



Health Branding and Food Communication: A Branded Content Analysis of Ketofastosis Lifestyle on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the rise of health-oriented lifestyle branding on social media has reshaped public discourse around food, wellness, and identity. Among these movements, the Ketofastosis Lifestyle (KFLS) community on Facebook has emerged as a compelling example of grassroots health branding. This study explores how health branding is constructed and communicated through food narratives within the KFLS Facebook group, focusing on the ways members articulate and promote Ketofastosis principles. Using Branded Content Analysis (BCA) with an inductive coding approach (Natural BCA), the research examines community-generated content to uncover the symbolic and discursive strategies embedded in Ketofastosis food communication. Findings reveal that the health branding of Ketofastosis Lifestyle is anchored in five core pillars: Feeding, Sleeping, Moving, Relaxing, and Fasting. These pillars serve as a holistic framework for promoting metabolic health and personal discipline. Food communication within the group emphasizes the consumption of “real food” characterized by low carbohydrates, moderate protein, and high fat. Members frequently employ a distinctive lexicon (such as “amunisi,” “realfood,” “ponari,” “jendela makan,” and “OMAD” or one meal a day) to reinforce shared values and practices. This branded language not only fosters group identity but also simplifies complex nutritional concepts for lay audiences. Ketofastosis advocates a high-fat, high-protein, ultra-low-carb diet, synergized with intermittent fasting protocols of 16, 18, or 20 hours. The branded content within KFLS blends scientific rationale, experiential testimony, and emotional resonance, positioning Ketofastosis as both a dietary strategy and a lifestyle philosophy. This study contributes to the expanding literature on health branding and food communication by offering insights into how digital communities co-create branded health narratives. It also provides practical reference for individuals seeking to adopt Ketofastosis as a sustainable health practice in the age of social media wellness movements.

Keywords

low carbohydrates, moderate protein, high fat, intermittent fasting, community-generated content

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INTRODUCTION

The mediatization of health has fundamentally reshaped how food, wellness, and bodily practices are understood and communicated in contemporary societies. Health is no longer confined to institutional or clinical domains but is increasingly produced and negotiated through everyday media practices, particularly on social media platforms. Within these digital environments, food is not merely a nutritional input but a symbolic medium through which individuals perform identity, exercise moral judgment, and demonstrate self-discipline. Scholars of health communication argue that this shift reflects the broader individualization of health responsibility, where wellbeing is framed as a personal project rather than a collective concern (Crawford, 1980; Lupton, 1996). As

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a result, health communication today is inseparable from cultural meaning-making and branding logics.

One of the most salient manifestations of this transformation is the emergence of health branding as a communicative phenomenon. Health branding refers to the process by which health-related practices and values are organized into coherent narratives that resemble commercial brands in structure, affective appeal, and symbolic coherence, even when no formal market actor is involved (Evans et al., 2015). Unlike traditional health promotion, which relies on expert authority and rational persuasion, health branding operates through emotional resonance, experiential credibility, and peer validation. Digital platforms amplify these dynamics by enabling ordinary users to participate actively in the production and circulation of branded health meanings (Lupton, 2012; 2014). Consequently, branding becomes a distributed, community-driven process rather than a top-down strategic intervention.

Food occupies a central position within these branded health narratives. From the perspective of food communication, eating practices are culturally and morally charged, embedded in discourses about purity, control, pleasure, and risk (Johnston & Goodman, 2015). Digital media intensifies these meanings by rendering food choices highly visible and narrativized through images, testimonials, and everyday storytelling. Research shows that online food communication often translates complex nutritional science into simplified moral binaries such as “real” versus “processed” or “clean” versus “toxic” food (Lewis, 2018). These simplifications function not only as communicative tools but also as branding mechanisms that stabilize meaning and guide collective behavior.

Within this landscape, low-carbohydrate and fasting-based dietary movements have gained increasing prominence. Approaches such as ketogenic diets and intermittent fasting are commonly framed as scientifically grounded alternatives to mainstream nutritional paradigms focused on calorie restriction and low-fat consumption (Paoli et al., 2013; Hallberg et al., 2018). Beyond physiological claims, these approaches are articulated as holistic lifestyles emphasizing metabolic efficiency, temporal discipline, and bodily awareness. Scholars have conceptualized such diets as “technologies of the self,” offering structured routines through which individuals seek control over bodily uncertainty in late modern health cultures (Lupton, 2015). Social media plays a crucial role in transforming these dietary regimes into lifestyle ideologies.

Facebook groups represent particularly important sites for this transformation. Unlike influencer-driven platforms that prioritize visibility and aspirational aesthetics, Facebook groups provide semi-enclosed spaces conducive to sustained interaction, norm formation, and shared meaning-making. Research on online communities demonstrates that repeated storytelling, ritualized practices, and specialized language are central to the formation of collective identity (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Kozinets, 2015). In health-focused groups, these dynamics are intensified by emotional investment and mutual accountability. As a result, Facebook-based communities often function as grassroots branding ecosystems, where health lifestyles are continuously produced and legitimized through peer communication.

The Ketofastosis Lifestyle (KFLS) Facebook community offers an instructive case of such grassroots health branding (Suryaman, 2021). Ketofastosis integrates ketogenic dietary principles with structured fasting protocols, framing metabolic health as the outcome of disciplined lifestyle management. Importantly, Ketofastosis is not primarily promoted through corporate campaigns or celebrity influencers but through sustained peer-to-peer interaction within the Facebook group. Members actively share food practices, fasting routines, bodily transformations, and motivational narratives, collectively constructing Ketofastosis as both a dietary system and a moral lifestyle project (Suryaman & Wijaya, 2020). This framing resonates with broader wellness discourses that emphasize self-governance and personal responsibility for health outcomes (Lupton, 1996; 2015).

From a branding perspective, Ketofastosis exhibits a distinctive symbolic architecture. Core lifestyle elements, such as regulated feeding, fasting, movement, rest, and relaxation, are repeatedly articulated as interconnected pillars of metabolic health (Ketofastosis, n.d.; Suryaman & Wijaya, 2020; Suryaman, 2021). These elements function analogously to brand values, providing a stable framework for interpreting and aligning diverse individual experiences. The emphasis on “real food,” metabolic flexibility, and temporal discipline further reinforces symbolic coherence within the

community. Such coherence is essential for sustaining engagement in lifestyle-based health movements that require long-term behavioral commitment.

The existing literature on digital health cultures has explored the roles of influencers, self-tracking technologies, and algorithmic visibility in shaping health practices (Lupton, 2016). Studies of diet-related online communities emphasize the importance of peer support, affective storytelling, and experiential knowledge in maintaining adherence to restrictive eating regimes (Fox & Ward, 2006; Bennett et al., 2020). Consumer culture scholars have further demonstrated how branding logics extend beyond markets into domains such as religion, politics, and health (Holt, 2004; Zwick & Bradshaw, 2016). However, these strands of research often remain analytically fragmented, limiting our understanding of how health branding, food communication, and online community dynamics intersect.

Moreover, empirical studies of ketogenic and fasting communities tend to prioritize behavioral or biomedical outcomes, paying limited attention to the communicative processes through which these lifestyles are normalized and morally justified. When communication is examined, it is frequently treated as a secondary variable rather than as a constitutive force in shaping health meaning. This limitation is particularly evident in research on non-Western digital health communities, which remain underrepresented in high-impact journals. Consequently, the cultural specificity and symbolic creativity of grassroots health branding in Southeast Asian contexts are often overlooked.

Another critical gap concerns methodological orientation. Much existing research relies on deductive frameworks derived from established health behavior theories, which may obscure emergent meanings within community-generated content. While valuable for testing predefined constructs, such approaches are less suited to capturing the symbolic, affective, and discursive dimensions of grassroots branding phenomena. There is therefore a need for inductive, interpretive methods that foreground meaning-making processes as they unfold within digital communities. Addressing this need is crucial for advancing theoretical debates in health communication and digital culture studies.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the Ketofastosis Lifestyle Facebook group through the integrated lenses of health branding and food communication, employing Branded Content Analysis (BCA) as its primary methodological approach. BCA conceptualizes branded communication as a symbolic system composed of narratives, values, rituals, and linguistic markers that collectively construct brand meaning (Wijaya, 2021). By adopting an inductive variant (Natural BCA), this study allows branded meanings to emerge organically from community discourse rather than imposing predefined brand dimensions. This approach is particularly appropriate for analyzing community-driven health movements where branding is implicit and continuously negotiated.

Focusing on food-related communication, the study examines how Ketofastosis members articulate dietary principles, justify health claims, and reinforce collective identity through everyday narratives and vernacular language. Attention is given to the ways scientific rationales, experiential testimonies, and emotional appeals are interwoven in community-generated content. These communicative practices are analyzed not merely as information exchange but as branding labor that sustains coherence and commitment within the group. In this sense, food communication is treated as a central mechanism through which health branding is enacted.

The contribution of this study lies in reconceptualizing community-based health movements as branded communicative systems. By positioning Ketofastosis as a digitally mediated health brand rather than solely a dietary practice, the study extends existing health communication frameworks that privilege institutional messaging. It also demonstrates how branding logics operate within peer-based communities, challenging assumptions that branding is inherently commercial. This perspective advances theoretical discussions on the personalization, moralization, and cultural embedding of health in digital societies.

The urgency of this research is underscored by the growing reliance on social media communities for health guidance in contexts of uneven institutional trust. As lifestyle-based health movements continue to proliferate online, understanding their communicative dynamics becomes increasingly important. Examining how health branding operates at the grassroots level provides insights into both the empowering and potentially problematic dimensions of digital wellness

cultures. Such insights are essential for informing future research, policy discussions, and health communication practice.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to analyze how health branding is constructed and sustained through food communication within the Ketofastosis Lifestyle Facebook community. Specifically, the study aims to identify the symbolic pillars that structure Ketofastosis branding, examine the role of branded vernacular in shaping collective identity, and explore how scientific and experiential narratives are integrated in community discourse. These aims are addressed through the following research questions: (1) How is health branding articulated through food-related communication in the Ketofastosis Lifestyle Facebook group? (2) What symbolic structures and branded narratives underpin the Ketofastosis lifestyle as constructed by community members? (3) How does branded language function to translate nutritional knowledge and reinforce communal identity?

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in a constructivist paradigm. The research conceptualizes health branding as a socially constructed communicative process that emerges through everyday interaction within online communities. Accordingly, the study does not seek to measure behavioral outcomes or causal effects, but to interpret how branded health meanings are collectively produced, stabilized, and circulated through food-related discourse.

Analytical Framework: Natural Branded Content Analysis

The study employs Branded Content Analysis (BCA) as its primary analytical framework (Wijaya, 2017; 2021). BCA conceptualizes branding as a symbolic system composed of narratives, values, rituals, and linguistic markers embedded in communicative practices (Wijaya, 2021). To align with the grassroots and community-driven nature of Ketofastosis, this study adopts an inductive variant of BCA, referred to as Natural BCA, which allows branded meanings to emerge organically from the data rather than being imposed through predefined branding dimensions. The BCA procedural steps proposed by Wijaya (2017; 2021) are shown in Figure 1.

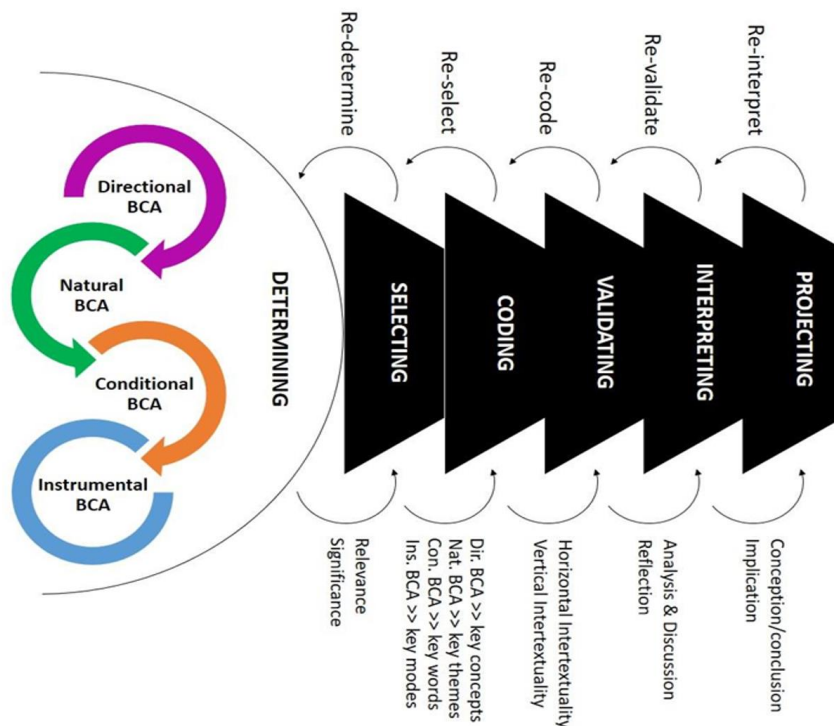


Figure 1. Branded Content Analysis (BCA) procedures (source: Wijaya, 2017; 2021)

Data Source and Context

Data were drawn from the Ketofastosis Lifestyle Facebook group (<https://web.facebook.com/groups/119735115075073>), a community-based online forum where members actively share food practices, fasting routines, experiential narratives, and motivational content related to the Ketofastosis lifestyle. Facebook groups provide a semi-enclosed communicative environment that facilitates sustained interaction and collective meaning-making, making them particularly suitable for studying grassroots health branding (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Ketofastosis Lifestyle (KFLS) group on Facebook (source: Facebook)

Unit of Analysis and Sampling

The unit of analysis consisted of food-related posts, captions, and comment threads that explicitly discussed dietary practices, meal composition, fasting routines, or metabolic health rationales. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to capture rich and recurring patterns of branded discourse rather than representative frequency. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached, indicated by the repetition of symbolic themes and branded language across posts.

Coding Procedure

Data analysis followed an inductive coding process. In the first cycle, open coding was conducted to identify recurring terms, metaphors, narratives, and symbolic expressions used by community members. In the second cycle, these codes were grouped into higher-order categories representing branded values, rituals, and meaning structures. Throughout the process, analytic memos were used to document interpretive decisions and emerging patterns, ensuring reflexivity and theoretical sensitivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ketofastosis as a Community-Based Health Brand

The findings demonstrate that Ketofastosis functions as a coherent branded lifestyle, articulated through a stable set of symbolic pillars repeatedly referenced in community discourse. These pillars (feeding, fasting, movement, rest, and relaxation) operate as organizing principles that structure how members interpret bodily sensations, evaluate progress, and narrate success. From a health branding perspective, this symbolic coherence is a defining feature of effective brands, as it enables diverse experiences to be aligned under a shared meaning system (Evans et al., 2015). Importantly, in the Ketofastosis case, this coherence emerges organically from community interaction rather than from centralized brand management.

This supports and extends scholarship on branding beyond commercial contexts. Consumer culture theorists have argued that branding logics increasingly permeate non-market domains, including religion, politics, and health (Holt, 2004; Zwick & Bradshaw, 2016). The present study contributes to this literature by demonstrating how health branding can emerge as a bottom-up, community-driven process. Ketofastosis branding is not imposed through logos, slogans, or

advertising campaigns, but through repeated communicative practices that stabilize meaning over time. In this sense, the brand exists less as an object and more as a shared interpretive framework through which members make sense of health and discipline.

Moreover, the moral dimension of Ketofastosis branding is particularly salient. The Results indicate that adherence to Ketofastosis principles is frequently framed as a form of moral achievement, emphasizing discipline, consistency, and personal responsibility. This aligns with Crawford's (1980) notion of healthism, where health practices become moral obligations tied to individual worth. However, rather than being imposed by institutional health authorities, these moral expectations are collectively reinforced within the community. This suggests that grassroots health branding may intensify moral regulation precisely because it is embedded in peer-based relationships.

Food Communication as Branding Infrastructure

A central contribution of this study lies in foregrounding food communication as the primary mechanism through which health branding is enacted. The Results show that food-related discourse (discussions of “real food,” macronutrient composition, meal timing, and fasting protocols) serves as the main site where Ketofastosis branding is articulated and reinforced. Rather than functioning merely as nutritional guidance, food communication operates as branding infrastructure, translating abstract health principles into everyday practices that are emotionally and symbolically resonant.

This finding extends food communication scholarship that emphasizes the cultural and moral dimensions of eating practices (Johnston & Goodman, 2015). In the Ketofastosis community, food choices are framed not only in terms of health outcomes but also as expressions of identity and commitment to shared values (Figure 3). The repeated contrast between “real food” and other forms of consumption reflects a moralized food discourse that distinguishes insiders from outsiders (Suryaman & Wijaya, 2021). Such distinctions are characteristic of branded communities, where symbolic boundaries play a crucial role in sustaining group identity (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).



Figure 3. A post of Ketofood expression (source: KFLS Group Facebook)

Furthermore, the emphasis on temporal discipline (particularly fasting windows and meal timing) highlights how food communication extends beyond what is eaten to encompass when and how eating occurs. This temporal framing aligns with broader wellness discourses that valorize self-regulation and optimization (Lupton, 2015). By embedding these temporal practices within branded narratives, the Ketofastosis community transforms routine bodily rhythms into meaningful acts of lifestyle alignment. Food communication thus becomes a means of governing the body through symbolic rather than institutional authority.

Vernacular Language and the Popularization of Health Knowledge

Another key finding concerns the role of vernacular language in sustaining Ketofastosis branding. Terms such as “amunisi,” “real food,” “jendela makan,” and “OMAD” function as linguistic shortcuts that condense complex nutritional and metabolic concepts into accessible expressions. This branded lexicon performs several essential functions. First, it lowers the cognitive barrier to participation, enabling members without formal health expertise to engage confidently in health discourse. Second, it fosters a sense of belonging by signaling insider status and shared understanding.

This finding resonates with Lupton’s (2016) argument that digital health cultures privilege experiential and lay knowledge alongside, and sometimes over, institutional expertise. By translating scientific concepts into vernacular terms, the Ketofastosis community produces what might be described as “popular metabolic knowledge.” This knowledge is not necessarily opposed to science, but it is recontextualized through lived experience and emotional resonance. As a result, scientific authority is reframed as something that can be appropriated and rearticulated within community discourse.

From a branding perspective, vernacular language serves as a powerful tool for meaning stabilization. Brands often rely on distinctive terminology to differentiate themselves and foster loyalty. In the absence of formal brand management, the Ketofastosis community collectively performs this linguistic branding work. This challenges conventional assumptions that branding requires strategic communication expertise, suggesting instead that branding competence can emerge organically through sustained interaction and shared practice.

Narrative and Experiential Legitimation of Health Claims

The Results further indicate that health claims within the Ketofastosis community are frequently legitimized through narrative and experiential testimony rather than through formal scientific citation. Members often share personal stories of weight loss, improved energy, or metabolic improvement, framing these experiences as evidence of Ketofastosis’s efficacy. These narratives are emotionally charged and often structured as transformation stories, emphasizing before-and-after contrasts and moral perseverance.

Such narrative legitimation aligns with research on online health communities that highlights the persuasive power of experiential storytelling (Fox & Ward, 2006; Bennett et al., 2020). In the context of health branding, these narratives function as brand myths that reinforce the lifestyle’s value proposition (Holt, 2004). Rather than undermining scientific credibility, experiential narratives coexist with scientific rationales, creating a hybrid epistemology that blends evidence-based discourse with lived experience.

This hybridization has important implications for health communication. On one hand, it democratizes health knowledge by validating personal experience as a legitimate source of insight. On the other hand, it raises questions about the boundaries between evidence-based guidance and anecdotal authority. The Ketofastosis case illustrates how grassroots health branding navigates this tension by embedding scientific language within emotionally resonant narratives, thereby enhancing credibility without relying solely on institutional endorsement.

Grassroots Branding and Online Health Communities

Taken together, the findings position Ketofastosis as an example of grassroots branding within an online health community. This extends brand community theory by demonstrating that communities can function as brands even in the absence of a focal commercial entity. While classic brand community models emphasize shared consumption of branded products (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), the Ketofastosis community centers on shared practices and symbolic alignment rather than on product ownership. The “brand” is the lifestyle itself, collectively maintained through communication.

This perspective also contributes to online community research by highlighting the branding dimension of communal interaction. While previous studies have emphasized support, information exchange, and social capital in online health communities (Zhang & He, 2021), the present study underscores the importance of symbolic coherence and branding logic in sustaining long-term

engagement. Branding provides a narrative structure that organizes individual experiences into a shared story, making continued participation meaningful and motivating (Suryaman, 2021).

Significantly, the non-Western context of the Ketofastosis community adds further theoretical value. Much of the literature on digital health branding is grounded in Western contexts, often focusing on influencer cultures or commercial wellness industries. The Ketofastosis case demonstrates that similar branding dynamics can emerge in different cultural settings, shaped by local language, values, and health concerns. This suggests that health branding is a globally relevant phenomenon that warrants greater cross-cultural attention.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it advances health branding theory by conceptualizing branding as a communicative process that can emerge organically within peer-based communities. Second, it extends food communication scholarship by demonstrating how food discourse functions as branding infrastructure rather than merely as health messaging. Third, it contributes to online community research by highlighting the role of symbolic coherence and vernacular language in sustaining collective identity.

By integrating these perspectives, the study offers a more holistic framework for understanding digital health movements. Rather than viewing health branding, food communication, and online communities as separate domains, the findings show how they intersect to produce powerful lifestyle narratives. This integrative approach responds directly to calls for more interdisciplinary research in health communication and digital culture studies.

Practical Implications

Beyond theoretical contributions, the findings have practical implications for health communication practice. Understanding how health branding operates at the community level can inform the design of more culturally resonant health interventions. Rather than relying solely on top-down messaging, practitioners may benefit from engaging with existing community narratives and vernacular language. Recognizing the branding logic embedded in grassroots movements can also help policymakers and health professionals better assess both the opportunities and risks associated with social media-based health guidance.

At the same time, the study highlights the importance of critical engagement with digital health cultures. While community-based branding can empower individuals and foster mutual support, it may also reinforce moral pressure and exclusionary norms. Future health communication strategies should therefore balance respect for community autonomy with efforts to promote inclusivity and evidence-informed dialogue.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Ketofastosis Lifestyle on Facebook operates as a form of community-based health branding constructed through everyday food communication rather than formal institutional promotion. Through Natural Branded Content Analysis, the findings show that branded meanings of health are collectively produced via visual food presentation, information sharing, question–answer interactions, practical recommendations, and the use of a distinctive vernacular. Food functions not merely as a nutritional object but as a symbolic medium through which discipline, identity, and lifestyle commitment are articulated and reinforced. These communicative practices enable Ketofastosis to emerge as a coherent lifestyle brand grounded in experiential knowledge, emotional resonance, and peer validation, thereby extending existing understandings of health branding beyond marketer-driven or expert-led models.

As a qualitative, interpretive study, this research does not aim to generalize findings statistically. The analysis is grounded in a specific community and platform, which may limit transferability to other contexts. Future research may expand this inquiry by conducting comparative analyses across different health-oriented online communities to examine how variations in platform affordances, cultural contexts, or health paradigms shape branded food communication. Longitudinal studies could further explore how health brands evolve over time in response to internal community dynamics and external discourses, including medical authority and commercial wellness trends.

Methodologically, integrating Natural BCA with digital ethnography or network analysis may offer deeper insights into the relational and power dimensions of community-based health branding. Such directions would contribute to a more nuanced theorization of digital health communication in an era where lifestyle branding increasingly emerges from grassroots online interactions.

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