

Personal Branding Strategy Through Instagram: A Case Study of @Hasbyristama as a Police Officer and Marathon Runner

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the personal branding strategy of Hasby Ristama (@hasbyristama) who combines his identity as a police officer and marathon runner on Instagram. The research problem examined is how Hasby builds and communicates his dual identity through digital platforms. The research aims to understand the personal branding strategy applied using the Communication Theory of Identity approach and Peter Montoya's eight characteristics of personal branding. The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with case study techniques, data collection through in-depth interviews with key informants, three supporting informants, and one expert informant, as well as observation and documentation of Instagram content. The results show that Hasby successfully applies the eight characteristics of personal branding (specialization, leadership, personality, distinctiveness, visibility, unity, persistence, goodwill) consistently across four identity layers. The unique combination of police profession and marathon running hobby becomes a strong positioning, supported by content consistency, active interaction with followers, and social awareness. The research concludes that authentic personal branding requires consistency between digital identity and real life, as well as clear mission integration to build a positive image in the public eye.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Communication Theory of Identity, Police Officer, Marathon Runner.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi personal branding Hasby Ristama (@hasbyristama) yang menggabungkan identitas sebagai perwira polisi dan pelari marathon di Instagram. Permasalahan yang diteliti adalah bagaimana Hasby membangun dan mengkomunikasikan identitas ganda tersebut melalui platform digital. Tujuan penelitian untuk memahami strategi personal branding yang diterapkan menggunakan pendekatan Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) dan delapan karakteristik personal branding Peter Montoya. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik studi kasus, pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam dengan informan kunci, tiga informan pendukung, dan satu informan ahli, serta observasi dan dokumentasi konten Instagram. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan Hasby berhasil menerapkan kedelapan karakteristik personal branding (spesialisasi, kepemimpinan, kepribadian, kekhasan, visibilitas, kesatuan, ketekunan, niat baik) secara konsisten pada empat lapisan identitas. Keunikan kombinasi profesi polisi dan hobi maraton menjadi penempatan yang kuat, didukung konsistensi konten, interaksi aktif dengan pengikut, dan kepedulian sosial. Kesimpulan peneliti membuktikan bahwa personal branding autentik memerlukan konsistensi antara identitas digital dan kehidupan nyata, serta integrasi misi yang jelas untuk membangun citra positif di mata publik.

Kata kunci: Personal branding, Communication Theory of Identity, Polisi, Pelari Maraton.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cultural phenomena in Indonesia are increasingly shaped by social media due to the shift from traditional to digital media, supported by rapid technological development that influences behavior and lifestyle (Nisfani, 2023). Social media allows easy access and sharing of information across ages, turning private activities public and becoming a space for identity formation, while also posing risks such as FOMO, catfishing, and cyberbullying that leave digital

traces (Afriluyanto, 2018). At the same time, social media functions as a promotional and business medium, giving rise to celebrity grams who rely on strong personal branding, with WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook being the most used platforms in Indonesia (Butar & Ali, 2018). Instagram stands out as one of the most used and active platforms across age groups due to its visual features and creative ecosystem that supports expression and community building (Kholilah & Deslia, 2025). In this context, personal branding has become increasingly important, as social media especially Instagram facilitates interactive and flexible self-presentation to build reputation, uniqueness, and professional value in the digital era (Mujiyanto et al., 2021).

Castells, (2013) states that social media such as Instagram has enabled mass-self communication through influencers who interact directly with followers, and these influencers are described as active, well-connected trendsetters from various fields (Anjani & Irwansyah, 2020). Influencers are categorized by follower count, with nano influencers dominating in Indonesia and showing higher engagement rates than larger influencers, where engagement is measured by likes and comments relative to followers (Anestia, 2024). This study focuses on police influencers due to declining public trust following numerous cases of police misconduct, including the high-profile Ferdy Sambo case that exposed systemic ethical and criminal violations and led to sanctions against many officers, alongside data showing increasing disciplinary, ethical, and criminal violations within Polri (Jhon & Panggabean, 2025). Among police influencers, Hasby Ristama is highlighted for building a positive image through consistent Instagram activity that combines professional duties and personal interests, particularly marathon running, which aligns with a growing global health trend (Kurniawati, 2025). With 28.4 thousand followers, he is categorized as a micro-influencer, enabling closer engagement and effective personal branding that supports his reputation as an honest and trustworthy police officer and contributes to his career development (Slice, 2023).

Hasby Ristama engages in activities beyond his personal Instagram account, including producing short story films and serving as executive producer for the 2019 film *"Film Viral Kabul, di Indonesia sudah tidak ada POLISI lagi"*, which reached 250,000 views on YouTube. He also directs and develops content for the Instagram account @Tmcpoldametro, which focuses on traffic in Indonesia and has 909,000 followers with content reaching millions of viewers. This study examines the Instagram account @Hasbyristama, a police officer who also builds personal branding as an influencer. Previous research on personal branding has varied focuses. Achmad & Ruhaena (2021) analyzed teenagers' personal branding on Instagram, highlighting its role in promoting self-competence and career support, but did not consider professional contexts. Hanifah (2023) emphasized consistency and authenticity in personal branding but did not examine public figures like celebrity police officers. Ralph et al. (2022) studied how UK police used social media during COVID-19 to maintain public relations with positive, professional content. Susanti & Paramita (2024) discussed Instagram personal branding using The Eight Laws of Personal Branding, without addressing strategies for professionals with social responsibilities. Jacobson (2020) highlighted the importance of curated, authentic self-image for social media managers to attract future audiences. Despite these studies, research on personal branding that combines professional duties and influencer roles within one individual remains limited, especially for professions with social responsibilities like policing. This study aims to explore how police officers who are also running influencers, like Hasby Ristama, develop their personal branding on Instagram. The research seeks to provide both evaluative and practical insights into personal branding strategies on social media. The study is titled *"Personal Branding Strategy Through Instagram: A Case Study Of @Hasbyristama as a Police Officer and Marathon Runner."*

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Communication

A very important human activity is communication. Not only in organizational life but also in human life as a whole, our lives depend on communication. Everyone communicates to interact with each other. Today, technology has changed the way humans communicate significantly. Communication can be done in simple to complex ways. Communication does not only occur through words, but also through interactions, such as smiles and nods, which indicate the same interests, attitudes, and feelings. Communication depends on the same understanding. "dialogue between people" occurs when something is not received in the same way (Pohan & Fitria, 2021).

B. History and Theoretical Orientation

Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) was developed by Michael Hecht and his colleagues. Michael Hecht is a professor in the Liberal Arts Research Professor of Communication Arts and Science and Crime, Law, and Justice in the Department of Communication Arts and Science at Penn State University.

This theory emerged in the 1980s as part of a shift from considering identity as the primary element of human existence to identity as a social phenomenon. This theory is an approach that allows for a broad exploration of how a person's identity can be formed not only through their internal perceptions but also through interpersonal perceptions in the context of the wider social environment. This theory offers a theoretical framework that states that identity can be formed and mediated through communication (Santosa & Yuliana, 2024).

C. Personal Branding

According to Haroen in the journal (Lois & Candraningrum, 2021), personal branding is the process of shaping the public's view of aspects that a person has. Such as personality, appearance, characteristics, or values and how all of them become positive perceptions to be viewed by the public.

D. New Media

In Lev Manovich book entitled "New Media Reader" said that new media is a cultural object in a new paradigm of the world of mass media in society. The information distribution model that uses software network technology is updated by new media, which is controlled by the application model and computer technology. According to the book written by Nicholas Gane and David Beer entitled "New Media: The Key Concepts", at least six concepts define New Media (Utami, 2021).

E. Social Media

Social media develops following increasingly sophisticated information and communication technology. According to Nasrullah in the journal (Herdiyani, 2022). Social media is an intermediary on the internet that provides social media users with space to present themselves, share information, collaborate, and communicate with other social media users so that a virtual social bond is formed.

F. Instagram

Instagram is a platform for users to share stories through photos and videos to express their personal selves. Currently, Instagram is one of the fastest growing and most popular social media platforms in the world (Southern, 2018).

G. Sports Culture

Sports not only improve one's physical and mental health, but also help one grow into a good person morally, such as manners, etiquette, respect, and kindness. It is wrong to consider sports only as physical activities and sports games. Human physical and psychological development is greatly influenced by sports. Sports are very important for shaping social character, and moral behavior in sports activities is very important for shaping the character of society (Dilnoza, 2023).

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher aims to understand the personal branding of Hasby Ristama on Instagram by identifying his followers. To do this, a qualitative method with a descriptive observation approach will be used, focusing on social phenomena and problems. This method emphasizes obtaining deep and meaningful data from natural settings, allowing for a comprehensive view of respondents' perspectives. Qualitative research does not seek generalizations but looks for underlying meanings. The researcher chose a case study design to examine Hasby Ristama's personal branding as a police officer and marathon runner, aligning with the communication theory of identity in sociocultural traditions. The research involves careful case identification, data collection, and analysis to explain the branding process. In this study, the subject to be studied is @hasbyristama instagram account, a police influencer running. The object to be studied is Hasby Ristama's personal branding strategy as a Police running influencer. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews, observation, documentation, literature studies, and ethical considerations. In-

depth interviews involve conversations between an interviewer and interviewee to gather detailed information about various topics. Observation is about systematically watching and recording behaviors to understand them better. Documentation complements interviews and observations by using notes and recordings. Literature studies involve reviewing reliable written sources to support research. Lastly, ethical issues stress the need for confidentiality, informed consent, and sensitivity when dealing with research subjects. This research was conducted in Jakarta and Telkom University Bandung, with data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation with informants. Data analysis involves collecting and organizing information from different sources to make it understandable and shareable. This process includes sorting data, synthesizing it, and drawing conclusions. Analysis begins before research starts and continues until results are found. The Miles and Huberman model outlines three key steps, data reduction, where data is summarized to focus on key topics, data presentation, which uses narratives, and verification, where temporary conclusions are checked against more data for objectivity. To ensure data validity, researchers can use triangulation, which involves checking data from multiple sources, using various methods, and considering different times. This study emphasizes source triangulation by gathering information from various informants to create a more comprehensive perspective. Comparing data strengthens the credibility of research findings.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULTS

Personal Layer

Researchers analyzed Hasby Ristama's personal branding using eight characteristics from Montoya & Vandehey (2002). These characteristics help to understand how Hasby views and presents his identity, particularly as a police officer and marathon runner. The personal layer of his branding reflects his beliefs, values, and principles. Hasby is loyal to his identity, exemplifying specialization in both his professional role and his passion for running. He believes that running helps him connect with the community and promote public safety.

Hasby considers himself a leader and carefully makes decisions. He uses running to connect with others and promote healthy living. His social media highlights his running skills and leadership, showing his influence through community events like marathons. Hasby manages to blend his personal interests with his role as a police officer, creating a strong public image.

He recognizes that social media does not fully reveal a person's true self but works to balance his duty as a police officer with his passion for running. Hasby's content shares his roles and promotes healthy activities. He emphasizes discipline, responsibility, and the importance of prioritizing work. His persistence in training despite a busy schedule reflects his commitment to improvement. Overall, Hasby aims to positively engage with the community and change perceptions about police through goodwill.

Enactment Layer

The enactment layer shows how Hasby expresses his identity through visible actions, including his creative work, social interactions, and online presence. His personal branding focuses on specialization and leadership. His passion for running initially emerged from his job as a police officer, and he encourages others to run by sharing experiences and recommending coaches. Hasby's leadership is evident as a marathon captain, fostering teamwork and ensuring smooth events. He prioritizes family time, balancing his professional and personal life, which experts advise he should clarify in his content. Hasby actively controls his public image, projecting a healthy persona and showcasing leadership on social media. His perseverance is shown in his running routine and community goodwill through support for local events, reflecting his commitment to helping others.

Relational Layer

A person's identity is shaped by their relationships and interactions, which influence how they see themselves and how others see them. Hasby Ristama's identity is strongly reflected on his social media, especially Instagram, where he highlights his roles as a police officer and marathon runner. His dedication to marathon running makes him stand out among other police officers. Informants describe Hasby as motivational, caring, and skilled at balancing his roles as a police officer, father, and runner. His social media interactions show an open, achievement-focused personality and engage his followers.

Hasby's visibility through Instagram encourages others to lead healthier lives and reinforces his reputation for professionalism and health. His commitment to training, despite his police duties, demonstrates persistence. Hasby is positive and frequently engages with his audience, sharing his running journey and inspiring others. He aims to improve public perceptions of the police through motivational posts and community support, showcasing his dedication to being relatable and understanding while balancing professional and personal goals.

Communal Layer

The communal layer of identity reveals that a person's sense of self is shaped by their community interactions and relationships. Identity is developed individually and collectively through shared experiences. Specialization is important, as seen in runners who exchange tips to improve their performance while balancing personal lives. Leadership also plays a key role, exemplified by Hasby from the Pocari marathon community, who united part-time runners and earned their trust through strong management skills. Hasby's sociable nature contrasts with common stereotypes about police. He effectively uses social media to share motivational content and connect with others, highlighting differences between online and real-life experiences. Hasby's connections with various groups reflect unity and perseverance, balancing his police role with interests in fitness and creativity. His consistent support and goodwill foster trust among community members.

DISCUSSION

Personal Layer

According to Montoya & Vandehey (2002), specialization in personal branding can be formed through behavior, ability, lifestyle, mission, service, product, and professional niche within niche, and within the personal layer Hasby Ristama fits the mission and professional niche within niche categories. His mission is internally grounded, using running as a strategic medium for community policing that is inseparable from his identity as a police officer while naturally promoting a healthy lifestyle, which aligns with Kalia et al., (2017) who state that a sustainable personal image is built on a personal mission internalized and reflected in professional behavior. In the professional niche within niche, Hasby uses marathon running as a communication bridge to connect with broader audiences, creating common ground and effective interaction, supported by Purba et al., (2025) who find that law enforcers who display humanistic elements through hobbies connect more easily with the public. His leadership is shaped by the SWOT framework, reflecting professionalism, prudence, and experiences gained from leading a marathon community, which forged resilience and discipline consistent with leadership traits identified by Kniffin et al., (2014) and with Montoya & Vandehey, (2002) view of leadership as decision-making amid uncertainty with clear direction.

Within the Personal Layer, Hasby demonstrates high self-monitoring and clear internal boundaries by acknowledging imperfection and limiting personal exposure to protect his private self, aligning with Labrecque et al., (2011) on balancing authenticity and privacy, and with Montoya & Vandehey, (2002) who emphasize that a strong personality need not be perfect. His distinctiveness comes from differentiating himself from professional athletes by creating a new category of recreational runners who are police officers, a strategy supported by Sachsman, (2007) on systematic hobby pursuit as a source of unique social identity and by Montoya & Vandehey (2002) on the need for recognizable uniqueness. Hasby's visibility is built through consistent, habitual self-expression rather than aggressive promotion, aligning with Montoya & Vandehey, (2002) on repeated exposure and with Turel & Serenko, (2017) on intrinsic pleasure as the basis of strong habits. He demonstrates unity by integrating his roles, with policing as the foundation and running aligned through shared values of discipline and consistency, as explained by Greenhaus & Powell, (2006), while his disciplined consistency reflects the Law of Persistence and a Harmonious Passion rather than obsession, in line with Vallerand, (2003) and Montoya & Vandehey, (2002). Finally, Hasby's goodwill is rooted in sincerity and a desire to help, shown through actions driven by conscience rather than strategy, aligning with Montoya & Vandehey, (2002) and the benevolence concept of Mayer, R., Davis & Schoorman, (1995), where positive intentions are directed toward others without expectation of personal gain.

Enactment Layer

Hasby's specialization is enacted through consistent performative actions that integrate athletic competence into police identity, from institutional fitness to marathon participation, creating a distinctive professional niche that signals discipline, health, and credibility in line with Stebbins, (1982). By sharing running knowledge and mentoring juniors and the community, his Instagram functions as empirical proof of this specialization, strengthening his personal brand.

His leadership is demonstrated through action rather than status, exemplified as a pioneer captain at the Pocari Sweat Run and reflecting servant leadership that builds trust and social recognition consistent with Hogg, (2001), portraying a humanistic police officer on and off duty.

From the enactment layer, Hasby manages boundaries between professional and personal life by prioritizing family, enacting a “Family Man” identity that enriches his brand in accordance with Greenhaus & Powell, (2006). He breaks rigid law enforcement stereotypes through dynamic marathon performances while maintaining group belonging, aligning with Brewer, (1991) Optimal Distinctiveness Theory and exemplifying Humanizing Authority. His curated visibility follows Goffman, (1956) dramaturgical approach, reinforcing a coherent identity narrative through frequent posting as described by Labrecque et al., (2011), while situational intelligence during crises reflects Work Life Enrichment Greenhaus & Powell, (2006). Persistent routines and intentional content show grit per Duckworth, (2007), and community advocacy builds emotional bonds and trust consistent with J. McCroskey & Teven, (1999) Source Credibility theory.

Relational Layer

The relational layer explains identity as formed through interactions and others’ perceptions (Hecht, 1993), which in personal branding helps frame public perception. Hasby strategically positions himself in the lifestyle category (Montoya & Vandehey, 2002) by highlighting a disciplined marathon-running life rather than his role as a police officer, using this lifestyle as a communication strategy to reduce hierarchy and build emotional connections as fellow runners (L. McCroskey et al., 2006). His leadership is socially constructed and validated through collective recognition, reflected in his election as captain of the Pocari Sweat pacers in line with Uhl-Bien, (2006), where followers perceive a transfer of discipline that supports a servant-leadership style grounded in trust and security. Hasby’s personality further builds closeness through self-disclosure and transparency (Bazarova & Choi, 2014), disrupting rigid police stereotypes and creating a unique Police–Runner identity that strengthens parasocial connections (Labrecque et al., 2011). His meaningful visibility and interactive engagement foster familiarity and trust, making visibility a relational tool rather than self-promotion (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Unity is perceived as coherence of values between his profession and hobby, where physical discipline mirrors professional integrity, forming authentic self-brand consistency (Moulard et al., 2016) and offering a positive alternative image that restores police–civilian relations. Persistence is understood as commitment and sacrifice that inspires emotional connection and trust through consistency and credibility (Lou & Yuan, 2019), validating both his athletic and professional discipline. Goodwill ultimately transforms popularity into deep trust, as Hasby’s perceived concern and empathy align with credibility theory emphasizing goodwill as a core of ethos (J. McCroskey & Teven, 1999), functioning as an emotional bridge that rebuilds public trust and humanizes the uniform.

Communal Layer

In building an effective personal brand, focus and specialization are essential. Hasby Ristama’s specialization, understood as clearly defined abilities, mission, and disciplined lifestyle, differentiates him and legitimizes his acceptance within the running community despite lacking formal organizational ties (Montoya & Vandehey, 2002). At the communal level of the Communication Theory of Identity, his role as a knowledge resource and consistent runner forms a shared cultural code that strengthens collective identity through technical exchange and mutual recognition (Hecht, 1993). His leadership emerges organically through influence rather than position, reinforced by trust and servant-oriented actions that provide security and cohesion. By contrasting police stereotypes with a warm, egalitarian personality and consistent self-management, Hasby achieves a balance between belonging and distinctiveness, creating an authentic and inspiring personal brand (Brewer, 1991; Labrecque et al., 2011).

Hasby’s visibility is built through consistent actions across physical and digital spaces, particularly via social media, where repeated exposure to his running activities validates identity and strengthens positive perception among peers (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). This sustained presence positions him as an internal influencer without formal leadership. His persistence is interpreted as intentional and meaningful, reflecting long-term passion and perseverance (Duckworth, 2007). Additionally, his supportive and prosocial behavior demonstrates goodwill and positive intention, enhancing trust, credibility, and legitimacy within both the running community and the police institution (Mayer, R., Davis & Schoorman, 1995).

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Hasby Ristama has successfully applied the principles of Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) to create his personal brand as a police officer and marathon runner. He combines these roles to present a strong image, branding himself as a "marathon-running police officer." He uses community policing as his mission and participates in marathons to promote a more relatable police force through consistent content creation. However, his personal branding has some limitations. His visibility in the community is mainly digital and event-based, lacking regular engagement in running activities due to his police duties. Additionally, his identities are not fully integrated, he prioritizes his role as a police officer during urgent situations, indicating a hierarchy in his identities. His authenticity is also managed carefully, he curates content to maintain a leadership image, which can limit his openness as an individual. Despite these challenges, Hasby's branding effectively connects the police with the public. He is seen as a motivating figure, known as a "healthy friend" to the community. Hasby Ristama has created a carefully managed but authentic personal brand that enhances social legitimacy and fosters community trust. Future research should combine personal branding theory with digital communication and social media algorithms, examine dual identities across professions, and study branding strategies in stigmatized professions. It should also consider cultural and demographic influences on branding. For individuals building a personal brand, unique positioning and consistency in online and real-life images are important. They should have a clear mission, engage actively with their community, and show goodwill through knowledge sharing and social responsibility.

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