

COMMUNICATION IDENTITY WITHIN THE CASUAL FASHION ENTREPRENEUR COMMUNITY IN WEST JAVA AS A FORM OF PERSONAL BRANDING

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the communication identity formed within the casual fashion entrepreneur community in West Java and its contribution to building personal branding. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews with casual fashion entrepreneurs who are part of local creative communities. The primary theory used is the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) by Michael Hecht, alongside the concept of personal branding from David Aaker, which encompasses five dimensions of individual brand character. The results show that the four layers of CTI (personal, enacted, relational, and communal) emerge simultaneously and intertwine in the entrepreneurs' communication processes. The findings also indicate that authenticity, consistency, emotional engagement, and community collaboration are the key strengths in forming a credible and impactful self-image. Through the exploration of each identity layer, this study confirms that communication is a central element in the formation of personal branding. Personal identity is manifested through a relaxed yet professional demeanor; enacted identity is evident in warm interactions and openness; relational identity is formed by maintaining personal character while adapting to social relationships; and communal identity is demonstrated through collaboration, product representation, and active participation in the community. These findings expand the understanding that personal identity is not only formed individually but also collectively through consistent communication practices within the business community. This study enriches the literature on communication identity in the context of the creative industry and provides a foundation for developing community-based personal branding strategies.

Keywords: *Communication Identity, Personal Branding, Casual Fashion, Entrepreneur Community, Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), Communication Strategy.*

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry in West Java is one of the most competitive industries, with many entrepreneurs trying to enter and stay in the market. In the context of casual fashion, which is heavily influenced by trends, lifestyle, and closeness to consumers, the ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally is key to building a positive self-image and enhancing business reputation. Therefore, fashion entrepreneurs in West Java need to understand and integrate communication identity into their personal branding strategy to support sustainable success. Previous research has shown that interpersonal communication and personal branding play an important role in business success. Communication identity is a key factor for entrepreneurs to adapt in the digital era through innovation, especially in promotional strategies that are in line with the dynamics of changing times. In the context of casual fashion, the ability to communicate effectively and build a strong communication identity can help entrepreneurs differentiate themselves from competitors and increase brand awareness. However, many casual fashion entrepreneurs do not have a structured, sustainable, and clear communication strategy. This is where the role of fashion entrepreneur communities becomes very important, as a forum for sharing knowledge and experience, and supporting each other in building communication identity and strong personal branding. This study aims to understand how casual fashion entrepreneurs in West Java form and convey their communication identity in the context of personal branding. By using communication identity theory and personal branding theory, this study is expected to provide insights into how fashion entrepreneurs can develop authentic and consistent communication to strengthen their brand image and increase brand awareness in a highly competitive market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In understanding the concept of communication identity and personal branding in the casual fashion entrepreneur community in West Java, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth literature review of relevant theories. This literature review will discuss the theory of communication identity, personal branding, self-disclosure, community, and fashion business. In this section, you should:

- Communication Identity: The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) by Michael Hecht (1993) explains that identity is not something fixed or inherent, but rather it is formed, negotiated, and expressed through communication. Identity consists of four layers: personal layer, enacted layer, relational layer, and communal layer.
- Personal Branding: According to David Aaker, personal branding is a strategic process in building and managing individual identity as managing a brand. Personal branding involves developing a strong self-identity, which includes personality, values, vision, competence, and communication style that differentiates an individual from others.
- Dimensions of Personal Branding: Aaker emphasizes that the success of personal branding depends on an individual's ability to create a unique position in social or professional environments, form a consistent image, and maintain consistency between the desired identity and public perception. The dimensions of personal branding include sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness.
- Self-Disclosure: The self-disclosure theory explains the process of an individual revealing personal information about themselves to others that is usually hidden. Self-disclosure can support individuals in interacting with others, strengthening self-confidence, and strengthening interpersonal relationships.
- Community: A community is defined as a group of people with various characteristics that are connected through social bonds, share the same perspective, and are involved in joint actions in a location or geographic setting.
- Fashion Business: The fashion business is one of the business fields that makes a significant contribution to the global and national economy, especially as part of the creative economy. Communication strategies in the fashion business are heavily influenced by digital developments, with the use of social media as the primary channel for interacting with consumers.

Thus, this literature review is expected to provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the concept of communication identity and personal branding in the casual fashion entrepreneur community in West Java.

METHOD

This study uses an interpretive paradigm, which focuses on understanding how individuals give meaning to social reality through social interaction. This paradigm is relevant to the study of communication identity in the casual fashion entrepreneur community in West Java, as it allows researchers to understand how the self-concept of entrepreneurs is formed and actualized in building their personal branding in the casual fashion realm. The research method used is a qualitative method, which aims to understand the situation and condition of a phenomenon in depth. This method allows researchers to build a detailed understanding of the phenomenon being studied, with results presented in narrative or verbal descriptive form. In the context of this study, qualitative methods are used to explore in-depth how the casual fashion entrepreneur community in West Java forms their communication identity as part of their personal branding strategy.

Tabel 2.2 Unit Analisis

Unit Analisis	Sub Analisis	Elemen
Identitas Pada Pengusaha Casual Di Sebagai Komunikasi Komunitas Fashion Personal Branding	Komunikasi Identitas (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008; Littlejohn et al., 2021) Personal Branding (Aaker, 1997)	<i>Personal Identity</i> <i>Enactment Identity</i> <i>Relational Identity</i> <i>Communal Identity</i> <i>Sincerity</i> <i>Excitement</i> <i>Competence</i> <i>Sophistication</i> <i>Ruggedness</i>

The unit of analysis in this study is the casual fashion entrepreneur community in West Java, with a focus on communication identity and personal branding. Communication identity is understood as a concept consisting of

four layers, namely personal layer, enacted layer, relational layer, and communal layer. Meanwhile, personal branding is understood as a strategic process in building and managing individual identity as managing a brand. This study uses several research stages, namely defining research objectives, research design, selecting research subjects, determining titles, writing proposals, supervisor approval, proposal defense, proposal revision, data collection, data processing research, and thesis defense. At the data collection stage, researchers conducted in-depth interviews, observations, and literature studies to obtain data relevant to the study. The data analysis technique used is the Miles and Huberman data analysis model, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. This model allows researchers to comprehensively manage qualitative data and develop accurate and relevant findings. To ensure the validity of the data, researchers use source triangulation and member checking techniques. Source triangulation is done by checking information through diverse sources, while member checking is done by validating the conclusions drawn with the sources to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation. By using qualitative research methods and appropriate data analysis techniques, this study is expected to provide a deep understanding of communication identity and personal branding in the casual fashion entrepreneur community in West Java.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study shows that casual fashion entrepreneurs in West Java build complex communication identities through four layers of CTI (Communication Theory of Identity), namely personal, enactment, relational, and communal identity. This identity is formed through a balance between personal expression, representation strategy, social interaction, and community involvement. In this process, casual fashion entrepreneurs not only build individual identities but also strong collective identities through communities. The discussion shows that personal identity plays an important role in shaping authenticity and consistency of the brand. Successful casual fashion entrepreneurs have the ability to express themselves authentically and consistently, so that consumers can easily recognize the brand's authenticity. Enactment identity is also formed through strategic and authentic visual and narrative communication, which strengthens the brand identity and differentiates it from competitors.

Relational identity is built through positive and communicative social interactions with consumers. Successful casual fashion entrepreneurs have the ability to build strong relationships with consumers, creating loyalty and trust. Communal identity plays an important role in shaping collective identity and social validation. Casual fashion entrepreneurs who are involved in communities can build stronger and more socially relevant identities. This study also shows that personal branding dimensions such as Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness play an important role in shaping the communication identity of casual fashion entrepreneurs. Sincerity and competence are the foundation of building trust and credibility, while excitement and sophistication help differentiate the brand and increase appeal. Ruggedness, on the other hand, strengthens a strong and resilient brand identity. The contribution of this research lies in a deeper understanding of the dynamics of communication identity in the creative industry, particularly in the local context that is rich in values of togetherness and honest expression. This study shows that communication identity is not only built through individual expression but also through social interaction and community involvement. Therefore, casual fashion entrepreneurs can build stronger and more socially relevant brand identities by understanding and applying the concepts of communication identity and personal branding appropriately.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the communication identity of the casual fashion entrepreneur community in West Java is formed through a balance between personal expression, representation strategy, social interaction, and community involvement. This identity is built through a complex and layered social process, forming a cohesive and dynamic narrative structure of identity. Thus, this communication identity not only serves as a means of self-expression but also as a cultural strategy to establish position, legitimacy, and trust in the local fashion industry. The result is an authentic, adaptive, and emotionally engaging personal branding that resonates with its audience. This study contributes to the development of communication identity and personal branding theories in the context of local creative business communities. Future studies can further expand this approach to other creative economy sectors such as music, fine arts, or culinary, to examine how communication identity is collectively built outside the fashion industry. Additionally, a comparative approach between communities in urban and rural areas is also worth researching to understand the cultural and geographical dimensions that influence the process of forming communication identity.

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