

## 2. The Myth of the Nonna: Digital Translation of Italian Food Heritage on TikTok<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

[EN] The proliferation of gastronomic content on social media invites renewed reflection on how food heritage is mediated, translated, and consumed in digital environments. This paper investigates the semiotic construction of authenticity in Italian food-related content on TikTok, focusing on the recurring figure of the nonna (Italian word for ‘grandmother’) as a privileged sign of food and culinary heritage. Drawing on Lotman’s notion of semiosphere, Barthes’s theory of myth, and de Certeau’s distinction between strategies and tactics, this paper examines how embodied cooking practices are translated into short-form audiovisual texts designed for recognition, circulation, and consumption. Two questions guide the analysis. The first concerns how TikTok, as a boundary space, translates lived culinary practices into standardized formats for digital circulation. The second concerns how tactical, everyday gestures (such as embodied skill, improvised tools, and familiar ritual) are preserved, transformed, or reabsorbed within the platform’s commercial logics. The paper further situates this dynamic within Urry’s notion of the «tourist gaze», arguing that TikTok accelerates and disembodies this gaze, turning the intimacy of the domestic kitchen into a spectacularized object of transnational consumption.

The analysis is based on a qualitative corpus of twelve TikTok videos selected from four highly visible profiles: Pasta Grannies (@pastagrannies), Nonna Natalina (@nonnanatalina1935), Nonna Nella (@nonnanellaa), and Nonna

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<sup>1</sup> The author used AI-assisted translation and language-editing tools solely to support the English formulation of the manuscript. The conceptual framework, corpus selection, analysis, interpretation, and final revision are entirely the author’s responsibility.

Silvi (@nonnasilvioofficial). From each profile, the analysis considers the three most-viewed uploads, with data collection concluding on May 30, 2026. These case studies, purposively chosen for their differing degrees of enunciative mediation and commercialization, make it possible to trace a continuum of mediation, ranging from editorial-documentary observation and domestic aestheticization to hybrid platform-native formats and explicitly branded family-business strategies. The paper analyzes visual framing and editing rhythm, with particular attention to recurring close-ups on hands and raw ingredients, enunciative structures (direct address, voice-over, and silent performative staging), and the sonic-paratextual apparatus of trending audio, captions, and hashtags.

The findings suggest that authenticity on TikTok functions as a semiotic effect produced through specific textual and platform practices, rather than as a stable, pre-given property of tradition. Elderly bodies, hands, domestic or domesticized spaces, dialect, silence, family interaction, and makeshift tools become markers through which food heritage is authenticated, generating what Barthes calls a «reality effect». At the same time, these apparently tactical elements are not external to platform logic. In fact, they are aestheticized, made recognizable, and often reabsorbed into economies of visibility, affective engagement, and branding: from the editorial musealization of longevity in *Pasta Grannies*, through the silent, aestheticized domesticity of *Nonna Natalina* and the hybrid, platform-adaptive enunciation of *Nonna Nella*, to the polyphonic, dialect-inflected branding of the production facility in *Nonna Silvi*.

The paper argues that the myth of the nonna survives on TikTok because it is adaptable. It can authenticate archival projects, ritualize domestic slowness, mediate industrial ingredients, and legitimize commercial production settings. Food heritage on TikTok is therefore best understood not as a stable object transmitted intact, but as a living semiotic practice continually translated between memory, body, platform, and market.

**Keywords:** *TikTok; Grandmother; Italian Food Heritage; Authenticity*

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary culinary cultures, food heritage increasingly appears as a dynamic field in which meanings and practices no longer remain confined to the domestic kitchen or to institutional definitions of tradition (such as those outlined in UNESCO 2003). Rather, this heritage moves across different spaces, undergoing processes of translation and renegotiation within the global semiosphere (LOTMAN 2005). Within this framework, the food system itself operates as a specific semiosphere. Here, culinary practices actively intervene in the formation and expression of cultural identity through continuous negotiations (STANO 2015: 28; MANGANO 2022: 287).

The pervasiveness of gastronomic discourse has long characterized traditional media, earning the definition of «gastromania» (MARRONE 2014). Furthermore, television has contributed to the folklorization of Italian rural foodscapes (BINDI & GRASSEN 2014). However, this dynamic accelerates significantly within digital spaces. Among the platforms that most catalyze this process, TikTok has established itself in recent years not merely as an entertainment space, but as a boundary space where local culinary narratives and identity discourses meet global consumption.

Building on these premises, the analysis is guided by two primary research questions. First, how does TikTok act as a boundary space that translates lived culinary practices into standardized audiovisual formats designed for digital circulation and consumption? Second, within this process of platform mediation, how are everyday tactical practices, such as embodied gestures, the use of makeshift tools, or affective rituals, preserved, transformed, or reabsorbed by the platform's commercial strategies? To explore this dynamic, the research adopts a comparative perspective based on semiotic analysis. It examines visual, verbal, and paratextual elements across four highly visible TikTok profiles: Pasta Grannies (@pastagrannies), Nonna Natalina (@nonnanatalina1935), Nonna Nella (@nonnanellaa), and Nonna Silvi (@nonnasilviofficial). These profiles were selected because they translate Italian food heritage for different publics, formats, and degrees of commercialization. Together, they make it possible to trace a continuum of enunciative and commercial mediation. This continuum begins with editorial-documentary observation, moving through the aestheticization of slow domestic practice and hybrid forms of domestic-platform instruction. Eventually, it culminates

in an explicitly commercialized regime of enunciation, exemplified by the transition from the domestic kitchen to the production laboratory.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework guiding the study. Section 3 presents the corpus and the methodological approach adopted. Section 4 analyzes the dynamics of heritage translation through the four case studies, organized along a continuum of commodification. Finally, Section 5 discusses the forms of authenticity that emerge from the analysis and returns to the initial research questions concerning the persistence and transformation of food heritage on TikTok.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

To understand how Italian food heritage is reframed on TikTok, we can interpret this platform as a semiosphere (LOTMAN 2005) governed by specific architectural and algorithmic logics. In Lotmanian terms (2005), the boundaries of the semiosphere are the spaces where cultural translation occurs. On TikTok, the algorithmic architecture can be conceptualized as this filtering mechanism. To enter the platform and gain visibility, everyday culinary practices cannot remain in their original form. They must cross this digital boundary and be translated into the platform's native language, such as short vertical videos, rapid editing, and trending audio tracks (RASHIDIN et al. 2026).

Within this digital semiosphere, local food heritage often encounters what Urry (1990) defined as the «tourist gaze». Urry originally theorized this as a socially organized way of seeing that objectifies places and cultures as visual spectacles distinct from everyday life. However, within the context of digital platforms, this gaze becomes disembodied and accelerated. Transnational users scroll through feeds expecting to consume spectacularized and easily recognizable cultural differences. The digital tourist gaze transforms the intimacy of the domestic kitchen into a visual commodity, demanding rapid access to an idealized version of rural or traditional Italian life.

It is within this intersection of algorithmic visibility and digital tourism that the figure of the nonna becomes central. Far from being reduced to a

mere demographic fact, the elderly cook operates on social media as a «contemporary myth» (BARTHES 1957). She becomes a sign through which digital discourse produces an idea of authenticity presented as natural, affective, and continuous. In an era marked by the industrial standardization of food systems, the close-up shot of time-worn hands kneading raw materials acts as a «reality effect» (BARTHES 1968). This visual strategy establishes a fiduciary relation between the image and the viewer.

However, the transposition of this heritage onto TikTok raises a central question regarding the relationship between food understood as a digital spectacle and cooking lived as a material practice. Following the dichotomy proposed by Michel de Certeau (1984), this dynamic can be read as a continuous tension between strategies and tactics within the short-video format. On the one hand, TikTok's logics of algorithmic visibility, branding practices, and commercial dynamics operate as top-down strategies, coding and commodifying tradition to render it a marketable product (ZHENG 2023). On the other hand, embodied culinary practice resists this hyper-simplification. Elements such as cooking «by eye», unrepeatable bodily gestures, and affective rituals function as bottom-up tactics of reappropriation and cultural resilience.

### **3. Methodology and Research Corpus**

The research corpus was constructed through a qualitative and comparative semiotic approach. Given the extent and fluidity of TikTok, the aim was not to provide a statistically representative or exhaustive mapping of Italian food content on the platform, but rather to focus on a targeted selection among the most visible profiles. The selection of the profiles followed an exploratory and purposive logic. In a preliminary phase, journalistic articles, blogs, and web materials were consulted. This scouting used keywords such as *nonne influencer* and *nonna cucina TikTok* – as well as other Italian and English expressions referring to elderly women producing food-related content on social media – to identify a broader set of public profiles associated with this phenomenon. These materials were not treated as part of the semiotic corpus. Rather, they were employed as part of a systematic exploratory approach to

map the public discourse and identify the most culturally relevant profiles. However, relying on media and journalistic coverage for preliminary scouting may introduce a selection bias. This method inherently privileges profiles that have already achieved mainstream visibility or that align with specific media narratives regarding the authentic Italian nonna, potentially excluding more marginal or less spectacularized culinary tactics. Despite this limitation, the study focuses precisely on how these highly visible cases negotiate heritage on the platform.

Among the profiles that emerged from this preliminary scouting, the four cases under examination were selected for their high visibility on the platform and strong relevance to the research question, especially with regard to the centrality of cooking practices, the explicit staging of the elderly female figure, and different degrees of mediation and commercialization. The corpus is therefore not intended to represent Italian food content on TikTok as a whole, but to support a comparative semiotic analysis of selected high-visibility cases.

Taken together, the four profiles under examination make it possible to trace a continuum of food heritage mediation: from editorial-documentary observation to family-based domestic staging, hybrid platform-native formats, and explicitly commercialized forms of culinary branding. It is by juxtaposing such disparate visual texts that the constant friction between the tactics of resistance inherent in culinary practice and the commercial and commodifying strategies imposed by the digital format becomes evident.

To analyze the texts with the greatest resonance, the three videos with the highest number of views were selected for each profile. Data collection concluded on May 30, 2026, yielding a corpus of twelve audiovisual texts in total. As an exclusion criterion, purely discursive content, such as vlogs or Q&A sessions, and viral trends unrelated to food preparation were omitted. A strict thematic constraint was applied: the videos had to depict the practical act of cooking (kneading, cutting, mixing, shaping, or serving), since the object of investigation in this paper is the audiovisual and digital translation of gastronomic know-how.

To deconstruct the twelve selected videos, the research applied a multidimensional semiotic framework centered on three main analytical layers. At the visual level, the focus was placed on editing rhythm and framing choices, tracking in particular the recurrent close-ups on hands and raw

ingredients. The analysis then shifted to enunciative strategies to examine the distribution of gaze and voice. Here, a distinction was made between videos where the cook addresses the camera directly and those where her presence is mediated by a voice-over or a relative behind the lens. The final layer incorporated the sonic and paratextual apparatus, including trending audio, captions, and hashtags. Although often considered peripheral, these elements are crucial to the semiotic organization of the texts. They make visible the ways in which culinary practice is adapted to platform logics of circulation and recognizability. Intersecting these three dimensions made it possible to pinpoint the exact mechanisms that resemanticize traditional cooking practices for a global audience.

#### **4. Italian Food Heritage Online: Regimes of Authenticity on TikTok**

The cross-analysis of the corpus highlights how the discursive construction of food heritage on TikTok is not uniform, but can be organized along a translational continuum. The four case studies delineate distinct regimes of meaning in which authenticity is constructed differently depending on the enunciative strategies adopted. Along this axis, the physical space of the kitchen and the body of the nonna cease to be mere backgrounds. Instead, they become central sites where the adaptation of material practice to digital formats becomes visible. The following sections deconstruct this progression by exploring, in order: the editorial-documentary gaze of Pasta Grannies, the slowness and care of domestic practice in Nonna Natalina, the intergenerational hybridization with digital formats in Nonna Nella, and the strongly branded and commercialized reconfiguration of the format in Nonna Silvi.

##### **4.1. The Editorial-Documentary Gaze: The Case of Pasta Grannies**

Positioned at the initial pole of the continuum proposed here is the Pasta Grannies profile. This editorial project, created to document and archive traditional Italian recipes, currently boasts a consolidated presence on TikTok with over 70.4k followers and 519k likes. Unlike the other profiles under

examination, the enunciating instance in this case does not coincide with the actor performing the culinary action. Rather, it consists of an external, Anglophone editorial subject that selects, frames, captions, and circulates the practice. From a structural perspective, therefore, the figure of the nonna undergoes a radical repositioning. She transitions from an active Subject and constructor of her own brand to the mere Object of an ethnographic observation.

In the three most popular videos, uploaded between March and August 2023, the camera documents three elderly women (90-year-old Olga, 103-year-old Irma, and Maria). They are engaged in the manual preparation of traditional pasta shapes, such as *maccheroncini di Campofilone* and *tagliatelle*. At the visual level, the videos focus on the physical labor of kneading and cutting the dough. In these texts, the textual anchoring – written in English and phrased in the third person – makes this process of intercultural translation evident. The captions «90yr old Olga makes *maccheroncini di Campofilone*. She can judge 120g fresh pasta for a serving by eye!» or «Maria makes *tagliatelle*» exemplify this dynamic. Local, domestic praxis is isolated, packaged, and musealized. It is extracted from its living, everyday flow and reframed as a static exhibition of cultural heritage. Consequently, it can be consumed as an exotic commodity by the gaze of global digital tourism.

Within this museal framework, chronological age ceases to operate as a mere demographic indicator, becoming instead the primary signifier of authenticity. The channel's paratextual apparatus triggers a spectacularization of longevity, evident in the third analyzed video, whose caption reads: «103 year old Irma makes *tagliatelle*, our oldest granny yet!» (see f.1). Here, the centenarian body is treated as an exceptional anthropological trophy capable of autonomously demonstrating the uncontaminated nature of the ritual. It is precisely within this elderly body that the resistance of the tactic against the rationality of industrial strategy becomes manifest (DE CERTEAU 1984). As highlighted in the aforementioned caption of the video featuring the ninety-year-old Olga («She can judge 120g fresh pasta for a serving by eye!»), practical knowledge is never delegated to standardized and objective measuring tools. Rather, it is entirely incorporated within the eye and hand of the social actor. Culinary praxis is thus reaffirmed as an embodied know-how, a competence based on direct experience that eludes the quantitative and standardized logic of modern cooking.

The construction of the soundscape and spatial environment also intervenes to reinforce the «reality effect» (BARTHES 1968). The absence of superimposed musical tracks, in favor of ambient noises (the rustling of flour, the rhythmic beating of the rolling pin), attempts to restore the text's presumed nature as a live documentary recording. The use of markers such as the hashtag #pastaasmr, however, reveals the strategic substrate of the entire operation. The bare acoustic authenticity is labeled and codified to address the contemporary global spectator's need for a sensory and material experience. Finally, these short videos systematically conclude with the consumption of the meal. This shifts the axiological axis onto the convivial dimension of food, confirming commensality as its primary social and relational function (MONTANARI 2004; BOUTAUD 2005; MARRONE 2016). This final commensality, staged in domestic and scenic settings (see f.2), closes the translational circle, offering the transnational user the illusion of intimate and unmediated access to Italian food heritage.



F.1 – @pastagrannies, June 28, 2023.



**F.2** – @pastagrannies, March 7, 2023.

#### **4.2. The Aestheticization of Practice: The Case of Nonna Natalina**

Proceeding along the continuum of heritage mediation, the Nonna Natalina profile marks an important shift in the dynamics of enunciation. Situated within a family-managed context and centered on a Tuscan grandmother as its protagonist, the channel currently boasts 4 million followers and 46.1 million likes. The three most popular videos under examination, uploaded between March 2022 and April 2023, share a marked thematic and visual uniformity. All of them depict the woman engaged in the preparation of handmade ravioli. In these texts, the spoken word is almost entirely absent. The cook does not converse with the camera, nor does she explicitly illustrate the steps of the preparation. Consequently, the recipe entirely loses its instructional

function, transforming instead into what Sanfilippo (2023: 319) defines as a «ricetta performativa» ('performative recipe', trad. mia). The objective of the enunciation is not primarily to transmit step-by-step procedural know-how, but to foreground the aesthetic and affective dimension of the gesture. Silence transforms domestic praxis into an untouchable liturgy, wherein the spectator is not invited to learn, but is relegated to pure contemplation. The use of highly emotional and melancholic music, such as the track *Another Love* by Tom Odell, or, conversely, rhythmic pop songs, such as Gianni Morandi's *Apri tutte le porte*, acts as a form of pathemic anchoring. In this sense, music orients the emotional reading of the video. It also translates the intimate and slowed-down gesture of shaping handmade ravioli into an affectively oriented audiovisual text compatible with TikTok's logics of engagement.

It is within this space of ritual isolation that the tactic of everyday life becomes particularly visible. The choice to frame the shaping of the ravioli using the edge of an upside-down plate (see f.3) contrasts with the polished and technologically mediated aesthetics often associated with professionalized online cooking. This display of makeshift tools contributes to generating an aesthetic of artisanal imperfection that could function as a guarantee of authenticity. At the same time, the close-up of elderly hands and of the raw ingredients of the preparations produces a substantial valorization (FLOCH 1990). In this manner, the camera stimulates a synesthetic experience, allowing the transnational user to visually touch the textures of tradition. The explicit display of the demographic age serves to consolidate this construct. The overlaid text «I ravioli della nonna... 86 anni ♥» ('Grandma's ravioli... 86 years old ♥'), prominently displayed in the video from March 2022 (see f.4), produces a significant effect of authentication. The text does not merely foreground the teaching of a technique, but also the figure of the person performing it. The elderly body becomes one of the main markers through which authenticity is constructed. This textual anchoring suggests to the viewer not merely the observation of a gastronomic practice, but the persistence of a familiar and reassuring image of culinary tradition.

Finally, the analysis reveals the presence of editorial direction behind the apparent everyday spontaneity of the profile, especially through its serial publication strategy. The re-uploading of similar or identical visual sequences over time points to the operation of a curator who manages the channel to foster its virality. For instance, the exact visual sequence of the March 2022

video was republished identically in January 2023. The new version varied only the overlay text (replaced by a simple red heart) and omitted the audio track.

While save counts cannot directly reveal user motivation, these repetitive and minimally explanatory videos accumulate a high number of saves. They received 113.9k in the originally uploaded video, 230.9k in the re-uploaded version, and peaked at 358k in the April 2023 video. This suggests that users save them not only for practical utility, but also for their aesthetic and affective value. More than an instructional recipe, the video functions as an atmosphere to be preserved. It offers a slowed-down, repetitive, and reassuring form of domestic temporality. In this sense, Nonna Natalina achieves high visibility on the platform not by accelerating the gesture, but by transforming slowness itself into a recognizable aesthetic form. Her silent and repetitive gestures offer a temporal counterpoint to the speed of the platform while remaining fully integrated within its logic of circulation.



**F. 3** – @nonnanatalina1935, April 17, 2023.



**F.4** – @nonnanatalina1935, March 11, 2022.

#### **4.3. Hybridization as Cultural Translation: The Case of Nonna Nella**

The Nonna Nella profile represents a further stage in the proposed trajectory. The channel, centered on the figure of an 86-year-old woman from Perugia, had 593k followers and 11.9 million likes at the time of data collection. The analysis of the profile's three most popular videos, uploaded between March 2021 and August 2022, reveals a marked flexibility in the enunciating instance. The figure of the nonna moves between two distinct regimes of enunciation. In two of the examined videos – one from May 2021 dedicated to mozzarella in carrozza and another from March 2021 featuring a dessert based on Oreo cookies – the visual framing alternates dynamically between the woman and

the ingredients, while her voice-over explicitly narrates the steps. Here, the elderly woman assumes the thematic role of cook-teacher, constructing a «ricetta potenziale» ('potential recipe', SANFILIPPO 2023: 319) in which the verbal component serves to transmit practical competence to the viewer. In the third analyzed video, uploaded in August 2022 and dedicated to pasta pomodorosa (a handmade pasta into whose dough tomato purée is added), the profile shifts instead toward the performative recipe discussed above. Filmed outdoors with the music track *Bella Toscana* playing, the video features no spoken words or technical explanations. This choice suspends the transmission of knowledge in favor of a purely aesthetic and spectacular exhibition of the gesture. Moreover, such adaptability shows how the profile reorganizes its expressive code according to different platform formats and logics of visibility.

It is within this fluid space that the domestic aesthetic encounters and absorbs products of the global market, complicating the myth of a pure and untouchable culinary tradition. In the Oreo dessert video, the profile mobilizes the body of the nonna – her elderly hands, her necklace, and the familiar setting of the living room – to manipulate a highly recognizable industrial product. In this instance, the culinary act no longer functions primarily as the preservation of an inherited recipe. Rather, it becomes a tactic of domestic adaptation of the industrial product. The practice aligns with a logic of speed, accessibility, and simplified preparation, contrasting with the slowness of traditional artisanal preparations (see f.5). Through Lotmanian categories (LOTMAN 2005), the elderly woman's body acts as a dialogic membrane. The reassuring myth of the nonna serves as a mediating device to legitimize the insertion of the multinational product within the Italian domestic space.

Finally, this editorial flexibility also emerges in the construction of a recognizable rural landscape in the August 2022 video dedicated to the pasta pomodorosa. Here, the profile moves from the enclosed living room to the open countryside, staging a form of geographical simplification oriented toward a widely recognizable image of rural Italy. The setting, dominated by olive trees and the wooden pastry board, is accompanied by the audio track *Bella Toscana*. This semiotic short-circuit is significant. Although the grandmother is from Perugia, the enunciating instance selects a Tuscan musical marker. This activates a geographical imaginary more immediately recognizable to a broad platform audience. In this way, the user is offered the classic postcard

image of rural Italy that digital tourism expects to consume. Yet, the sensory effect generated by the chromatic contrast between nature, tomatoes, and flour is interrupted by a visual detail. The cook wears a personalized apron with the name Nonna Nella embroidered on the chest (see f.6). This element reveals the professional and editorial dimension of the content. The elderly woman is not merely a family figure accidentally filmed in her daily life, but the face of a curated project, capable of balancing the appeal to local identity with the commercial and platform-oriented logic of the global market and personal branding.



**F.5** – @nonnanellaa, March 4, 2021.



**F.6** – @nonnanellaa, August 11, 2022.

#### **4.4. The Production Facility and Brand Strategy: The Case of Nonna Silvi**

At the more explicitly commercialized end of the continuum explored here lies the profile of Nonna Silvi, where domestic practice is strongly reconfigured within a family-business branding strategy. Nonna Silvi, whose name is Silvana, is an 85-year-old grandmother from Tuscany who has been working at her son's bakery since 2006. At the time of data collection, her TikTok profile had 2.1 million followers and 29.7 million likes. The three most popular videos examined here, uploaded between March 2023 and September 2024, illustrate this dynamic. These videos generated high engagement, ranging from 865.9k to 2.7 million likes, and alternated between shots of the elderly woman explaining the recipe and close-ups of the food she prepares. However,

the primary and most striking visual element is spatial displacement. In the analyzed videos, the domestic kitchen is definitively abandoned in favor of a commercial production facility. Within this framework, authenticity ceases to reside in the physical space, becoming entirely incorporated into the body of the actant. The work apron, which in the September 2024 video prominently displays the digital handle @NONNASILVI (see f.7), indexes the construction of Nonna Silvi as an «intermedial hero» (MANGIAPANE 2014: 167), for whom the social-media infrastructure becomes part of an economic and communicative enterprise. In other words, the reassuring figure of the grandmother is employed to mask the commercial nature of the operation. The image of maternal care serves to render an industrial environment dominated by professional machinery less aseptic. Consequently, it allows products to be sold on a large scale as if they were the result of an authentic act of familial love.

Supporting this process of resemanticization is a specific architecture of enunciation. Unlike the frontal monologue of Nonna Nella or the absence of voice in Nonna Natalina, Nonna Silvi's videos are structured through a polyphonic enunciation. The active presence of the grandson behind the lens and the grandfather's interventions configure the text as a sitcom-like family scene. In the April 2023 video dedicated to carbonara, for instance, a comedic scene unfolds among the three family members, supported by a theatrical use of the Tuscan vernacular. The insertion of these relational, familial, and comedic dynamics is not merely decorative. It serves the tactical function of warming the cold and serial environment of the production facility, infusing the scene with a sense of genuineness and craftsmanship. The affective and dialectal dimension is thus integrated into a branding strategy that fosters familiarity and loyalty among the platform audience, inviting viewers to enter a reassuring family scene. Alongside this vernacular component, the need to reassure the digital audience about the absolute integrity of the recipe is met through the exhibition of a strict culinary orthodoxy. The normative and emphatic correction regarding the ingredients – such as the admonition «guanciale, non pancetta, guanciale!» – functions as identity-based and gastronomic positioning. The strenuous and verbalized defense of tradition compensates for the professionalized production setting. Rigor regarding ingredients acts as an authentication device, because it legitimizes the branded identity of the profile through the authority of culinary correctness.

Finally, the complex textuality of this profile generates a peculiar dynamic. The videos formally maintain the didactic purpose of the aforementioned potential recipe, making the steps explicit and inviting the viewer to replicate them. However, the quantitative scale of the preparations reduces the practical instructional function of the text. Although domestic replication remains possible by adapting the measurements, the emphasis shifts from the practical transmission of knowledge to the spectacular exhibition of ingredients, textures, and transformations. This shift is amplified by a curated soundscape that blends the woman's voice with emotional musical tracks (such as Ludovico Einaudi's *Divenire* or Adrián Berenguer's *Little Things*) and prominent ASMR sounds. The high number of saves – 552.3k for the March 2023 carbonara video and over 132k for the September 2024 video – suggests that the videos may be valued not only for immediate culinary utility, but also for their aesthetic and sensory dimension. The combined use of sonic markers and extreme close-ups of the textures of the ingredients (melted cheese, thick creamy sauces) produces a food-porn-like regime of visual consumption (IBRAHIM 2015; see f.8). In this configuration, culinary heritage does not disappear as know-how, but is increasingly reframed as a multisensory object of platform circulation, where instruction, affect, branding, and spectacle coexist.



**F.7** – @nonnasilviofficial, September 1, 2024.



**F.8** – @nonnasilviofficial, April 6, 2023.

## 5. Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the four case studies makes it possible to map different ways in which living food heritage is renegotiated within TikTok's platform environment. In response to the opening question, authenticity on TikTok is not to be understood as an ontological given or as the simple survival of a pre-modern tradition. Rather, it emerges as a meaning effect produced through specific enunciative, visual, sonic, and paratextual choices. The continuum explored in this article ranges from the editorial-documentary mediation of Pasta Grannies to the production facility of Nonna Silvi. This trajectory shows that the digital platform does not merely host culinary tradition. Instead, it actively translates this heritage to render it compatible with the global market.

Within this translational process, the elderly body and domestic space function as key mediating devices. In particular, the close-up of the nonna's face is not merely a descriptive visual detail, but operates as an affordance of social interaction. By showing her face to the camera, the nonna projects a specific axiological orientation onto the culinary object. She effectively offers the global viewer «the right face of food» (LEONE 2024). This facialization acts as a visual and moral authenticating mechanism. It establishes a fiduciary pact that mitigates the sterile nature of digital commodification. Consequently, her symbolic capital is mobilized to domesticate industrial food products, as in the case of Nonna Nella's Oreo-based dessert. Alternatively, it serves to humanize professionalized production settings, as in the case of Nonna Silvi. Biological age, when textually foregrounded, ceases to function merely as demographic data and becomes a marker of continuity, memory, and perceived authenticity. In this sense, the elderly body becomes the visual embodiment of the intangible cultural heritage defined by UNESCO (2003). In fact, it acts as the living vector through which knowledge is intergenerationally transmitted. In Barthesian terms (BARTHES 1957), the myth of the nonna naturalizes a historically and socially mediated idea of Italian food tradition, presenting it as familiar, affective, and apparently continuous.

At the same time, the relationship between strategies and tactics theorized by de Certeau (DE CERTEAU 1984) proves to be more complex than a simple opposition. The everyday tactics analyzed in the corpus – such as silence and repetition in Nonna Natalina's videos, makeshift tools, measuring «by

eye», dialectal correction, family interaction, and the embodied manipulation of ingredients – do not stand outside platform logic. Rather, they are made visible, aestheticized, and often reabsorbed into the platform's economy of circulation. The platform does not necessarily repress these tactics. It can transform them into recognizable markers of authenticity. Artisanal imperfection, slowness, and embodied know-how thus become not only signs of resistance to standardization. They also function as elements through which the videos gain recognizability and affective value.

Ultimately, the translation of food heritage on TikTok marks the definitive transition from the instructional recipe to the performative recipe. Traditional food ceases to be solely a practical ritual to be learned and transforms into a visual experience to be collected as a digital souvenir. This dynamic raises critical questions for current cultural heritage preservation policies. While institutional frameworks, such as the UNESCO convention, emphasize the safeguarding of intangible heritage through the active, community-based transmission of knowledge, digital platforms propose a parallel, paradoxical form of preservation. Digital mediation of food heritage demonstrates that digital environments do not simply record living cultural memory, but actively rewrite it by assembling specific regimes of visibility (BONACCHI et al. 2023). Therefore, food heritage on TikTok is best understood not as a stable object transmitted intact, but as a living semiotic practice, continually translated between memory, body, platform, and market.

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