

Influencer Communication Strategies in Building Personal Branding on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Local Influencers; Personal Branding;
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The rapid growth of social media has transformed the way individuals communicate, construct identity, and build influence in digital environments. Within this context, influencers play an important role in shaping audience perceptions, promoting products, and disseminating information through online platforms. This study aims to analyze the communication strategies used by local influencers in Baubau City to build personal branding on social media and to examine differences between influencers who consciously develop personal branding and those whose branding emerges organically. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore influencer communication practices within their natural digital environments. Data were collected through observation, in depth interviews, and documentation involving three local influencers who actively produce content on social media. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman -qualitative analysis model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that influencers produce content for multiple purposes, including gaining recognition, supporting local businesses, and generating economic benefits through digital collaborations. Storytelling, simple language, and audience-oriented communication styles were identified as the main strategies used to deliver messages effectively. The study also found differences in personal branding awareness among influencers. Some influencers deliberately design their branding through consistent content themes, slogans, and distinctive communication styles, while others develop their online identities gradually through ongoing interaction with audiences. Authenticity and ethical communication practices were also found to be essential for building audience trust and sustaining credibility. Overall, the study highlights the importance of strategic communication, authenticity, and content consistency in developing personal branding among local influencers. The findings contribute to the understanding of influencer communication within regional digital ecosystems and provide practical insights for emerging influencers seeking to build sustainable online identities.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed the way individuals communicate, interact, and construct social identities in contemporary society. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have evolved from simple communication tools into complex digital environments that enable users to present themselves, share information, and build networks of influence. In this digital ecosystem, the emergence of influencers has become one of the most notable phenomena. Influencers are individuals who possess the ability to affect the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of their audiences through the content they create and distribute online. Their role has grown increasingly important in shaping consumer decisions, promoting products and services, and influencing cultural trends in the digital era (Handika & Darma, 2018).

The increasing popularity of influencer culture has attracted significant scholarly attention in the fields of communication, marketing, and digital media studies. Influencers are often perceived as opinion leaders who maintain close relationships with their audiences through continuous interaction and content sharing. This interactive relationship allows influencers to build credibility and authority among their followers, which can subsequently influence purchasing decisions or social attitudes (Gianthonove & Pratiwi, 2022). In addition, the flexibility and accessibility of social media platforms have made the influencer profession increasingly attractive, particularly for younger generations seeking alternative career paths in the digital economy (Nindhita et al., 2023). As a result, the competition among influencers to maintain visibility and relevance in the digital environment has intensified.

In such a competitive environment, communication strategy plays a critical role in determining an influencer's success and sustainability. Communication strategies encompass the planning, structuring, and delivery of messages in ways that effectively engage audiences and convey specific meanings. According to Yusanda et al., (2021) communication strategies in digital contexts involve not only the content of messages but also the manner in which those messages are delivered and adapted to audience characteristics. Effective communication strategies enable influencers to establish emotional connections with audiences, enhance engagement, and strengthen their online presence. Consequently, the ability to communicate strategically has become an essential competency for individuals who seek to maintain influence and credibility in digital spaces.

Alongside communication strategies, personal branding has emerged as another crucial factor influencing the success of influencers on social media. Personal branding refers to the process by which individuals deliberately shape and manage how they are perceived by others, particularly within professional or public contexts. Through personal branding, individuals can communicate their values, expertise, and distinctive characteristics in ways that differentiate them from others (Novita et al., 2024). In the digital era, social media platforms provide a powerful medium for developing personal branding because they allow individuals to continuously display their identity, personality, and content themes to large audiences.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of personal branding in establishing an influencer's credibility and visibility. Personal branding strategies often involve consistent content themes, recognizable communication styles, and the deliberate presentation of personal identity. Montoya and Vandehey's theory of personal branding, for example, emphasizes several key principles, including specialization, personality, distinctiveness, visibility, persistence, unity, leadership, and goodwill. These principles suggest that strong personal branding is developed through consistent messaging, authentic self-presentation, and the cultivation of trust between individuals and their audiences.

Previous research has also demonstrated that influencers who consciously design their personal branding strategies are more likely to achieve sustainable success on social media. For instance, Febriyanti et al., (2025) found that beauty influencers can effectively develop personal branding by producing authentic and consistent content that reflects their genuine personality. (Pertiwi & Irwansyah, 2020) emphasized that strategic planning of personal branding allows influencers to reach wider audiences and maintain stronger audience engagement. In another study, (Azhar & Winduwati, 2020) identified several elements of successful influencer branding, including specialization in a specific topic, consistent content production, and the development of a distinctive online identity.

Despite the growing body of literature on influencer communication and personal branding, most existing studies primarily focus on well-known influencers or celebrities who already possess strong and well-established branding strategies. These studies often examine how influencers implement branding strategies after their identities have been successfully formed. Consequently, limited attention has been given to the early processes through which influencers develop personal branding, particularly among local or regional influencers who operate outside major urban centers.

This gap in the literature is particularly relevant in the context of local influencers who operate within smaller communities or regional digital ecosystems. Unlike national-level influencers, local influencers often interact with audiences who share similar cultural backgrounds, geographic proximity, and social experiences. These contextual factors may influence the communication strategies and branding approaches adopted by local influencers. Furthermore, not all influencers

intentionally construct personal branding; some develop their online identities organically through ongoing content creation and interaction with audiences.

In Indonesia, the growth of local influencers has become increasingly visible in many cities, including Baubau City in Southeast Sulawesi. Influencers in this region actively utilize social media platforms, particularly TikTok, to share content related to daily activities, food reviews, and local culture. Some influencers deliberately design their personal branding by using specific slogans, communication styles, and content themes that distinguish them from others. However, other influencers create content without consciously planning their personal branding strategies, allowing their online identities to develop naturally over time. These differences highlight the need for a deeper understanding of how communication strategies influence the development of personal branding among local influencers.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the communication strategies used by local influencers in Baubau City to build personal branding on social media. Specifically, the study seeks to compare the communication strategies of influencers who consciously develop personal branding with those who do not intentionally construct such branding. By focusing on local food vloggers and content creators, this research provides a contextual and comparative perspective on influencer communication practices in regional digital environments. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on local influencers and its examination of differences in branding awareness among influencers. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of digital communication scholarship while also providing practical insights for emerging influencers seeking to build effective and sustainable personal branding strategies on social media.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore and analyze the communication strategies used by local influencers in building personal branding on social media. Qualitative research is widely used to understand social phenomena through the interpretation of participants' experiences, perspectives, and behaviors within their natural contexts. According to Bogdan and Taylor, qualitative methods produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words obtained from individuals whose behaviors are observed and studied. This approach is particularly appropriate for examining communication practices and digital interactions because it allows researchers to explore meanings, interpretations, and strategies developed by individuals within their social environments (Syahril & Flowerina, 2024). In the context of digital communication research, qualitative approaches have also been applied to examine how influencers construct identity, interact with audiences, and strategically manage online communication (Febriyanti et al., 2025).

The focus of this research is the communication strategies used by influencers to develop personal branding through social media platforms. Personal branding has been widely discussed as a process through which individuals strategically shape public perceptions by presenting their identities, values, and expertise in consistent and recognizable ways (Novita et al., 2024). Within the influencer ecosystem, communication strategies serve as essential mechanisms through which personal branding is articulated and maintained. Through qualitative inquiry, this study seeks to understand how local influencers interpret and implement communication strategies in their everyday content production and audience engagement.

The subjects of this study were local influencers based in Baubau City, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, who actively use social media platforms—particularly TikTok—to produce and distribute digital content. These influencers were selected because they play the role of communicators who directly apply communication strategies in their interactions with audiences through online media. In addition, the selected influencers demonstrate varying levels of awareness regarding the development of personal branding, which allows the study to explore differences between influencers who intentionally construct personal branding and those whose branding emerges organically through content creation.

Three influencers participated as key informants in this research. They are Sagita Syah, Tasyazann, and Adel Okta, each of whom maintains an active presence on TikTok and regularly produces content related to food reviews, daily experiences, and local culinary promotion. These influencers were selected through purposive sampling based on several criteria, including active

engagement in social media content production, the presence of a significant follower base, and relevance to the phenomenon of influencer communication within the local digital environment. The study focused on analyzing their communication styles, strategies for content creation, and the ways in which they construct and communicate personal identity to their audiences.

Data used in this study consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained directly from the main sources of information, namely the influencers themselves. These data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation of the influencers' social media activities. Primary data collection is particularly important in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to gather firsthand accounts of participants' experiences and interpretations. Such data enable researchers to explore the motivations, strategies, and perspectives underlying influencers' communication practices.

Secondary data were used as supporting materials to complement the primary data obtained from interviews and observations. These data included documentation of influencer social media profiles, content uploads, follower interactions, and other digital materials relevant to the research topic. Secondary data provide contextual information that supports the analysis of communication practices and personal branding strategies in digital environments.

Data collection in this study involved three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine directly how influencers produce and present content on their social media accounts. Observational techniques are widely used in qualitative research to capture behaviors and interactions in natural settings without manipulating research variables. Through systematic observation, researchers were able to identify patterns in communication styles, content presentation, and audience engagement practices among the selected influencers.

In addition to observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected informants. Interviews serve as an essential technique for obtaining detailed information regarding participants' perspectives, motivations, and experiences related to the research topic. Through semi-structured interview sessions, the researcher explored how influencers conceptualize their communication strategies, how they manage audience relationships, and how they interpret the concept of personal branding within their digital activities. Interviews also allowed participants to reflect on the challenges they face in maintaining content consistency, managing time, and producing engaging digital media.

Documentation was also utilized as an important method of data collection. Documentation refers to the process of collecting and analyzing written, visual, or digital materials related to the research subject. In this study, documentation included screenshots of social media posts, video content, profile descriptions, and other materials that illustrate how influencers present their identities online. Documentation helped provide factual and contextual evidence that supported the findings derived from interviews and observations.

The analysis of qualitative data in this research followed the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which is widely recognized as one of the most reliable frameworks for qualitative data analysis. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data analysis consists of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. These stages occur interactively throughout the research process, beginning from the initial stages of data collection and continuing until the final interpretation of findings.

Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data obtained from the field. Because qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation are often extensive and complex, it is necessary to reduce and categorize the data according to the research focus. During this stage, the researcher identified key themes related to influencer communication strategies, personal branding awareness, and audience engagement practices. The process of data reduction helps sharpen the analytical focus and ensures that the data remain relevant to the objectives of the research.

The next stage is data display, which involves organizing the reduced data into structured forms that allow researchers to interpret patterns and relationships within the data. Data displays may take the form of narrative descriptions, thematic categorizations, or conceptual representations of

relationships between communication strategies and branding practices. Through systematic data presentation, the researcher can better understand how communication strategies are implemented and how they contribute to the development of personal branding among influencers.

The final stage of analysis involves drawing conclusions and verifying findings. In qualitative research, conclusions often emerge gradually during the process of data collection and analysis. However, these preliminary conclusions must be continuously verified by comparing multiple data sources and examining the consistency of findings. Verification techniques such as data triangulation were applied to ensure the credibility and validity of the research results. By comparing interview data, observational findings, and documented social media content, the researcher was able to confirm the reliability of interpretations regarding influencer communication strategies.

This research was conducted in Baubau City, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, where the phenomenon of local influencers has grown significantly alongside the increasing popularity of social media platforms. The selection of this location was based on the observation that many local influencers actively utilize digital platforms to promote local culinary culture, share lifestyle content, and build relationships with their audiences. The research process took place over a three-month period, from December to February, which included stages of research preparation, data collection, and data analysis.

By applying qualitative research methods and focusing on the lived experiences of local influencers, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how communication strategies are used to construct personal branding within regional digital ecosystems. The methodological approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the relationship between communication practices, audience interaction, and the development of influencer identity in contemporary social media environments.

3. Result and Discussion

Influencer communication strategies in building personal branding on social media were examined through qualitative analysis of interviews, observations, and documentation involving local influencers in Baubau City. The findings reveal that communication practices among influencers are closely related to their motivations for content creation, their approaches to audience interaction, and their awareness of personal branding development. The results are presented according to the thematic structure derived from the research notes, covering influencer motivations for creating content, communication strategies, personal branding strategies, efforts to build audience trust, content strategies, and challenges faced by influencers.

3.1. Result

3.1.1. Influencer Motivations for Creating Content

The findings indicate that local influencers in Baubau City produce content on social media for several interconnected purposes, including gaining popularity, supporting local economic activities, and generating financial benefits. These motivations reflect the broader dynamics of influencer culture in digital environments, where individuals combine self-expression, entrepreneurship, and community engagement through online platforms. The interview results show that the initial motivation for many influencers was the desire to become known by a wider audience. Influencers perceive social media platforms as spaces where individuals can introduce themselves, display their personalities, and build recognition among digital communities. This motivation aligns with the concept of personal branding, which emphasizes the strategic presentation of identity in order to influence how individuals are perceived by others (Novita et al., 2024).

Beyond personal recognition, some influencers also expressed social motivations related to promoting local businesses and culinary products in Baubau. Influencers often create content that highlights small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly local food vendors and traditional culinary experiences. Through these activities, influencers position themselves not only as content creators but also as mediators who connect local businesses with wider audiences. This role corresponds with the concept of influencer marketing, where influencers act as intermediaries

capable of influencing consumer behavior and increasing public awareness of products or services (Gianthonove & Pratiwi, 2022).

Economic motivation also emerged as an important factor shaping influencer activities. Several informants reported that content creation provides opportunities for additional income through endorsements, brand collaborations, and promotional partnerships. This finding supports previous research suggesting that influencer activities are increasingly integrated into the digital economy, where social media presence can be monetized through partnerships with brands and businesses (Nindhita et al., 2023). Consequently, the motivations of influencers are not limited to personal expression but also encompass social contribution and economic opportunities.

3.1.2. Influencer Communication Strategies

Communication strategies play a crucial role in how influencers deliver messages, interact with audiences, and maintain engagement within digital platforms. The analysis of interview data revealed that storytelling is one of the most dominant communication strategies employed by local influencers. Storytelling allows influencers to present information through personal experiences, narratives, and informal conversations that resonate with audiences. By sharing personal stories or experiences related to food, lifestyle, or daily activities, influencers create content that feels authentic and relatable.

The use of storytelling as a communication technique is consistent with research in digital communication strategies, which emphasizes that narrative-based communication can strengthen emotional connections between communicators and audiences (Pamungkas et al., 2024). Through storytelling, influencers are able to transform ordinary experiences into engaging narratives that attract audience attention and encourage interaction. This approach also helps influencers humanize their digital presence, making them appear more approachable and genuine to followers.

In addition to storytelling, influencers frequently employ simple and direct communication styles. Informants explained that delivering information in a clear and straightforward manner makes content easier for audiences to understand. Simplicity in language use is particularly important because social media audiences consist of individuals from diverse educational, cultural, and geographical backgrounds. By using accessible language, influencers ensure that their content remains inclusive and widely understandable.

Furthermore, influencers often adapt their language style to suit audience characteristics. For example, several informants intentionally use Indonesian rather than regional dialects to reach broader audiences across different regions. This adaptation reflects the importance of audience segmentation in communication strategies, where communicators adjust message delivery to match audience characteristics and expectations (Priselie & Paramita, 2022). As a result, communication strategies among influencers involve not only message content but also the style and structure of message delivery.

3.1.3. Personal Branding Strategies

The findings also reveal variations in how influencers approach the development of personal branding. Some influencers consciously design their personal branding strategies from the beginning of their content creation activities. These influencers deliberately determine the themes, identity, and image they want to present to audiences. For instance, certain influencers position themselves as food vloggers who specialize in reviewing local culinary experiences. By consistently producing food-related content, they establish specialization, which is considered one of the key principles of personal branding according to Montoya and Vandehey's framework.

Conscious personal branding strategies often involve the use of distinctive elements that help audiences recognize and remember the influencer. These elements may include slogans, catchphrases, or unique greeting styles used at the beginning of videos. Such characteristics contribute to the law of distinctiveness in personal branding theory, which states that individuals must differentiate themselves from others in order to build a memorable identity (Febriani & Ratna, 2025).

However, the study also found that not all influencers intentionally develop personal branding strategies. Some influencers reported that their personal identity on social media evolved naturally through continuous content creation and interaction with audiences. In such cases, personal branding emerges as a gradual process shaped by audience feedback, content experimentation, and evolving communication styles.

Regardless of whether branding is intentional or emergent, influencers often display specific personality traits that contribute to their public image. Informants described presenting themselves as cheerful, friendly, and communicative individuals in their videos. Personality expression is an important component of personal branding because it allows audiences to form emotional connections with influencers. As highlighted in previous research, authentic personality presentation can significantly strengthen audience engagement and trust (Utami & Christin, 2023).

3.1.4. Efforts to Build Audience Trust

Audience trust emerged as one of the most significant factors influencing the effectiveness of influencer communication. Trust determines whether audiences perceive influencers as credible sources of information and whether they are willing to follow recommendations or opinions shared through social media content. The findings indicate that honesty is considered a fundamental strategy for maintaining audience trust.

Several informants emphasized that they only promote products that align with their genuine opinions or experiences. When influencers perceive a product as unsatisfactory, they prefer not to publish promotional content rather than risk damaging their credibility. This approach reflects the importance of authenticity in influencer communication. Authentic communication practices are essential for maintaining long-term relationships with audiences because followers tend to value honesty and transparency in digital interactions , Febriyanti et al., (2025)

In addition to honesty, influencers also strive to maintain ethical communication practices. Ethical communication involves using polite language, avoiding exaggerated claims about products, and respecting audience sensitivities. Such practices contribute to the development of positive reputations, which are central to the law of goodwill within personal branding theory. According to Montoya and Vandehey, maintaining a positive reputation is essential for sustaining audience trust and ensuring long-term credibility. Through these strategies, influencers cultivate an image of reliability and authenticity. Trust-building efforts not only strengthen relationships with audiences but also increase the likelihood that followers will engage with content and respond positively to promotional messages.

3.1.5. Influencer Content Strategies

Content strategy is another crucial component influencing how influencers develop their personal branding on social media. The study found that many influencers adopt a content specialization approach, where they focus on a specific theme or niche. In Baubau, a large number of influencers concentrate on culinary content, particularly food reviews and local culinary exploration. By focusing on a single content category, influencers are able to develop consistent brand identities that audiences can easily recognize.

Content specialization is closely related to the law of specialization in personal branding theory, which suggests that focusing on a particular field enables individuals to become associated with a specific area of expertise. For example, influencers who consistently review local food become known as culinary content creators within their communities.

However, not all influencers limit their content to a single theme. Some informants reported creating diverse content, including fashion reviews, lifestyle vlogs, and daily activities. This diversity allows influencers to experiment with different content formats and maintain creativity in their social media presence. Nevertheless, diversified content may also make it more difficult to establish a clear and consistent personal brand.

Another notable content strategy involves utilizing viral trends or popular social media challenges as inspiration for content creation. Influencers frequently monitor trending topics and adapt them to

their own content style. This strategy helps increase content visibility and expand audience reach, as trending topics often attract higher engagement levels within digital platforms.

3.1.6. Challenges Faced by Influencers

Despite the opportunities offered by social media platforms, influencers also encounter several challenges in maintaining their activities and developing personal branding. One of the most common challenges identified in the study is maintaining consistency in content production. Influencers often struggle to balance content creation with other personal or professional responsibilities. This difficulty can result in irregular posting schedules, which may affect audience engagement and platform visibility.

Another challenge involves the technical aspects of content production. Many influencers manage the entire production process independently, including recording, editing, and publishing content. Video editing, in particular, requires time, technical skills, and creative effort. Limited resources and lack of technical expertise may hinder influencers from producing high-quality content consistently.

These challenges highlight that influencer activities involve more than creativity or popularity. Successful influencer communication requires strategic planning, time management, and technical competencies. The ability to overcome these challenges plays an important role in sustaining personal branding development and maintaining audience engagement over time.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that communication strategies, personal branding awareness, audience trust, and content management practices are interconnected factors shaping the success of local influencers. The experiences of influencers in Baubau City illustrate how digital communication practices operate within local contexts while reflecting broader trends in influencer culture and social media engagement.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into how local influencers construct and manage personal branding through communication strategies on social media. By examining the experiences of influencers in Baubau City, this research contributes to the broader literature on digital communication, influencer marketing, and personal branding. The discussion elaborates on the key findings of the study in relation to existing theoretical perspectives and previous empirical studies, particularly those related to influencer communication strategies, digital media interaction, and personal branding theory.

3.2.1 Motivations Behind Influencer Content Creation

The findings reveal that influencers in Baubau create content for a combination of personal, social, and economic motivations. These motivations illustrate the multifaceted nature of influencer activities within contemporary digital environments. The desire to gain recognition and popularity reflects the role of social media as a platform for self-presentation and identity construction. Social media platforms allow individuals to showcase their personalities and talents to a broad audience, thereby facilitating the formation of digital identities. This observation aligns with the concept of personal branding, which emphasizes the deliberate presentation of self-image to shape public perception (Novita et al., 2024).

In addition to personal recognition, the findings demonstrate that influencers also engage in content creation as a means of supporting local businesses and promoting regional culture. This highlights the broader social function of influencers as intermediaries between producers and consumers within digital communication networks. Influencers who promote local culinary businesses contribute to the visibility and economic sustainability of small and medium enterprises. This finding supports previous research suggesting that influencer marketing can enhance brand awareness and consumer engagement by leveraging the credibility and reach of influential social media figures (Gianthonove & Pratiwi, 2022).

Economic motivation also emerged as a significant factor influencing influencer behavior. The possibility of generating income through endorsements and collaborations illustrates how influencer activities have become integrated into the digital economy. As noted by Nindhita et al., (2023),

personal branding on social media has increasingly been viewed as a career strategy, enabling individuals to transform online visibility into professional opportunities. Thus, the motivations identified in this study reflect broader transformations in the nature of work and entrepreneurship in the digital era.

3.2.2. Communication Strategies in Influencer–Audience Interaction

One of the most prominent findings of this study is the use of storytelling as a primary communication strategy among local influencers. Storytelling allows influencers to transform everyday experiences into engaging narratives that resonate with audiences. Through personal stories, influencers create emotional connections with followers, making the communication process more interactive and relatable. This observation is consistent with the argument of (Pamungkas et al., 2024), who emphasized that storytelling plays a crucial role in digital communication strategies because it enables communicators to establish emotional bonds with audiences.

The use of simple and accessible language also represents an important communication strategy identified in this study. Influencers intentionally avoid complex or formal language in order to ensure that their content can be easily understood by diverse audiences. This approach reflects the importance of audience segmentation in communication strategies, where communicators tailor their messages to match the characteristics and expectations of their target audiences (Priselie & Paramita, 2022). In the context of social media, where audiences come from various educational and cultural backgrounds, clarity and accessibility in communication become essential elements for maintaining audience engagement.

Another notable finding is the adaptation of communication styles to audience characteristics. Influencers often use Indonesian language rather than local dialects to reach wider audiences across different regions. This practice illustrates the strategic role of language in digital communication. By selecting language that can be understood by broader audiences, influencers increase the potential reach and impact of their content. This finding further supports the idea that effective communication strategies involve not only message content but also careful consideration of delivery methods and audience context (Yusanda et al., 2021).

3.2.3. Personal Branding Awareness Among Local Influencers

A central contribution of this study lies in its examination of differences between influencers who consciously build personal branding and those whose branding develops organically. The findings show that some influencers deliberately design their personal branding strategies by determining specific content themes, communication styles, and identity markers. These influencers often focus on particular niches, such as culinary reviews, in order to establish clear associations between their identity and specific content categories.

This strategic approach corresponds closely with the Law of Specialization within Montoya and Vandehey's personal branding framework. According to this principle, individuals who concentrate on a specific field are more likely to be recognized and remembered by audiences (Febriani & Ratna, 2025). Influencers who consistently produce culinary-related content, for example, gradually become associated with food-related expertise within their communities.

In contrast, some influencers develop personal branding unintentionally through continuous interaction with audiences and repeated content creation. Rather than implementing structured branding strategies, these influencers allow their identity to evolve naturally over time. While this approach may still lead to recognizable online identities, the absence of deliberate branding strategies can result in less consistent messaging and weaker brand differentiation.

These findings highlight the importance of strategic awareness in personal branding development. As emphasized by (Pertiwi & Irwansyah, 2020), effective personal branding requires careful planning and consistency in message delivery. Without such planning, individuals may struggle to maintain a coherent identity across their social media activities.

3.2.4. Building Audience Trust Through Authentic Communication

Another important aspect discussed in this study is the role of trust in influencer–audience relationships. Trust is a critical component of digital communication because audiences rely on influencers as sources of information and recommendations. The findings show that honesty and authenticity are essential strategies used by influencers to maintain credibility.

Several informants emphasized that they only promote products they genuinely trust or personally use. This practice reflects a commitment to authenticity, which has been identified as a key factor in successful influencer communication. Previous studies have shown that audiences are more likely to trust influencers who demonstrate transparency and sincerity in their communication practices (Febriyanti et al., 2025).

Ethical communication also plays a significant role in maintaining audience trust. Influencers reported that they avoid exaggerating product claims and ensure that their promotional content remains respectful and responsible. Such practices contribute to the development of positive reputations, which correspond with the Law of Goodwill in Montoya and Vandehey's personal branding theory. According to this principle, maintaining a positive reputation is essential for sustaining long-term audience relationships and credibility.

The emphasis on authenticity and ethical communication also provides an explanation for why some influencers maintain strong and loyal audiences despite having relatively smaller follower bases. Trust-based relationships often generate deeper engagement and stronger audience loyalty compared to purely promotional communication strategies.

3.2.5. Content Strategy and Digital Visibility

Content strategy represents another key element influencing the development of influencer personal branding. The findings show that many influencers adopt a specialization approach by focusing on specific content themes, particularly culinary reviews. Specialization helps influencers develop distinctive identities and maintain consistency in their content production. This finding reinforces the argument that specialization is an essential component of personal branding, enabling audiences to associate influencers with particular topics or expertise (Montoya & Vandehey).

However, the study also identifies influencers who create diverse content across multiple topics. While this approach allows for greater creativity and experimentation, it may also complicate the process of establishing a clear personal brand identity. Inconsistent content themes may make it more difficult for audiences to associate influencers with specific characteristics or expertise.

Another strategy observed among influencers is the use of viral trends as inspiration for content creation. By participating in trending topics or challenges, influencers increase the visibility of their content within social media algorithms (Hastuti, 2025). This practice reflects the dynamic nature of digital communication environments, where content visibility is often influenced by platform algorithms and user engagement patterns.

3.2.6. Challenges in Maintaining Influencer Communication Strategies

Despite the opportunities provided by social media platforms, influencers face several challenges in maintaining consistent communication strategies. One of the most common challenges identified in this study is maintaining regular content production. Influencers often struggle to balance content creation with other responsibilities, such as work, education, or personal commitments.

Another challenge relates to the technical aspects of content production. Many local influencers operate independently and must manage the entire content production process, including recording, editing, and uploading videos. Limited resources and technical skills can create barriers to producing high-quality content consistently.

These challenges highlight the complexity of influencer activities, which require not only creativity but also time management, technical competence, and strategic planning. As social media platforms continue to evolve, influencers must continuously adapt their communication strategies to remain relevant and competitive.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the success of influencer personal branding is shaped by a combination of communication strategies, authenticity, audience engagement, and consistent content management. The experiences of influencers in Baubau City illustrate how local digital actors navigate the broader dynamics of influencer culture while simultaneously contributing to the promotion of regional culture and economic activity.

4. Conclusion

This study examined how local influencers in Baubau City utilize communication strategies to build personal branding on social media, particularly through platforms such as TikTok. The findings demonstrate that influencer activities are shaped by multiple motivations, including the desire for social recognition, the intention to support local small businesses, and opportunities for economic gain through digital endorsements and collaborations. These motivations influence how influencers design their communication strategies, interact with audiences, and manage their online identities.

The results show that storytelling, simple language, and adaptive communication styles are key strategies used by influencers to create engaging content and strengthen relationships with their audiences. In addition, the study reveals differences in the level of awareness regarding personal branding among influencers. Some influencers consciously develop branding strategies through consistent content themes, distinctive slogans, and recognizable communication styles. Others develop their personal branding more organically through repeated interaction with followers and continuous content production. Regardless of the approach, authenticity and ethical communication practices play a crucial role in building audience trust and maintaining credibility.

These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital communication and influencer studies by highlighting the dynamics of personal branding among local influencers in regional contexts. Unlike previous research that primarily focuses on wellknown national influencers, this study emphasizes the experiences of regional content creators who operate within smaller digital ecosystems. The study also provides practical insights for emerging influencers regarding the importance of consistent communication strategies, authenticity, and audience engagement in developing sustainable personal branding. Future research may explore larger samples of influencers across different regions or examine the relationship between personal branding strategies and measurable audience engagement outcomes.

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