

Personal Branding Strategy @babeheji in The New Media Era: Phenomenological Analysis in the Framework of Participatory Culture

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Personal Branding; Participatory Culture;
New Media; Parenting Content;
@babeheji

The new media era has changed the paradigm of personal branding for content creators, where the audience is no longer a passive consumer, but an active participant in the production and distribution of content. This study uses a qualitative method by analyzing @babeheji's personal branding strategy within the framework of participatory culture. The research focuses on authenticity, content consistency, active interaction, multiplatform use, and storytelling. As a parenting content creator, @babeheji builds a digital identity that emphasizes the importance of a fatherless family. She shares daily vlogs with Eji and Momma and presents parenting education. The study found that active audience participation in various forms of digital interaction, such as comments, duet videos, and cross-platform discussions, enabled @babeheji's personal branding strategy. Increasingly decentralized and democratic content production allows audiences to be not only recipients of messages, but also partners in building digital narratives. The complexity of the narratives that emerge in the intertextual space between platforms strengthens the position of social networks over hierarchy in shaping audience engagement. Moreover, the success of personal branding in the new media era depends not only on the image built by the creator, but also on the extent to which the audience feels ownership and participates in the digital community. By understanding the dynamics of participatory culture, content creators can develop personal branding strategies that are more inclusive, interactive, and sustainable in the digital ecosystem.

1. Introduction

Advancements in digital technology have transformed nearly every aspect of human life. The world has become more interconnected through digitalization, enabling communication, information, and economic activity to operate at unprecedented speed. One of the most prominent phenomena in the digital era is the rise of new media. New media adopt and repurpose concepts from traditional media into more modern and enhanced formats (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). Unlike conventional media, new media are interactive and digital by nature, fundamentally revolutionizing communication and enabling broader engagement.

New media have shifted how people access information, with digital platforms replacing traditional ones. This ease of access makes information more inclusive and rapidly distributed on a global scale. Additionally, the emergence and strengthening of social media as an integral part of modern life—such as Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube—allow individuals

not only to consume information but also to produce and share opinions, experiences, and trends that go viral (Fakhruroji, 2024).

Among these platforms, TikTok has become one of the most favored globally. This short-video-based application offers a unique interactive experience where anyone can create, edit, and share content easily. With its sophisticated algorithm that tailors content to user preferences, TikTok has created a dynamic and highly engaging digital ecosystem.

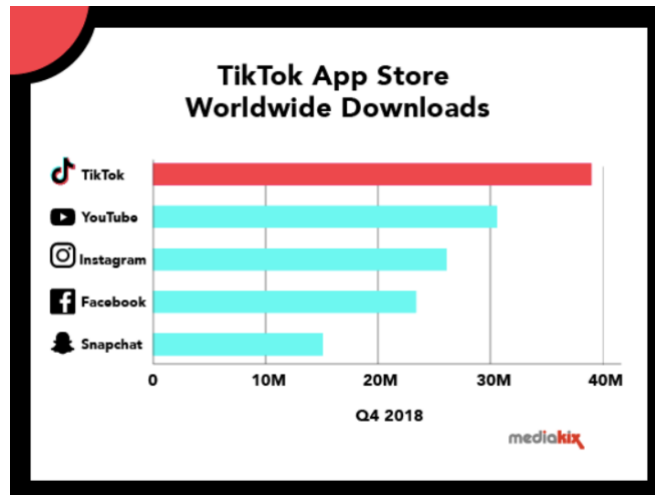
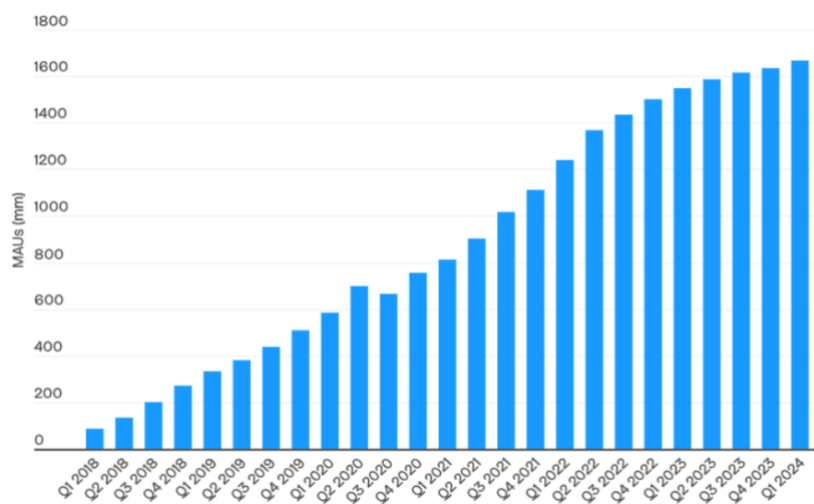


Figure 1. TikTok as the Most Downloaded Platform in 2024

(Source: MIX Marcomm - "Tengoklah TikTok: Kini Punya 1,5 Miliar Pengunduh")

Statistics by Mixcom show that TikTok has been downloaded by approximately 40 million users, followed by YouTube with 30 million downloads, Instagram with over 20 million, Facebook slightly below Instagram, and Snapchat with around 10 million downloads.



TikTok quarterly users 2018 to 2024 (mm) Sumber: Data.ai, CNBC, Company data

Figure 2. Growth of TikTok Users from 2018 to 2024

(Source: Kalodata - "TikTok Statistik 2024: Data, Tren, dan Wawasan Pemasaran")

The significant increase in users each year, as reported by Kalodata via CNBC, shows TikTok’s growing influence across the globe. This popularity has affected how individuals and content creators build and maintain their public image. One content creator who has successfully established personal branding in the new media era is @babeheji, known for his fatherhood-centered content and engaging family moments, especially with his son, Eji.



Figure 3. The "No Fatherless" Branding Embedded in @babeheji's Content

Through his TikTok account, @babeheji provides inspiration and parenting insights with a focus on the father's role in the family, promoting healthy family relationships and offering practical tips. His content is not only educational and entertaining but also uniquely packaged, making many followers feel emotionally connected to his journey as a young parent.

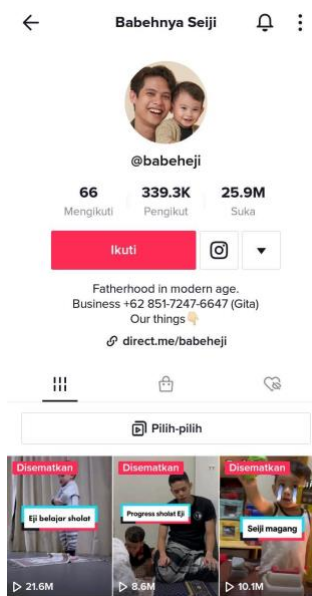


Figure 4. @babeheji's TikTok Account with Significant Followers

With over 300,000 followers and millions of viewers, @babeheji's success reflects the importance of personal branding in today's digital landscape. In an increasingly saturated and competitive content environment, crafting a unique identity is essential for standing out and capturing audience attention. Personal branding becomes a vital strategy for creators to highlight their uniqueness. This marks a significant shift in how users engage with public figures, especially through active participation in digital culture (Jenkins, 1999).

The success of @babeheji's personal branding strategy depends not only on content quality but also on active audience participation. In the competitive digital world, audiences are no longer passive consumers but also co-creators who shape the public image of figures they follow. Through interactions, comments, and support, audiences expand the reach and influence of content, fostering stronger connections between creators and followers. This reflects the evolving nature of digital

culture, which emphasizes two-way interaction and collaboration (Jenkins, 2006), making personal branding more dynamic and relevant.

The strategy implemented by content creators like @babeheji aligns with Henry Jenkins' participatory culture theory. This theory, also referred to as active audience theory, explains that audiences are not just passive consumers but participants in content production, distribution, and interpretation (Gane & Beer, 2008). In this context, personal branding is shaped not only by the individual but also by audience involvement in constructing the public narrative. Digital technology enables individuals and small groups to create and share their content (Jenkins, 2008).

Participatory culture is built on five key assumptions: (1) audiences are active participants; (2) content production is increasingly decentralized and democratic; (3) followers are engaged contributors, not passive fans; (4) narrative complexity often emerges between different texts rather than within a single one; and (5) networks are more significant than hierarchies in understanding media interaction and engagement.

Within this framework, @babeheji builds personal branding through parenting content emphasizing the importance of father presence, sharing daily vlogs with Eji and Momma, and offering interactive parenting education. Audience participation in digital culture enables more democratic content production. Creators do not solely control narratives—followers actively join discussions, share experiences, and reproduce content in various formats. Fans of @babeheji are not mere passive supporters but part of a community that shapes values and discourse around digital parenting.

Moreover, participatory culture leads to narrative complexity not limited to a single post, but evolving across platforms through comments, reactions, duet videos, and discussions. These intertextual exchanges create a more nuanced and collaborative storytelling process. In this context, networks outweigh hierarchies in defining creator-audience dynamics and the formation of new media interactions.

By optimizing participatory culture, @babeheji not only builds his digital identity but also fosters a space for audience contribution in parenting discourse. This study analyzes how his personal branding emerges within participatory culture and how his audience co-constructs an inclusive and interactive digital ecosystem.

Several previous studies underpin this research: Mulyadi (2023) on Prabowo Subianto's personal branding through social media; Kurniasih (2019) on Anies Baswedan's political communication via Instagram; Yusanda et al. (2021) on Instagram branding among students; Widyaningrum et al. (2023) on dancer Rianto's Instagram strategy; and Dewi et al. (2023) on TikTok branding by Melinda Rohita. Other relevant research includes participatory practices in fandoms (Hanifah & Kusuma, 2023; Andriyani, 2022), citizen journalism (Srikandi & Budiharjo, 2023), and virtual communities (Octavia; Wijaya & Madya).

This research contributes to the literature on personal branding in the new media era, focusing on @babeheji's digital identity construction through social media. Using participatory culture as a framework, the study highlights how creators invite audiences to co-create narratives—an area underexplored in prior studies. It also underscores the role of social media not only in visual branding but in deeper interaction and emotional engagement. By integrating participatory culture theory and phenomenology, this research explores new dimensions of personal branding rooted in active audience collaboration, emphasizing the significance of two-way digital identity construction.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to gain a deep understanding of the personal branding strategy implemented by @babeheji in the era of new media. The phenomenological approach was chosen to capture the lived experiences, meanings, and essence of the branding activities carried out by @babeheji, from both the perspective of the content creator and the audience involved in digital interactions. Phenomenology, as Creswell (2013) outlines, is focused on exploring human experiences in a specific context through a detailed analysis of the subject's perspective.

To gather comprehensive and in-depth data, this study employs three primary data collection techniques:

The researcher conducted non-participant observation of @babeheji's personal branding activities without engaging in them directly. As an independent observer, the researcher monitored content posted across various social media platforms, audience interactions, reactions, and comments. This observation helped identify patterns of engagement between the content creator and his followers, allowing the researcher to understand how branding is perceived and constructed in the digital space. By not participating in the interactions, the researcher could observe natural behaviors without influencing the setting.

To support the observational data and provide a theoretical foundation, the study incorporated document analysis. The documents analyzed consisted of content posted by @babeheji, academic articles on personal branding, and previous research related to participatory culture. As Bowen (2009) states, document analysis enriches qualitative research by adding context and depth, helping to strengthen the findings and supporting the analysis of how @babeheji's personal branding aligns with broader theories and trends in digital media. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected followers of @babeheji to gather insights into their perceptions of his personal branding and their roles in the interaction process. These interviews provided direct perspectives from the audience, revealing how they interpret and engage with the content shared by @babeheji. By examining the followers' views, the study explored how these participants in the digital space contribute to shaping and evolving the content creator's brand.

The combination of phenomenological methodology with non-participant observation, document analysis, and audience interviews provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the personal branding strategy of @babeheji. By integrating these methods, the study aims to describe how @babeheji constructs his digital identity and how the audience, as active participants in participatory culture, contributes to the development and transformation of his brand.

3. Result and Discussion

The findings of the study, based on interviews, non-participant observation, and literature review, reveal the personal branding strategy implemented by content creator @babeheji in the new media era, viewed through the lens of participatory culture.

Referring to Creswell (2013) and Kuswarno (2009), the research begins with an overview of the personal branding strategy of @babeheji. Below are Tables 1 to 3, which analyze the personal branding strategy using interview techniques. The concept of Participatory Culture, as introduced by Henry Jenkins (2006), emphasizes that in the digital age, the audience is no longer a passive consumer but an active participant in content creation and dissemination. In the case of @babeheji's personal branding strategy, high engagement, user-generated content, and collaboration with followers are key indicators that support this theory.

3.1 Personal Branding Strategy

Table 1 Analysis using interview techniques

No.	Interview w Subject	Question					
		What made you interested in following @babeheji ?	What do you think about the authenticity of @babeheji's content?	How important is content consistency in following a parenting account?	How do you think @babeheji interacts with the audience?	Does @babeheji's use of multiplatform affect how you access its content?	How does storytelling in @babeheji's content influence you?

1.	Amanah Budi Asih (Follow er and young mother 27 years old)	"I was interested because the content discusses parenting from a father's perspective. This is rare on social media, and I think it's important to showcase the role of fathers in the family."	"The content is very natural, not just made to go viral. I can see how his interactions with his family are genuine and inspiring for other fathers including my husband."	"If I'm not consistent, I'm bound to forget. Because parenting requires a lot of learning, so if there is an account that regularly provides education, I will return to that account more often."	"I see that Bebeh often answers questions in the comments and discusses topics requested by followers. This makes me feel like our opinions as an audience are valued."	"Sometimes I look at TikTok if I want short content, but if I want to learn more, I check YouTube. This makes me more flexible in accessing information."	"The stories she tells feel close to my own life as a young parent. My husband and I are often inspired to spend more time with our children after watching her content."
2.	Faisal Amri (22 year old follower and student)	"I like the way bebaehnya eji educates children, especially how a father should be active in parenting. Not many content creators emphasize the importance of the father's role in the family."	"The content feels honest and not contrived. The way Babeh Seiji interacts with his children and wife seems natural, so I feel more confident in the messages."	"Very important! I always wait for new content from him because there are many parenting tips that can be directly practiced by parents. If it's not consistent, I might forget and not really engage."	"I once commented on one of his videos, and it was answered! It makes me feel closer to him, and it makes me engage with his content more often."	"Yes, I often see her videos on TikTok, but if I want to find more information, I watch babeh and momma's YouTube. It helps me understand more about parenting."	"The story of daily life with Eji and Momma is very inspiring. I can relate to the stories, and this makes me more motivated to be more active in childcare when I have a family."

3.	Abdul Hadi (Follow er and Father 30 years old)	"I like it because the content is unique, featuring a father's perspective on parenting. Usually, parenting topics are more often discussed by moms, so a father's perspective is very interesting and gives new insights."	"The content feels very natural and not contrived. I could see real interactions between him and his children and wife, and it gave me an idea of how fathers can be more active in the family."	"Consistenc y is important, because I often look for parenting references on social media. If the account is updated frequently, I am more interested in following because there is always something new to learn."	"He often responds to comments and discussions from followers and there was even one video of him and Eji opening a toy sent from a follower. This makes me feel closer as an audience, like he really cares about his followers."	"I often see his videos on TikTok, then if I want to go deeper, I look on YouTube. Sometimes I also see his posts on Instagram. So, it's easy for me to get information anywhere."	"The story is very relatable! He often shares his daily stories that are similar to my experience as a father. This makes me feel more motivated to be actively involved in parenting."
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Interviews were conducted with three followers of the @babeheji account from various circles ranging from students, young mothers, and even fathers. This was done to measure personal branding strategies from different levels and different sides.

Authenticity is one of the main factors that make @babeheji's personal branding strong in the eyes of the audience. From the interviews, many followers revealed that the content presented feels natural and not contrived. Family interactions, especially in daily vlogs with Eji and Momma, display real family dynamics, thus creating an emotional closeness with the audience. This authenticity makes many followers feel trust in the parenting values conveyed.

In addition, followers also consider that @babeheji truly reflects a father who cares about childcare and rejects the concept of fatherlessness. The absence of the impression of engineering in the presentation of content makes @babeheji different from other parenting creators who sometimes emphasize the dramatic or sensational aspects of their content. This high credibility is the main attraction that makes the audience continue to follow and trust the messages shared.

Consistency in presenting content is an important element in @babeheji's personal branding strategy. The interview results show that the audience returns to the @babeheji account because of the regular upload pattern and always provides new insights related to parenting. Consistently uploaded content helps followers form expectations of what they will get from the account.

Followers also appreciate how @babeheji has a clear upload schedule, whether in the form of daily vlogs, parenting education, or interactive discussions. With this regularity, audiences feel more connected and have a reason to keep up to date with the content. This consistency not only increases follower loyalty, but also strengthens @babeheji's digital presence as an authoritative figure in the parenting niche.

Active audience participation is an integral part of @babeheji's personal branding. Interviews showed that interaction through comment replies, live sessions and discussions on social media made followers feel valued and heard. Followers feel that they are not just consumers of content, but also part of a larger community.

This strategy demonstrates how the concept of participatory culture is applied, where audiences have the opportunity to actively engage in discussions, share experiences, and provide opinions on parenting issues raised by @babeheji. The quick response to the questions and

discussions initiated also strengthened the audience's sense of engagement, creating an inclusive digital environment for parents to support each other in their journey as families.

The utilization of various social media platforms is the main strategy in expanding audience reach. Based on the interview results, it was found that @babeheji uses TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram with different but complementary purposes. TikTok is used to present short and viral content, YouTube is used to discuss parenting topics in more depth, while Instagram becomes a more personal visual storytelling tool.

Followers stated that this combination of platforms allows them to choose the way of content consumption that best suits their needs. Some prefer TikTok for its faster and more engaging format, while others appreciate YouTube for providing more detailed information. This multiplatform strategy allows @babeheji to reach various audience segments, both those who prefer quick media consumption and those who want to get more in-depth parenting education.

The delivery of parenting messages through storytelling is an important factor in the success of @babeheji's personal branding. Based on interviews, many followers revealed that it is easier for them to understand and apply parenting values because they are conveyed in the form of everyday life stories.

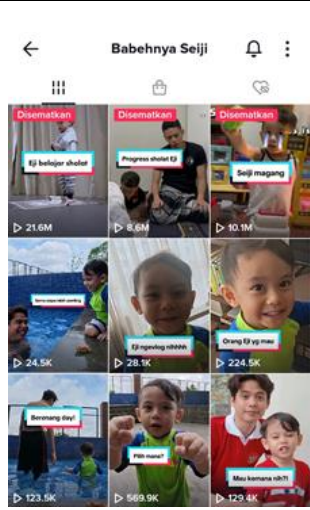
This technique also creates an emotional bonding between the audience and @babeheji. Many followers feel that the experiences shared in the content are very relatable to their own lives, so they are more emotionally connected. By showcasing everyday life with Eji and Momma, @babeheji not only provides education, but also builds empathy and closeness with the audience.

This approach shows that storytelling strategies not only make content more engaging, but also strengthen audience loyalty. Followers who feel emotionally connected tend to be more loyal in following content developments and active in the community built by @babeheji.

3.2 Role of Participatory Culture

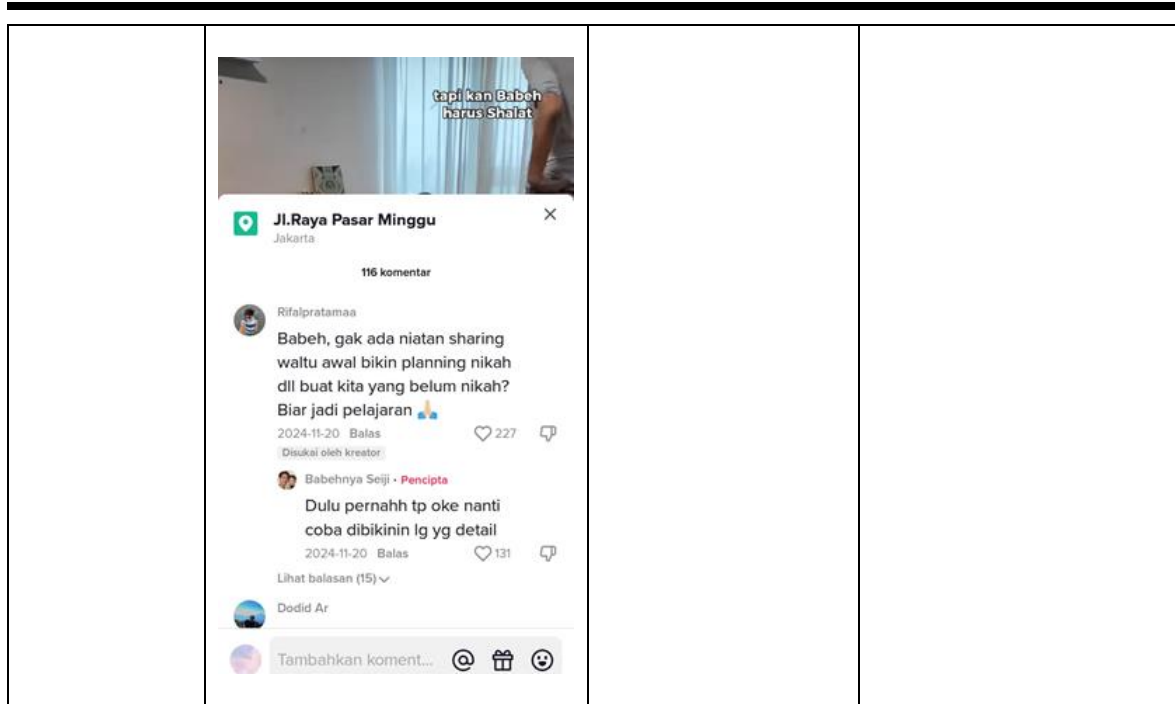
The concept of Participatory Culture proposed by Henry Jenkins (2006) emphasizes that audiences in the digital era are no longer passive consumers, but active actors who participate in the creation and dissemination of content. In the context of @babeheji's personal branding strategy, high engagement, user-generated content, and collaboration with followers are the main indicators that support this theory. The following table 2 analyzes the Participatory Role using non-participant observation and literature study.

Table 2. Participatory role analysis in personal branding @babeheji

Aspects	Image	Non-Participant Observation Results	Document/video Study Findings
High Engagement		It can be seen from the consistently high number of likes, comments, and shares on each upload. Comments are not just compliments, but also active discussions about parenting.	Based on content analysis, any post that engages the audience in discussion gets higher engagement than posts that are only informative.

			
<p>User-Generated Content</p>		<p>Many followers create content related to the topics raised by @babeheji, such as reaction videos, Instagram stories, and duplication of parenting trends created by creators.</p>	<p>Based on documentation, parenting trends started by @babeheji are often adopted and further developed by his followers, creating a viral effect.</p>
<p>Collaboration with Followers</p>		<p>@babeheji often conducts Q&A sessions via live streaming, providing direct responses to parenting experiences shared by the audience.</p>	<p>Literature shows that this strategy is effective in building follower loyalty, as the audience feels more personally connected to the creator.</p>

<p>Digital Community Building</p>		<p>Parenting discussion groups are formed on various platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, where followers actively share experiences and discuss.</p>	<p>Based on social media analysis, the community not only passively supported @babeheji, but also created discussions that reinforced key messages about the importance of fathers in parenting.</p>



The results of non-participant observation and document study show that @babeheji's personal branding relies heavily on the active involvement of audiences in the social media ecosystem. The success of this strategy is not only supported by consistency in content creation, but also by audience participation in shaping discussions, spreading narratives, and creating new content that is relevant to the values promoted by @babeheji. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of Participatory Culture proposed by Henry Jenkins, where audiences in the digital era are not only passive consumers, but also act as producers and distributors of information.

One of the main indicators of the success of @babeheji's personal branding is the high level of engagement on each upload. Based on non-participant observation, almost every post gets thousands of likes, comments, and shares, which shows that the audience is actively responding to and discussing the content presented. In addition, the comments given by followers are not only appreciation, but also in-depth discussions about parenting, which shows that they see @babeheji as an authoritative figure in this field.

Furthermore, the document study results show that @babeheji's quick and active response to audience comments or questions increases emotional closeness with her followers. These interactions create a more personalized relationship, where audiences feel that they are heard and cared for. This contributes to increased audience trust and loyalty to the content produced.

Non-participant observation also found that many followers voluntarily create parenting content based on inspiration from @babeheji. This content is in the form of reaction videos, reposts on Instagram Stories, or even adaptations of parenting trends first introduced by @babeheji. This phenomenon shows that the message conveyed by the creator has been successfully internalized by the audience, so that they feel they have an active involvement in spreading the values promoted.

The document study results also show that user-generated content extends the reach of @babeheji's personal branding without the need for a paid marketing strategy. When audiences actively share or recreate relevant content, they indirectly act as brand ambassadors introducing @babeheji's values to more people. Thus, this strategy not only increases exposure but also strengthens @babeheji's image as a parenting creator with real impact in the digital community.

Collaboration with the audience is one of the key factors in the success of @babeheji's personal branding. Based on observation, this creator often initiates open discussions through live streaming sessions, comment sections, and question and answer features on various platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. In these sessions, audiences not only consume content but also share their personal experiences related to parenting.

The document study results show that this strategy had a significant impact in building a solid digital community. Followers not only became passive supporters, but also interacted and shared insights with each other, creating a supportive environment in the parenting world. The community then evolved into an active discussion space, where parents could exchange experiences and get support in their journey of raising children.

In addition, in terms of the basic assumptions of participatory culture theory, there are five basic assumptions, to determine the relationship between creators and their audiences.

a. Audiences are not passive consumers, but active participants

In the new media ecosystem, audiences are no longer just passive consumers who only absorb information, but become active participants who take part in the process of content production and distribution. Based on the research results, @babeheji's followers not only watch videos or read uploads, but also provide comments, share personal experiences, and discuss various parenting topics raised.

This liveliness can be seen in the many interactions in the comments section, live sessions filled with questions, and discussions that take place on various social media platforms. For example, when @babeheji raised important issues such as the role of fathers in the family and rejected the concept of fatherlessness, many followers shared their own stories, both in the form of comments and reposts on their personal accounts. This shows that the audience feels emotionally and intellectually engaged in the community built by @babeheji.

b. Content Production Becomes More Decentralized and Democratic

The emergence of social media has decentralized content production, where anyone can create and disseminate information without having to rely on conventional media. This is also true in @babeheji's personal branding ecosystem. It is not only @babeheji who produces content, but also her followers who participate in creating and resharing parenting-related videos or posts.

Many followers create fanbase accounts as a reaction to being interested in @babeheji's content, share their personal experiences related to the topics discussed, or even adapt the parenting concepts introduced by @babeheji in their own lives. Thus, the personal branding that is built not only rests on the figure of @babeheji alone, but is also strengthened by the audience who actively participates in the dissemination of the values and ideas conveyed.

c. Followers Are Not Just Passive Supporters, but Active Participants in Digital Culture

The results show that the community formed around @babeheji is not a group of passive followers who only support symbolically, but a group that is actively involved in the parenting culture that is built. Many of them not only absorb information but also participate in practicing and sharing the values obtained from @babeheji content to their own environment.

Many parents are inspired by the parenting approach promoted by @babeheji and begin to implement it in their parenting. They then share these experiences in personal posts, create discussions with fellow followers, or even participate in challenges or trends created by @babeheji, such as campaigns about the importance of fathers in the family.

d. Narrative Complexity Emerges in the Space Between Different Texts

In participatory culture, narratives do not only develop within one particular content but also in the space between different texts. This can be seen in the way @babeheji's personal branding is formed through various interactions, both with the audience and with other parenting content on social media.

In a post about the importance of fathers' involvement in parenting, the discussion that emerged in the comment section did not only revolve around the content itself, but also expanded to various other perspectives added by followers. Some followers relate it to their personal experiences, while others relate it to parenting theories from other sources.

Thus, an understanding of the narratives built by @babeheji cannot only be seen from a single video or upload, but must be understood within a wide network of digital interactions that connect various perspectives, experiences, and knowledge that emerge from audience participation.

f. Networks Matter More than Hierarchies in Understanding Digital Interactions

One of the main characteristics of participatory culture is the importance of networks in building and spreading ideas, as opposed to rigid hierarchical structures. In the context of

@babeheji's personal branding, engagement with the audience is not one-way (top-down), but rather occurs in a more egalitarian and community-based form of interaction.

In interviews with followers, many stated that they felt they had a close relationship with @babeheji because the interaction felt natural and not distant. This is reinforced by engagement strategies such as comment replies, live sessions, and interactive discussions that allow audiences to feel involved in the communication process.

In addition, the digital network formed around @babeheji also involves various other creators who share the same vision in parenting. Collaboration with other parenting creators such as @Danissha as a fellow child parenting creator, both in the form of discussions and some joint content, further strengthens this network and expands audience reach.

4. Conclusion

A key aspect of participatory culture is that digital interactions are networked rather than hierarchical. In the context of @babeheji's personal branding, communication is not one-way from creator to audience, but more like an interactive ecosystem where every individual has the opportunity to contribute.

Based on observations, the interactions between @babeheji and his followers are not limited to a particular platform, but spread across various channels such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. Followers not only comment or like posts, but also engage in cross-platform discussions, share their own experiences, and even initiate topics that then become part of a larger narrative. With this network-based interaction model, @babeheji's personal branding depends not only on self-produced content, but also on the collective contribution of the community that has been formed. This shows that the success of personal branding in the new media era is not only determined by the creator himself, but also by how strong the participatory network is built around him.

Overall, @babeheji's personal branding strategy within the participatory culture framework succeeded in building high audience engagement, strengthening credibility as an authoritative figure in parenting, and creating a digital community that is active in sharing and supporting the values promoted. This proves that in the digital era, the strength of a personal brand depends not only on its content, but also on the ability to build meaningful relationships and audience participation.

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