Negotiating Premium Value Across Digital Platforms: Communicative Legitimation in the Viral Asinan Ceri-Ya Case

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Abstract

This study examines how the appropriateness of a creator's premium price is publicly proposed, justified, contested, repaired, and redistributed in a digital controversy. It uses communicative legitimation—the observable public process through which premium-value claims are proposed, justified, contested, repaired, and circulated—as a process-oriented lens, and identifies provisional legitimacy, a corpus-bounded condition in which the grounds of a claim receive recognizable uptake while remaining open to renewed contestation, as its outcome. The empirical case is Asinan Ceri-Ya, a limited-order fruit product sold by Indonesian food creator Devy Anastasia for IDR 600,000. A bounded, Threads-centered qualitative digital case study was conducted using 26 public artifacts documented up to 20 July 2026: 15 Threads artifacts and contextual evidence from TikTok, Instagram, and online news. Chronological mapping, frame analysis, and reflexive thematic analysis were combined with a three-part test—claim, public reasoning, and observable consequence—that distinguished legitimation episodes from other communication and assigned each a legitimacy status. Provenance, scarcity, expertise, and economic consequence formed the initial legitimation attempt; cost disclosure increased cognitive intelligibility without producing uniform approval; and audiences gave qualified acceptance to the cost rationale while contesting taste and accessibility. Within this corpus, movement among digital arenas altered which explanations, comparison standards, and speakers became visible and portable, while closure, fraud warnings, ownership claims, and public correction functioned as communicative repair. Post-closure recipes redistributed value from exclusive access toward replicable knowledge. The resulting seven-stage sequence is proposed as a case-derived analytical heuristic, not a universal model. Legitimacy in creator commerce is therefore provisional: specific grounds of a premium claim can gain uptake in one arena and be reopened when claims move between platformed publics.

Keywords: communicative legitimation; creator economy; cross-platform communication; digital framing; premium value; provisional legitimacy

INTRODUCTION

The creator economy has expanded the communicative role of social-media personalities beyond endorsement. Creators increasingly function as producers, retailers, and person-brands whose economic value depends on attention, authenticity, and audience relationships. Research therefore describes the creator economy as an ecosystem in which creators, platforms, audiences, advertisers, and intermediaries continually negotiate value creation and capture (Bleier et al., 2024; Dolbec & Smith, 2025; Edeling & Wies, 2024; Peres et al., 2024). When creators launch their own products, identity, expertise, reputation, and commercial claims become difficult to separate.

Premium pricing intensifies this fusion. Material explanations such as costly ingredients, labor, and limited production may justify a price economically, but audiences must also recognize why a familiar category should be treated as rare, superior, or worthy of distinction. Premium and luxury branding studies explain how provenance, scarcity, experience, and symbolic difference sustain value. In creator commerce, however, those claims circulate in less controlled environments alongside reviews, replies, reaction videos, reposts, news headlines, and imitative products (Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024; Prandelli et al., 2024). Price therefore becomes a public claim whose legitimacy can be reopened by multiple actors.

Indonesian digital-food culture is a productive setting for examining this problem. Food creators combine personal storytelling, demonstrations, reviews, and selling, while publics assess both sensory quality and the social meaning of consumption. Thamrin and Utami (2023) show that interactivity and cross-channel cooperation matter in Indonesia's leisure-food influencer marketing. Yet purchase intention does not capture what happens when an unusually priced creator-owned product becomes a public object through which people discuss affordability, class, taste, authenticity, and the creator's entitlement to determine value.

The bounded case is Asinan Ceri-Ya, a limited-order fruit product introduced by Indonesian food creator Devy Anastasia in June 2026. The package was offered for IDR 600,000 and was publicly discussed on Threads, TikTok, Instagram, and online-news sites. A creator post reported 1,250 sold or queued packages before orders closed. These are the factual conditions that delimit the case; the communicative functions of particular platforms are treated as empirical questions rather than assumed in advance.

The central problem is that established influencer-marketing and premium-branding approaches are not sufficient to explain how the legitimacy of value is negotiated when a controversy migrates among digital arenas. Influencer research usually focuses on credibility, authenticity, disclosure, persuasion, or purchase intention (Audrezet et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021). Premium-branding research explains symbolic differentiation, framing research explains the selection and emphasis of message elements, affordance research explains platformed possibility, and value research explains how audiences weigh benefits and sacrifices. Existing work thus explains framing, valuation, and audience evaluation largely separately. What remains unclear is how these moves become linked over time in public struggles over the appropriateness of a creator's

premium-value claim, as the claim encounters contestation, demands for accountability, reframing, repair, and replication across digital arenas.

This study addresses that gap through the lens of communicative legitimation, defined as the observable public process through which premium-value claims are proposed, justified, contested, repaired, and circulated before relevant publics. The outcome of that process is described with established legitimacy vocabulary as provisional legitimacy: a corpus-bounded condition in which the grounds of a claim receive recognizable uptake while remaining open to renewed contestation. The study asks: (1) How did the creator attempt to legitimate the premium value of Asinan Ceri-Ya? (2) How did audiences and online media justify, contest, or qualify this claim across the documented digital arenas, and which legitimacy outcomes are observable? and (3) How did the process of communicative legitimation evolve from launch and cost justification to closure, intellectual-property repair, and post-closure replication? The contribution is a case-derived process account of the communicative legitimation of premium value in creator commerce, where the creator simultaneously acts as person, seller, brand owner, and community participant. It shows how movement among arenas changes the visible evidence, comparison standards, and authorized speakers, so that legitimacy remains provisional and can be reopened. The seven-stage sequence connecting proposition, contestation, accountability, reframing, repair, and value redistribution is offered as a case-derived analytical heuristic; the study integrates established legitimacy traditions and does not propose a new general theory of legitimacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creator Economy, Premium Value, and Conceptual Distinctions

Creator-economy research treats creators as entrepreneurial actors embedded in platform infrastructures. Platforms shape discovery, monetization, governance, data access, and creator–audience relationships rather than functioning as neutral hosts (Bleier et al., 2024). Content production and entrepreneurship consequently become inseparable (Edeling & Wies, 2024), while person-brands capture value from fame, expertise, and follower relationships (Dolbec & Smith, 2025).

In this study, premium value is not synonymous with product novelty or formal luxury classification. It refers to the communicative elevation of a product above ordinary category expectations through claims about provenance, scarcity, expertise, sensory experience, and social consequence. This differs from perceived value, which ordinarily describes an individual's evaluation of benefits and sacrifices; from premium or luxury branding, which organizes controlled symbolic differentiation; and from brand legitimacy, which concerns broader social acceptance of a brand's conduct or identity. The communicative legitimation of premium value, defined in the next subsection, instead names the process through which the grounds of an elevated price are proposed, justified, contested, and revised in public.

The lens also differs from influencer authenticity. Authenticity concerns perceived consistency among a creator's identity, motives, and presentation, especially under

monetization pressure (Audrezet et al., 2020; Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024). Authenticity may support a value claim, but it does not settle whether audiences regard the product's price, package, or sensory outcome as appropriate. Influencer-marketing studies clarify reach, credibility, expertise, and content roles (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Hudders et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021), yet they give less attention to the temporal public negotiation of value after a creator-owned product becomes controversial.

Legitimacy, Legitimation, and Adjacent Concepts

Legitimacy supplies the evaluative standard at the core of the study. Suchman (1995) defines it as a generalized perception that an entity's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within socially constructed norms and beliefs. Universal approval is not required: a disputed action may acquire pragmatic or cognitive intelligibility while remaining morally or experientially contested. Prabowo (2022) shows that repeated Instagram communication can support institutional legitimacy; creator commerce raises the related but more volatile question of legitimacy under immediate commercial contestation. Applied to premium pricing, legitimacy concerns whether publics can recognize the grounds of the price, regard those grounds as fair or plausible, and accept the creator's entitlement to make the claim.

The study draws on four connected traditions rather than coining a new construct. First, legitimacy is understood as perceived appropriateness within a socially constructed system of norms, values, and beliefs (Suchman, 1995). Second, legitimation is the discursive construction of justification: actors answer the explicit or implicit question of why something should be done or accepted, through authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis (van Leeuwen, 2007). Third, legitimacy resides in the judgments of evaluators, whose individual propriety judgments are shaped by, and feed back into, collective validity (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Fourth, on social media legitimacy is co-constructed in networks in which organizations cannot fully control which claims circulate, who speaks, or how their accounts are recombined (Castelló et al., 2016). Taken together, these traditions move from what legitimacy is, to how it is claimed in discourse, to who judges it, and to where that judgment is negotiated in networked publics.

Epistemically, the study treats legitimacy as relational, audience-dependent, and processual. Legitimacy is not a property that a product or creator possesses, and it cannot be read directly from sales, reach, or engagement. In a document-based case study it is inferable only through observable public discourse and its uptake within the bounded corpus. The study therefore integrates these established traditions into a case-bounded analytical lens; it does not claim a new universal theory.

On this basis, the study distinguishes a process from an outcome. Communicative legitimation denotes the temporal, public process through which the appropriateness of a premium-value claim is proposed, justified, contested, repaired, and circulated before relevant publics. Provisional legitimacy denotes a temporary, audience-dependent condition in which the grounds of a claim receive recognizable uptake within the bounded corpus while remaining open to renewed contestation. Provisional legitimacy is not a new construct; it is a corpus-bounded application of the evaluator-judgment view of legitimacy

(Bitektine & Haack, 2015). The study accordingly does not treat communicative legitimacy as a separate construct: communication is the medium of the process, whereas legitimacy remains the outcome judged by audiences. A legitimation attempt is an actor's effort to make a claim appear appropriate or justified; an attempt may fail, remain contested, or produce only cognitive intelligibility.

Communicative legitimation must also be distinguished from adjacent concepts that explain parts of the same case (Table 1). Framing concerns selection and emphasis (Entman, 1993); value negotiation concerns bargaining over worth; audience evaluation concerns judgments of cost, experience, access, or taste; and legitimacy work concerns purposeful actor efforts to gain, maintain, or repair legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). Communicative legitimation is the temporal public process that connects claims, justifications, evaluations, uptake, and repair.

Table 1. Communicative Legitimation and Adjacent Concepts

Concept	Analytical object	Empirical indicator in this corpus	Role in this study
Framing (Entman, 1993)	Selection and emphasis of aspects of the price, product, or closure	Problem definitions, causal accounts, and remedies in creator posts and news (e.g., seasonality vs. criticism-driven closure)	Analytical lens on how claims change form across arenas
Value negotiation	Bargaining over worth, portion, and price tier	Requests for smaller packages, volume comparisons, jastip pricing, recook cost calculations	Evidence of contestation or qualified acceptance when it bears on appropriateness
Audience evaluation	Judgment of cost, experience, accessibility, authenticity, fairness, or taste	Reviews, sensory criticism, affordability remarks, humor, support, rejection	Relevant to legitimation only when it addresses the claim's appropriateness or entitlement
Legitimacy work (Suchman, 1995)	Purposeful actor effort to gain, maintain, or repair legitimacy	Cost disclosure, closure statements, scam warnings, ownership assertion	Actor-side legitimation attempts and repair within the process
Communicative legitimation (process)	Temporal public process linking claims, justifications, evaluations, uptake, and repair	Episodes that satisfy the three-part test: claim, public reasoning, observable consequence	Organizing analytical lens of the study
Provisional legitimacy (outcome)	Temporary, audience-dependent condition of recognizable uptake	Explicit acceptance of reasons, qualified approval, compliance with corrected boundaries, reduced challenge in a documented sequence	Outcome assigned per episode; never inferred from sales, reach, or silence alone

Source: Author's conceptual synthesis of the cited literature and the bounded corpus.

The lens is analytically necessary because each adjacent concept captures only one object. Framing explains why the closure story became simpler as it travelled, but not whether the creator's entitlement to set the price was accepted; audience evaluation explains a buyer's taste judgment, but not how that judgment answered a prior justification; legitimacy work explains the creator's repair moves, but not the audience uptake that makes repair consequential. Communicative legitimation links these objects in time. To avoid conceptual inflation, the term is not applied to every post or reaction in the case. It is reserved for episodes that invoke appropriateness, entitlement, norms, reasons, or public recognition; other messages are treated as context.

Accountability and Communicative Repair as Legitimation Mechanisms

Accountability is treated as a process mechanism within communicative legitimation. It refers to communicative efforts that make a disputed claim answerable by disclosing reasons, inputs, consequences, or boundaries; in van Leeuwen's (2007) terms, it relies chiefly on rationalization. A cost-of-goods explanation can shift the frame from 'ordinary asinan with an excessive price' to 'a limited composition with costly inputs,' but audiences may accept the calculation while rejecting the purchase, criticizing taste, or requesting a more accessible format. Accountability can therefore improve intelligibility without guaranteeing approval.

The term communicative repair is grounded in traditions of organizational apologia and legitimacy crisis (Hearit, 1995), image repair discourse (Benoit, 1997), and situational crisis communication (Coombs, 2007). These traditions examine how actors respond when responsibility, reputation, or social standing is threatened. The present study does not introduce a new universal crisis-response taxonomy. It adapts their shared insight—that challenged actors use message strategies to redefine responsibility, correct meaning, or restore acceptable relations—to the smaller-scale, hybrid setting of creator commerce.

Communicative repair is therefore used processually for message moves intended to stabilize meaning after misunderstanding, reputational risk, imitation, or loss of control. It can include clarification, acknowledgement, correction, boundary setting, closure, or ownership assertion. Because a creator communicates simultaneously as a person, seller, brand owner, and community participant, repair must negotiate both formal ownership and relational intimacy.

Platform Audience Ecology, User Segments, and Reframing

A cross-platform approach does not assume that identical content has identical meaning wherever it appears. Social-media affordances emerge through relations among technological features, user practices, institutional arrangements, and situated goals (Ronzhyn et al., 2023). Creators interpret these possibilities through technological frames and platform-sensitive strategies (Arriagada & Siles, 2024; Bhatia et al., 2025), while Indonesian research illustrates how multimedia and interactive affordances shape digital communication practice (Saidah, 2024). Engagement experiences also differ by platform type (Voorveld et al., 2018), and the same engagement features can acquire different relational values across platforms (Scharlach & Hallinan, 2023). Affordances are therefore analytical possibilities, not deterministic platform essences.

User segmentation is operationalized here as a mapping of visible communicative roles within the bounded case, not as demographic profiling. The corpus does not support claims about age, income, gender, or the total population of any platform. Instead, it distinguishes creators, buyers and recookers, prospective consumers, critical or curious responders, reviewers, imitators, publishers, and recipe-oriented publics according to what they do in the documented interaction. Table 2 links these role segments to the engagement orientation of each arena and to the evidence limits of the study.

Table 2. Platform Audience Ecology and Analytic User Segments

Arena	Visible participant segments	Engagement / affordance orientation	Case role and evidentiary caution
Threads	Focal creator; buyers/recookers; prospective buyers; critical or curious responders; imitating seller	Text posts, replies, quotation, and context-rich claim–response sequences	Primary arena for framing, negotiation, and repair; segments are communicative roles, not demographics
TikTok	Reaction creator; visible viewers/commenters	Short audiovisual discovery, reaction, and visible engagement metrics	One reaction and one official photo artifact; no systematic comment segmentation
Instagram	Focal creator; food reviewers; follower publics	Visual tasting, reels, profile statements, and endorsement/social proof	Three review reels and one creator profile; comments were not sampled systematically
Online news	Food-news publishers; general information and recipe-oriented publics	Headline selection, causal narration, search persistence, and recipe utility	Framing and narrative diffusion; not a social-platform population, and derivative texts are distinguished

Source: Author's analytical mapping based on the bounded corpus and cited affordance literature.

Framing theory explains how movement among these arenas can alter meaning. Frames select aspects of perceived reality to define problems, attribute causes, make moral evaluations, and imply remedies (Entman, 1993). Creator framing may foreground ingredients and seasonality; audience counter-framing may foreground affordability or sensory disappointment; news framing may foreground criticism as the cause of closure. Indonesian online-news research similarly shows how selective narratives organize complex issues (Asmarantika, 2026). Humor can further condense economic discomfort into a shareable vernacular form (Lutfiputri, 2023), while visible lifestyle practices can mark both desirability and symbolic exclusion (Rosalina et al., 2026).

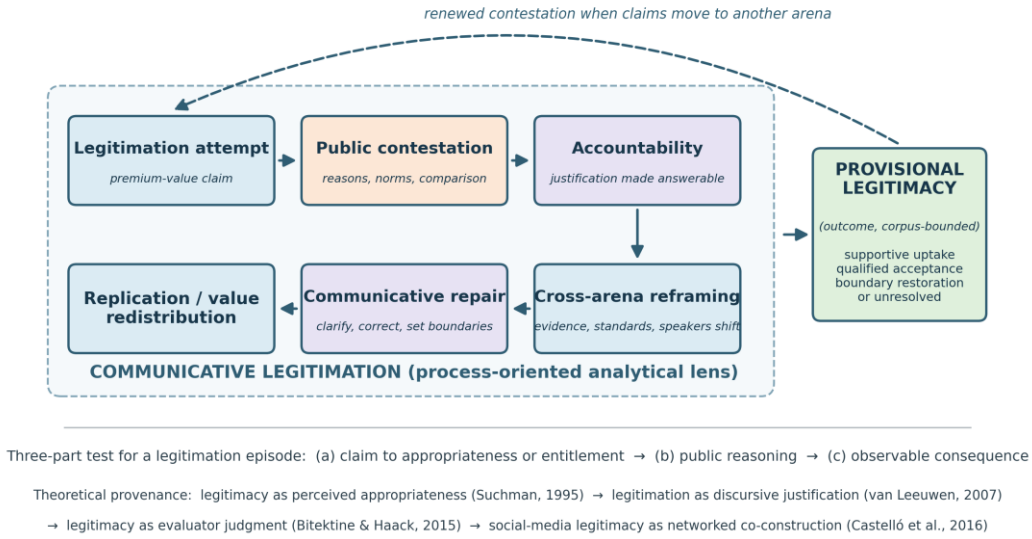
The role-based segmentation also clarifies what counts as a legitimacy encounter. A follower who asks for a smaller package negotiates access; a buyer who separates ingredient cost from taste evaluates material and experiential value; a recooker converts consumption into production knowledge; a reviewer translates sensory evidence; and a publisher selects a portable causal account. These are analytically distinct publics even when one person could occupy more than one role. The mapping therefore avoids treating a platform audience as a homogeneous mass and focuses on how different participants can test different dimensions of the same value claim.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) separates process from outcome. Communicative legitimation is the process-oriented lens, and provisional legitimacy is the outcome identified empirically. Legitimacy theory supplies the evaluative standard of appropriateness; framing and platform affordances are analytical lenses on how claims change form as they move; and accountability and communicative repair are mechanisms within the legitimation process. The framework anticipates a sequence in which a legitimation attempt encounters public contestation, generates demands for accountability, is reframed across digital arenas, prompts repair, and leads to replication or value redistribution. Each episode is assessed through the three-part test described in

the Methodology; its outcome may be supportive uptake, qualified acceptance, boundary restoration, or unresolved legitimacy. Because arena movement can reopen the grounds of a claim, the outcome is represented as provisional and linked back to renewed contestation. The sequence sensitizes the analysis but does not predetermine a fixed model: the empirical stages and their ordering remain open to revision through the case evidence.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Communicative Legitimation (Process) and Provisional Legitimacy (Outcome) of Premium Value Across Digital Platforms



Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on Suchman (1995), van Leeuwen (2007), Bitektine and Haack (2015), and Castelló et al. (2016).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Case Boundary

This research used a bounded instrumental qualitative digital case-study design (Yin, 2018). Asinan Ceri-Ya was selected because a temporally concentrated controversy around a creator-owned premium product moved through several digital arenas. The design was informed by netnographic sensitivity to platform context and traceability (Kozinets, 2020), but remained a document-based case study rather than participant netnography. The main case was bounded from the public opening of orders in approximately late June 2026 to a fixed data snapshot on 20 July 2026. Two earlier posts about another limited product, Susucang, were retained only as historical context and excluded from the main thematic count.

Retrieval Strategy and Corpus Construction

The corpus was assembled through iterative, trace-based retrieval from public posts rather than a platform API or probabilistic sample. Retrieval followed the case outward from the product and focal creator to replies, reviewers, reposts, media reports, and recipe or imitation content. The query logic combined focal markers—'Asinan Ceri-Ya' and spelling variants, 'Devy Anastasia,' and the IDR 600,000/599,000 price—with event-specific terms visible in preserved artifact labels and excerpts: COGS/cost/harga, mahal/overpriced, tutup/pamit/closure, resep/recook/jastip, and logo/HAKI/imitation. Cross-links, quotations, and explicit sourcing were then followed to locate connected artifacts.

The research workbook preserved URLs, artifact labels, excerpts, and verification status but not a complete timestamped query-by-query log. The protocol above is therefore a transparent reconstruction of the search logic, not a claim of a fully reproducible API search. Inclusion required a public artifact within the case boundary, or clearly marked historical context, plus at least one traceable element: a working URL, searchable metadata, or a documented excerpt. An item also had to contribute a distinct communicative act relevant to value framing, contestation, accountability, reframing, repair, or replication. Blank rows, inaccessible items without usable documentation, and exact duplicates were excluded. Derivative news remained in the corpus only as evidence of narrative diffusion and was not counted as independent factual confirmation.

The final main corpus contained 26 artifacts: 15 Threads artifacts, two TikTok artifacts, four Instagram artifacts, and five online-news texts (Table 3). The Threads subset included six verified creator posts, one indirect repost preserving the creator's cost explanation, and eight audience or third-party posts and replies. The original cost-disclosure post could not be relocated and was therefore treated as indirectly documented evidence. The TikTok and Instagram materials lacked complete transcripts or systematic comment archives and were used contextually. The media subset included one primary DetikFood article, two derivative or explicitly sourced rewrites, and two recipe-oriented IDN Times articles.

Selection was purposive at two levels. At the event level, artifacts were retained when they documented a new actor, communicative act, or evidentiary status in the unfolding case. At the contrast level, items were retained when they complicated an emerging interpretation—for example, accepting the cost rationale while criticizing taste, or reproducing the recipe at either higher or lower cost. Engagement counts were recorded as snapshot context where available but were not used as a sampling threshold or as evidence of representativeness. This choice prioritizes process variation and negative cases over popularity ranking.

The study does not claim saturation of platform discourse. Corpus adequacy was assessed for bounded process reconstruction: the documented artifacts covered the value claim, contestation, accountability, plural negotiation, reframing, repair/closure, and replication, while preserving negative and discrepant evidence. This supports an explanatory case trace, not prevalence estimates or representation of any platform population.

Table 3. Digital Corpus and Analytic Function

Arena	Artifacts	Primary analytic function	Evidence status	Comparative role
Threads	15	Creator framing, extended audience negotiation, repair	Primary; one cost post indirectly documented through repost	Center of the case analysis
TikTok	2	Viral visibility and short-form reaction	Contextual; no complete transcript/comment archive	Observed contextual function only
Instagram	4	Review visibility, social proof, persistent closure statement	Contextual; URLs/profile metadata documented	Observed contextual function only
Online media	5	Causal framing, narrative diffusion, recipe replication	Comparative; two items derivative of primary report	Frame circulation, not platform prevalence
Total	26	Bounded process reconstruction	Snapshot completed 20 July 2026	Threads-centered with cross-platform context

Source: Research corpus compiled by the author.

Units of Analysis and Evidentiary Roles

The artifact was the unit for chronology and source status. Within artifacts, the message or frame was the unit for coding; where replies formed a documented exchange, the claim–response sequence was treated as a dialogic unit. Accounts and users were not treated as demographic units. Identifiers marked source and actor roles: C for creator posts, A for audience or third-party posts, T for TikTok artifacts, I for Instagram artifacts, and M for media texts. Direct posts supported claims about message content; indirect reposts supported only the preserved excerpt; contextual artifacts supported bounded observations about circulation; and derivative news supported frame diffusion rather than independent confirmation. This separation also prevented the same claim from being counted as multiple factual confirmations merely because it appeared in a repost or rewritten article. The analytic question was what a repeated message did in a new arena, not how many times it appeared. A legitimation episode—a claim together with the public reasoning and documented consequence that followed it—was the unit for assigning legitimacy status; one episode could span several artifacts and arenas.

Operationalizing Communicative Legitimation and Legitimacy Outcomes

Communicative legitimation was operationalized through a three-part test. An episode was coded as legitimation only when the record showed (a) a claim that a price, product, conduct, or ownership boundary is appropriate or legitimate; (b) public justification or contestation of that claim through reasons, norms, values, evidence, comparisons, or accountability demands; and (c) an observable consequence, such as uptake, qualified acceptance, rejection, repair, boundary restoration, or continued contestation. Messages that met only the first element were coded as legitimation attempts. Messages that did not concern appropriateness or entitlement—for example, a sensory review without reference to price or fairness—were retained as audience evaluation but were not treated as legitimation.

Each episode was then assigned one legitimacy status: legitimation attempt, contestation, supportive uptake, qualified acceptance, repair, or unresolved legitimacy

(Table 4). Provisional legitimacy was recorded only where supportive uptake, qualified acceptance, or repair accompanied by documented compliance was observable in discourse. Sales counts, engagement metrics, visibility, and silence were recorded as context but not as evidence of legitimacy, because they cannot show whether the grounds of a claim were recognized, and the corpus cannot support population-level acceptance.

Table 4. Operational Criteria for Legitimation Episodes and Legitimacy Status

Analytical element	Working definition	Observable indicator in this corpus	Claim limit
Communicative legitimation	Temporal, public process through which the appropriateness of a premium-value claim is proposed, justified, contested, repaired, and circulated	Reasons for price; norm-based criticism; cost disclosure; creator replies; public correction; ownership claims; acceptance, rejection, or qualified uptake	Not every message is legitimation; the episode must concern appropriateness, entitlement, justification, or recognition
Provisional legitimacy	Temporary, audience-dependent condition in which the grounds of a claim receive recognizable uptake within the bounded corpus	Explicit acceptance of reasons; qualified approval; purchase or participation accompanied by recognition; compliance with corrected boundaries; reduced challenge in a documented sequence	Sales, reach, likes, or silence alone do not establish legitimacy; no population-level acceptance is inferred
Legitimation attempt	An actor's effort to make a claim appear appropriate or justified	Provenance, scarcity, expertise, economic consequence, cost explanation, warnings, closure narrative, ownership assertion	An attempt may fail, remain contested, or produce only cognitive intelligibility
Contestation	Public challenge to the grounds of a claim	Affordability objections, norm-based criticism, market comparison, ironic reaction, competing causal accounts	Contestation is not rejection; it may coexist with qualified acceptance
Repair	Message moves intended to restore meaning, responsibility, or boundaries after a threat	Clarification, closure narrative, scam warning, ownership assertion, apology received	Counted as restoring legitimacy only when uptake (e.g., correction or compliance) is documented
Audience evaluation	Judgment of cost, experience, accessibility, authenticity, fairness, or taste	Reviews, sensory criticism, affordability requests, humor, comparison, recooking, support, rejection	Relevant to legitimation only when it bears on the claim's appropriateness or entitlement

Source: Author's operationalization, adapted from Suchman (1995), van Leeuwen (2007), and Bitektine and Haack (2015).

Analytic Procedure, Audit Trail, and Reflexivity

Analysis combined chronological mapping, frame analysis, and reflexive thematic analysis. First, artifacts were ordered to reconstruct the movement from proposition to closure and replication. Second, frame analysis identified problem definitions, causal accounts, moral evaluations, and implied remedies (Entman, 1993). Third, familiarization and initial coding captured scarcity, provenance, economic consequence, cost transparency, conditional acceptance, sensory critique, affordability, humor, social proof, causal simplification, closure, intellectual property, and replication. Fourth, related codes were organized into focused themes. Fifth, themes were reviewed against evidence status, chronology, and negative cases. Sixth, integrative comparison connected themes to the

proposed stages without requiring every platform to contribute equally (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022; Saldaña, 2021). In a final step, every episode linked to a stage was re-examined with the three-part test and assigned a legitimacy status, so that each stage reported in the Results separates evidence, legitimation mechanism, audience response, and legitimacy status.

Table 5 provides a representative audit trail from artifact to initial code, focused theme, integrative interpretation, heuristic stage, and legitimacy status. It is illustrative rather than exhaustive, but it makes visible how the case-derived heuristic was constructed. Following reflexive thematic analysis, coding was treated as situated interpretation rather than neutral discovery or a test of coder agreement. The legitimacy lens risked reducing responses to support versus rejection; this was countered by keeping price rationale, sensory experience, and access separate and retaining A1–A2 as a negative case in which cost was accepted but taste was criticized. Platform affordances were likewise treated as observed possibilities within the corpus, not as inherent causal properties.

Table 5. Representative Audit Trail from Evidence to Integrative Stage and Legitimacy Status

Evidence anchor	Initial code(s)	Focused theme	Interpretive movement	Heuristic stage	Legitimacy status
C1–C2: rapid demand, seasonality, 1,250 packages	Scarcity; social proof; economic consequence	Premium proposition	Elevated price is tied to limited access and productive impact	1. Proposition	Legitimation attempt; no documented uptake (sales are context only)
C3-indirect: named ingredients and partial cost account	Provenance; cost transparency	Accountability	The disputed price becomes answerable without requiring agreement	3. Accountability	Attempt producing cognitive intelligibility; approval not established
A1–A2: price judged appropriate; taste criticized	Conditional acceptance; sensory disconfirmation	Plural negotiation	Economic intelligibility and experiential approval separate	4. Negotiation	Qualified acceptance: cost reasons accepted, taste contested
T1: 'Asinan in this economy' reaction	Humor; affordability shorthand	Vernacular condensation	One documented reaction compresses economic critique	2/5. Contestation/reframing	Contestation; uptake indeterminate
M1–M3 versus C2/C4 closure accounts	Causal simplification; frame diffusion	Cross-arena reframing	Criticism-driven closure travels more simply than ambiguous chronology	5. Reframing	Unresolved: competing causal frames
C5–A5: ownership claim, apology, discontinuation	Boundary setting; correction	Relational repair	Public acknowledgement restores a branded ownership boundary	6. Repair/closure	Repair with documented compliance: boundary restored (provisional legitimacy)

Evidence anchor	Initial code(s)	Focused theme	Interpretive movement	Heuristic stage	Legitimacy status
A3, A6–A7, M4–M5: recook, jastip, recipes	Cost testing; substitution; replication	Participatory valuation	Exclusive access becomes reproducible knowledge and alternative pricing	7. Redistribution	Mixed: supportive uptake (A3); necessity of price contested (A6–A7)

Source: Author's analysis of the bounded corpus.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Trustworthiness was supported through source-status distinctions, chronological comparison, negative-case attention, and the explicit code–theme audit trail (Nowell et al., 2017; Tracy, 2020). Repeated news text was not treated as triangulation, and uncertainty was retained for approximate dates and the unavailable original cost post. The study used public material and did not interact with users. The creator and institutional media were named as public commercial or journalistic actors; ordinary accounts were represented by analytic identifiers. Short excerpts were translated while retaining analytically necessary Indonesian expressions, and no private motive or demographic characteristic was inferred from profiles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Because 15 of 26 artifacts came from Threads and the most complete creator–audience exchanges were documented there, the findings are presented as a Threads-centered case reconstruction with cross-platform contextual evidence. Statements about TikTok, Instagram, and online news describe functions observed in this corpus; they are not claims about the essential character, prevalence, or total user population of those arenas. Each subsection separates the evidence, the legitimation mechanism, the audience response, and the legitimacy status assigned through the three-part test. Sales figures, engagement counts, and visibility are reported as context; they are not treated as evidence of acceptance.

1. Premium-Value Proposition: Scarcity, Provenance, and Economic Consequence

The opening-order post linked the IDR 600,000 price to demand and limited availability: orders were described as full within three days and extending to 8 July (C1). A later post framed the product as seasonal and reported 1,250 sold or queued packages before closure (C2). The creator also referred to employees, suppliers, and local economic activity. These messages did not merely announce scarcity; they positioned purchase as entry into a temporary, creator-led production event.

The indirectly preserved cost explanation named Indian pomegranate, Tasmanian cherries, moon-drop or muscat grapes, lychee, kiamboy, honey, and no added sugar (C3-indirect). The evidence shifts the object of evaluation from familiar 'asinan' to differentiated inputs and invisible supply costs. Theoretical implication: in creator commerce, a premium proposition can combine material provenance with person-brand authority and social consequence. In van Leeuwen's (2007) terms, provenance and the

creator's culinary expertise operate as expert authorization, while references to employees and suppliers add a moral evaluation of social benefit. Legitimacy status: legitimation attempt. The messages satisfy the first element of the test—a claim to appropriateness—but at this stage the record documents no public reasoning or uptake. The 1,250 sold or queued packages indicate demand rather than legitimacy, because purchases alone cannot show that buyers recognized the grounds of the price.

Historical context reinforces the need to separate evidence from causal inference. Earlier posts about Susucang described another premium, tightly limited product and operational constraints involving hygiene, shelf life, and nutrition. These posts were excluded from the 26-artifact thematic count, but they show that limited release and closure predated the Ceri-Ya controversy. They make a planned-seasonality interpretation plausible without proving that criticism had no influence. The appropriate conclusion is therefore chronological and comparative: closure belonged to an existing entrepreneurial repertoire, while the public controversy supplied competing interpretations of why it occurred.

2. Accountability and Plural Audience Negotiation

When the price became the central problem, the cost explanation began by acknowledging that IDR 600,000 was not cheap and then supplied selected ingredient costs. This sequence accepted the public benchmark instead of denying it. It invited arithmetic comparison, signaled product-design expertise, and presented transparency as a fairness claim. Cost disclosure therefore functioned as accountability: the price became cognitively answerable without becoming compulsory or universally acceptable. As a legitimation mechanism, the disclosure is an instrumental rationalization (van Leeuwen, 2007) that justifies the price by reference to its inputs; its immediate status is an attempt that produced cognitive intelligibility.

Audience evidence confirms that comprehension and approval separated. One buyer described IDR 599,000 as appropriate for roughly one kilogram of premium fruit and 500 milliliters of liquid, yet noted delivery costs and later argued that kiamboy obscured the pomegranate and cherry components (A1–A2). This negative case accepts the cost rationale while withholding sensory endorsement. It satisfies all three elements of the test and is coded as qualified acceptance: the grounds of the price receive explicit uptake, while the experiential claim is contested. Another user reached acceptance through recooking: high input costs led the user to describe the original package as comparatively inexpensive (A3). Material verification, not simple persuasion, produced that judgment. It is a clear instance of supportive uptake.

Other responses used different evaluative frameworks. A request for an IDR 100,000–200,000 package proposed accessibility through smaller volume rather than denying the creator's right to sell (A4); it is coded as qualified acceptance of the creator's entitlement combined with contestation of access. Market comparisons replaced the creator's premium-ingredient benchmark with mall brands, home production, or volume pricing. The documented TikTok reaction 'Asinan In This Economy' (T1) condensed affordability concerns into ironic economic shorthand. Because the TikTok comment

archive was unavailable, it supports only the bounded interpretation that one high-engagement artifact made the price portable as vernacular reaction; it cannot establish dominant TikTok sentiment. Its legitimacy status is contestation, with uptake indeterminate.

Together, these positions—conditional acceptance, sensory criticism, affordability redesign, practical cost testing, comparison, and humor—show plural rather than binary negotiation. Legitimacy was conditional across at least three dimensions: whether the inputs explained the price, whether the experience realized those inputs, and whether the package allowed meaningful participation. Legitimacy status therefore differed by dimension: the cost rationale received supportive uptake or qualified acceptance, the sensory claim was contested, and access remained unresolved. Provisional legitimacy was thus partial and dimension-specific rather than a general verdict on the product.

The class dimension should also be interpreted cautiously. The corpus does not establish respondents' income or class location. What it documents is class-coded language: comparison with routine food expenditure, difficulty paying IDR 600,000 at once, and the phrase 'in this economy.' Such language converts personal affordability into a publicly recognizable standpoint. The value claim is thereby judged not only against ingredient costs but also against imagined participation: who can enter the price tier, under what package conditions, and with what social meaning.

3. Cross-Arena Reframing: Elaboration, Reaction, Social Proof, and Causal Simplification

Within the documented Threads subset, extended text and replies carried the most detailed creator explanations, buyer reviews, recook calculations, home-recipe questions, and ownership dispute. The evidence therefore supports Threads as the primary arena of elaboration in this case. This is a corpus-specific relation between available features, actor choices, and preserved evidence—not a general claim that Threads necessarily produces transparency.

The two TikTok artifacts and four Instagram artifacts played narrower contextual roles. T1 packaged the controversy as concise reaction and displayed 81,700 likes and 1,040 comments at the recorded snapshot, but missing transcripts and comments limit interpretation. Three Instagram review reels made tasting and interpersonal endorsement visible, while the creator profile later carried a persistent closure statement. These artifacts show documented instances of reaction, visual review, and profile-level closure; they do not support platform-wide comparisons of audience attitudes. The engagement figures document circulation, not endorsement of either the price or its critique.

Online news produced the clearest frame shift. A primary DetikFood report and derivative texts described the product as viral because of its price and presented production as stopping after netizens considered it too expensive (M1–M3). Creator posts instead emphasized seasonality, completed orders, gratitude, and farewell (C2, C4). The evidence does not establish one exclusive cause. It shows competing causal frames: criticism-driven closure versus completion of a limited product cycle. Because no documented response settled which account was accepted, the legitimacy status of the closure account is coded as unresolved.

The derivative articles matter as frame diffusion, not corroboration. Near-identical wording and explicit sourcing allowed a simple causal account to appear across outlets. The theoretical implication is that cross-platform visibility can expand narrative reach while reducing ambiguity: affordances make different forms possible, but actor and editorial choices determine which frame travels (Entman, 1993). The pattern is consistent with a networked view of legitimacy (Castelló et al., 2016): once the case moved into news, publishers rather than the creator became the most visible authorized speakers, and the comparison standard shifted from ingredient cost to public criticism.

The audience ecology in Table 2 helps explain this shift without assigning fixed identities to platforms. On Threads, the preserved roles include creator, buyer-reviewer, prospective buyer, recooker, critic, and imitator, allowing several legitimacy tests to appear in connected text. The contextual TikTok artifact centers a reaction creator and an unseen comment public; the Instagram evidence centers reviewers, followers, and a profile statement; and the media corpus centers publishers and information- or recipe-seeking readers. Different visible role configurations, as much as technical format, shaped which version of the controversy could be documented.

4. Communicative Repair, Closure, and Replication

Closure involved more than stopping sales. The creator announced closed orders, emphasized seasonality, thanked buyers for 1,250 packages, warned about scams or unofficial products, and later posted a farewell (C2, C4). These moves limited demand, marked an official boundary, and offered a success-and-completion account that countered the narrower criticism-driven narrative. In the adapted repair framework, closure becomes a meaning-management strategy rather than evidence of either success or failure by itself. Its legitimation mechanism combines mythopoesis—a completion narrative—with protective warnings. The corpus documents the repair attempt but no audience response that settled its reception, and the competing media frame persisted; the status is therefore repair with unresolved legitimacy.

A subsequent imitation dispute shifted the threat from price to ownership. The creator stated that a promotional video and logo had been copied by a lower-priced seller (C5). The other party apologized, acknowledged the similarity, and discontinued the product (A5). Public acknowledgement and correction restored a relational boundary. This is the only episode in which a repair attempt produced documented compliance: the other party's apology and discontinuation constitute observable uptake of the ownership claim. It is therefore coded as repair with boundary restoration—the clearest instance of provisional legitimacy in the corpus. The creator had separately encouraged a home-cooking inquiry (C6), so the observed boundary distinguished branded commercial appropriation from informal culinary experimentation.

After closure, recooks, ingredient calculations, a small jastip priced at IDR 60,000 for 600 milliliters, and recipe articles circulated (A3, A6–A7, M4–M5). Replication had dual effects: discovering expensive inputs could validate the original price, while substitution could demonstrate a cheaper alternative. The legitimacy status is mixed: recooks that discovered expensive inputs supplied supportive uptake of the cost rationale (A3), whereas

cheaper substitutions contested the necessity of the price without disputing the creator's provenance or authorship (A6–A7). Scarcity thus shifted from access to the official product toward provenance, authorship, and creator-authorized identity. The theoretical implication is that communicative repair and participatory replication can coexist: control is reasserted around branding even as value knowledge diffuses.

This pattern extends repair beyond a single reputational response. The relevant object changes across episodes: first the price requires explanation, then closure requires causal framing, then scams and copied identity require boundary work. No one message could repair all three. In creator commerce, repair is therefore episodic and object-specific; the creator may accommodate audience creativity in one domain while asserting control in another.

5. A Case-Derived Heuristic of Communicative Legitimation

The evidence can be organized as a seven-stage analytical heuristic: proposition, contestation, accountability, plural negotiation, cross-arena reframing, repair/closure, and replication/value redistribution. Table 6 links each stage to its evidence, legitimation mechanism, empirical indicator, and legitimacy status. The sequence is not a universal model or a prevalence claim. It is an abductive, case-derived proposition that identifies a changing center of gravity; stages may overlap, recur, or appear in a different order in other cases. Read across the stages, provisional legitimacy was documented at only three points: supportive uptake or qualified acceptance of the cost rationale (A1–A3), qualified acceptance of the creator's entitlement to sell (A4), and restoration of the ownership boundary (C5–A5). Elsewhere, the status remained an attempt, contestation, or unresolved. The heuristic therefore describes a legitimation process whose outcomes are partial and reopenable, not a path toward settled acceptance.

Table 6. Case-Derived Heuristic of the Communicative Legitimation of Premium Value

Stage	Evidence in this case	Legitimation mechanism	Empirical indicator	Legitimacy status
1. Proposition	C1–C3-indirect: demand, seasonality, provenance, economic consequence	Legitimation attempt: expert authorization (provenance, expertise); moral evaluation (employees, suppliers); scarcity	Claims that price and product are appropriate; order and sales figures reported as context only	Legitimation attempt; no documented uptake
2. Contestation	T1 and audience comparisons/humor	Norm-based and comparative challenge to the creator's price benchmark	Affordability remarks, ironic 'in this economy' reaction, market comparisons	Contestation; uptake indeterminate
3. Accountability	C3-indirect: partial COGS and ingredient explanation	Instrumental rationalization through cost disclosure	Acknowledgement that the price is not cheap; named inputs and selected costs	Attempt producing cognitive intelligibility; approval not established
4. Negotiation	A1–A4: reviews, taste critique, smaller-size request, recook	Audience evaluation bearing on appropriateness and entitlement	Explicit acceptance of cost reasons; sensory criticism; request for accessible format; cost verification	Supportive uptake (A3) and qualified acceptance (A1–A2, A4); taste contested; access unresolved

Stage	Evidence in this case	Legitimation mechanism	Empirical indicator	Legitimacy status
5. Reframing	T1, Instagram reviews/profile, M1–M3	Networked recontextualization: new speakers and comparison standards	Competing causal frames for closure; derivative news wording; review reels	Unresolved: competing closure accounts
6. Repair/closure	C2, C4–C6, A5: closure, warnings, ownership claim, correction	Mythopoesis (completion narrative); boundary setting; ownership assertion	Farewell and thanks; scam warnings; apology and discontinuation by the imitating seller	Closure: repair, legitimacy unresolved. Ownership: repair with boundary restored (provisional legitimacy)
7. Redistribution	A3, A6–A7, M4–M5: recooks, jastip, recipes	Participatory valuation through replication	Ingredient calculations; lower-priced jastip; recipe articles	Mixed: supportive uptake of cost rationale (A3); necessity of price contested (A6–A7)

Source: Author's analysis. The heuristic is case-derived and provisional; legitimacy status refers only to documented discursive uptake within the bounded corpus.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study's contribution is a bounded process account of the communicative legitimation of premium value in creator commerce, where the creator simultaneously acts as person, seller, brand owner, and community participant. It explains what persuasion, framing, or value evaluation alone does not. Persuasion research asks whether a message changes attitudes or intentions; framing explains which aspects of a price are selected and emphasized; and value evaluation explains how audiences weigh benefits and sacrifices. The present lens explains how these moves become linked over time in a public struggle over appropriateness. The case adds three points to marketing and strategic communication scholarship. First, the object of legitimation shifts across episodes—from price, to closure, to ownership—so a justification that gains uptake in one episode does not carry over to the next. Second, platform movement changes the visible evidence, the comparison standards, and the authorized speakers, so legitimacy achieved in one arena can be reopened in another. Third, legitimacy outcomes are differentiated rather than binary: cognitive intelligibility, qualified acceptance, and boundary restoration can coexist with unresolved contestation. The resulting condition is provisional legitimacy, an application of multilevel and networked accounts of legitimacy (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Castelló et al., 2016) to a single bounded case rather than a universal model or a new general theory of legitimacy.

For creators, premium pricing requires an evidence architecture that separates provenance, portion, labor, production limits, and sensory promise. Cost transparency can improve answerability but should not be presented as requiring agreement. Creators should prepare concise cross-arena versions of key claims and distinguish home adaptation, unauthorized endorsement, and commercial imitation. For online media, a product closing after criticism should not be reported as criticism causing closure without comparing chronology and creator statements. Likewise, high sales or engagement should not be read as public acceptance of a premium price; documented uptake of the reasons offered is a more reliable indicator.

Methodologically, the case demonstrates why cross-platform research must separate narrative multiplication from evidentiary triangulation and platform presence from platform representation. A repost can preserve otherwise unavailable evidence, a derivative article can reveal diffusion, and a visible engagement count can indicate circulation; none alone establishes factual independence or audience prevalence. Explicit evidence roles allow these materials to remain analytically useful without granting them equal status. The three-part test also offers a transferable procedure for separating legitimation episodes from general communication and for reporting legitimacy status without inferring it from reach.

CONCLUSION

The first research question is answered by the creator's legitimation attempt, which used scarcity, provenance, expertise, demand, and economic consequence to propose why Asinan Ceri-Ya belonged above ordinary category expectations. The second is answered by plural audience evaluations—cost acceptance, sensory criticism, accessibility requests, humor, comparison, and recooking—and by competing creator and media closure frames; the observable outcomes were supportive uptake or qualified acceptance of the cost rationale, contestation of taste and access, and an unresolved closure account. The third is answered by the movement from cost accountability to closure, ownership repair with a restored boundary, and post-closure replication.

The theoretical contribution can be stated as one bounded proposition: in creator commerce, the communicative legitimation of premium value yields at most provisional legitimacy—recognizable uptake of specific grounds of an elevated price within particular arenas—because every movement among digital arenas can reopen those grounds through new frames, evidence, and speakers. The seven-stage sequence is therefore offered as a case-derived analytical heuristic, not a universal model. Practically, creators need portable evidence, differentiated audience-role strategies, and clear boundaries between community adaptation and branded commercial appropriation.

The study is limited by a bounded, uneven corpus centered on Threads; two contextual TikTok artifacts; incomplete audiovisual and comment archives; approximate dates; an unavailable original cost post; and derivative media texts. The workbook also did not preserve a complete timestamped query log, so the reported search protocol is reconstructed from available records. Legitimacy status was inferred only from documented discursive uptake; because sales, engagement, and silence were not treated as acceptance, some episodes necessarily remain indeterminate. Future research should prospectively archive platform-native data and engagement metrics, conduct multimodal analysis and interviews, and explore whether the proposed sequence appears, changes, or fails in other creator-owned premium products and cultural markets.

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