the video (baking a Crumbl Cookie dupe) (Pletikosa Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013), which is crucial on a platform where visibility may depend on engagement. The Facebook video invites users to comment but only at the end, when they are encouraged to suggest potential future recipes. This is useful for creators to know what their audience might appreciate, and engages viewers directly in the content creation process, giving the impression that the creator will be listening to them, thus fostering loyalty (Ertz *et al.* 2024; Malodia *et al.* 2024). In any case, posing a question to the audience and encouraging interaction in the comment section is typically used on social media for involvement (Lacsina 2023).

Inviting comments is not the only way to encourage user participation. All the videos analysed use inclusive we, which creates a shared cooking experience and frames it as a collaborative activity between the host and the viewers, making them feel involved. This involvement is further reinforced multimodally through close-up shots that show the dish or ingredients in detail. Such shots serve two purposes simultaneously: creating an immersive experience for the audience and supporting the cooking instructions, which is one of the most typical and ancient uses of images in recipes (Notaker 2017). Furthermore, parasocial interactions are present (Giles 2002), as all the creators 'imagine' the actual presence of their audience. On TikTok, viewers are

positioned as learning an authentic Taiwanese recipe and as witnesses of an equally authentic family interaction, whereas on Instagram users are addressed as the contestants on a TV quiz show. However, Facebook presents the most interesting case. Alix directly addresses the audience by sharing personal anecdotes and by mocking herself, for instance when she uses a metal whisk on a non-stick pan. This results in anticipating potential critical commentaries and defusing negativity while acknowledging users in a humorous way (Culpeper *et al.* 2017), strengthening social connection and demonstrating pragmatic awareness in a social context by using humour and self-mockery to mitigate potentially face-threatening acts (as well as acts potentially undermining her cooking expertise) (Sundar and Cao 2020).

Overall, these examples demonstrate that engagement is not only a social media marketing strategy, but also functions as a pragmatic act of affiliation, performing illocutionary work by including the audience as a co-participant and fostering solidarity. Therefore, engagement is a speech act co-constructing the social dimension of digital food discourse, fostering loyalty, and supporting the brand's communicative goals (Abidin 2018; Ertz *et al.* 2024).

#### **4.4. Multimodal strategies**

The multimodal organisation of the videos and the orchestration of visuals, sounds, gestures, and words play a central role in meaning-making processes. Although it can be argued that all communication is inherently multimodal (Kress and van Leeuwen 2020), digital contexts offer complex interplays of semiotic modes.

All the videos analysed rely on visual deixis, thus using visual resources to support or complement verbal instructions, for instance by showing a full list of ingredients or additional information as on-screen captions. TikTok is the only exception, as on-screen elements are only used to make the video fully accessible to people who do not speak Taiwanese.

The use of camera angles and shots varies across social media platforms, reflecting different multimodal and pragmatic priorities. On Facebook and TikTok, medium eye-level shots dominate, and the creator has the same screen time as the food, thus reflecting the balance between showing a recipe and offering personal narratives. Instagram provides the most close-ups, echoing the original *Tasty* top-down videos, whose priority is that of showing how to make a recipe with minimal social and personal engagement. These camera choices are therefore not merely aesthetic but contribute to pragmatic meaning-making. Close-ups highlight textures or results and typically accompany procedural and evaluative acts, visually reinforcing the illocutionary force of the instruction and/or its outcome. Medium eye-level shots of the creator usually coincide with softened directives, assertives, and affiliative talk, as the equal (eye-level) perspective visually enacts proximity and is thus consistent

with the 'expert friend'. High or top-down angles align with step-sequencing and visual clarity, effectively guiding the user through instructions. Consequently, camera work is pragmatic in that it extends the illocutionary work of speech acts into the visual mode.

Soundscapes diverge. The Facebook video is the only one with auditory food-related sensory perceptions. The Instagram video has a very quick pace and only the voice of the creator is heard. Jasmine's TikTok video prioritises a realistic soundscape, with clinking bowls and laughter, thus multimodally enhancing authenticity. These differences confirm that the illocutionary force of a speech act can extend beyond language to multimodal communication (O'Halloran 2011; Payrató 2017) and multisensory experiences (Keating and Łapińska 2023).

Platform affordances affect content creation, even though they do not depend on brand's or creators' choices. Facebook typically has a higher tolerance for longer content, which enables more digressions, as opposed to Instagram, whereas TikTok's algorithm favours emotional and personal bonds. This exemplifies that recipes as a digital genre mediate form, action, and medium to foster novel, multimodal, participatory environments (Miller 2015).

These insights confirm the centrality of multimodality in social media discourse as a tool to expand the illocutionary force of speech acts (Austin 1962), since directives gain clarity and expressives are intensified. Consequently, this study suggests that speech acts and visual communication should not be treated as separate layers, but as complementary meaning-making tools (Payrató 2017), thereby amplifying their force for instructive, humorous, and affiliative goals (Zappavigna 2015).

## 5. Conclusion

The present study considered *BuzzFeed's Tasty* as a case study to explore how cooking videos on social media employ multimodal strategies for instruction, affiliation, humour. Inspired by pragmatics and relying on the frameworks of multimodality (Kress and van Leeuwen 2020), politeness (Culpeper *et al.* 2017), speech acts (Austin 1962), and stancetaking (Kiesling 2022), this article shows the adaptability of pragmatic frameworks to the analysis of multimodal digital genres and notes similarities and differences across three social media networks through a cross-platform approach (Brunner and Diemer 2022).

Across all platforms, pragmatic functions, mainly instruction and affiliation, are realised multimodally through the interplay of speech acts, stance markers, politeness, camera work, and humour. Nevertheless, each platform foregrounds a different communicative style: Facebook prioritises a colloquial and friendly tone, Instagram a fun and concise style, and TikTok spontaneity. Overall, two common patterns emerge: the creators' positioning

as “expert friends” and their pursuit of authenticity as strategies to boost user engagement.

This study entails some limitations. Firstly, the dataset is highly specialised, since only three random videos – one per platform – have been considered. Although a larger corpus was available, the main goal of this study was to rely on multiple frameworks to explore their interplay and effects on social media content. Since the annotation process was entirely manual and subject to time and resource constraints, only a limited number of videos could be analysed. Secondly, only one brand and its videos posted in May 2023 have been analysed. Thirdly, the annotation was carried out by a single researcher. All these limitations point to a shared gap which could be addressed in future research: expanding the dataset and, ideally, involving more annotators could make the analysis more representative since, at this stage, it is not possible to make generalisations. Instead, emerging trends may provide food for thought for future studies. Finally, the investigation could benefit from computational tools for a quantitative perspective on the issue.

Nonetheless, the study contributes to pragmatics by demonstrating how traditional concepts can be adapted to new platforms while extending verbal communication to multimodal resources to co-construct pragmatic functions. A multimodal pragmatic perspective reveals that instruction and affiliation are realised through language, camera work, editing, sound, humour, and stance markers. This article also has implications for genre theory, as it suggests that a historically stable genre such as the recipe still offers room for adaptation to the participatory culture of social media without losing its instructional nature. Bridging pragmatics and multimodality can provide valuable tools for understanding the complexities of digital communication. Furthermore, while it does not offer definitive conclusions, this study opens up new avenues for research on digital food genres. Ultimately, a recipe is much more than a set of ingredients and procedural steps: it can become a site of stancetaking, social affiliation, and sensory perception.

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