

Bobon Santoso's Digital Communication Strategy for Building Personal Branding through "Kuali Merah Putih" YouTube Content

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ABSTRAK

Perkembangan pesat media digital telah meningkatkan pentingnya personal branding di kalangan kreator konten. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana Bobon Santoso menggunakan strategi komunikasi digital untuk membangun personal branding melalui serial konten YouTube "Kuali Merah Putih". Penelitian ini menganalisis elemen visual, naratif, performatif, simbolik, dan interaktif yang berkontribusi terhadap konstruksi identitas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 12 video YouTube yang dipilih secara purposif melalui observasi nonpartisipan, dokumentasi digital, dan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa personal branding Bobon Santoso dibangun melalui identitas visual yang konsisten, tontonan memasak berskala besar, simbolisme nasionalisme, storytelling sosial, autentisitas performatif, dan keterlibatan audiens. Simbol "Merah Putih" memperkuat nilai nasionalisme, solidaritas, dan tanggung jawab sosial, sementara performa yang autentik dan narasi kemanusiaan mendorong terbentuknya hubungan parasosial, loyalitas audiens, keterikatan emosional, serta kepercayaan. Personal branding yang efektif tidak hanya bergantung pada visibilitas, tetapi juga pada kemampuan mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai sosial yang bermakna dan interaksi yang berkelanjutan dengan audiens.

Kata Kunci: Strategi Komunikasi, Digital, Personal Branding, Youtube, Hubungan Parasosial, Bobon Santoso

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital media has increased the importance of personal branding among content creators. This study examines how Bobon Santoso employs digital communication strategies to build personal branding through the "Kuali Merah Putih" YouTube content series. The study analyzes visual, narrative, performative, symbolic, and interactive elements contributing to identity construction. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected from 12 purposively selected YouTube videos through non-participant observation, digital documentation, and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Bobon Santoso's personal branding is constructed through consistent visual identity, large-scale cooking spectacles, nationalist symbolism, social storytelling, performative authenticity, and audience engagement. The "Merah Putih" symbol reinforces nationalism, solidarity, and social responsibility, while authentic performances and humanitarian narratives foster parasocial relationships, audience loyalty, emotional attachment, and trust. Effective personal branding extends beyond visibility by integrating meaningful social values and sustained audience interaction.

Keywords: Digital Communication Strategy, Personal Branding, Youtube, Parasocial Relationships, Bobon Santoso.

INTRODUCTION

Developments in information and communication technology have transformed the ways individuals construct their identities, manage their self-image, and interact with the public (van Dijk, 2020). The use of technology as a supportive tool has become a common practice that helps facilitate human work across various fields (Anandito et al., 2025). Communication is beneficial for conveying information, influencing audience attitudes and behaviors, building relationships with audiences, increasing brand awareness, and effectively supporting the achievement of organizational or business objectives (Zulaikha et al., 2024).

Digital media no longer serve solely as channels for information dissemination; they have evolved into social spaces where individuals display their values, character, communication styles, and social positioning before audiences (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Labrecque et al., 2011). In this context, social media facilitate rapid, extensive, and interactive communication that transcends geographical boundaries (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; van Dijk, 2020). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that social media have become important platforms through which individuals communicate, express themselves, and establish more open relationships with the public.

This transformation has elevated personal branding as a significant topic within digital communication studies (Trang et al., 2024; Venciute et al., 2024). Personal branding should not be understood merely as an effort to gain popularity or promote oneself; rather, it constitutes a strategic process for shaping public perceptions through a consistent, distinctive, and meaningful identity (Sharifzadeh et al., 2021; Venciute et al., 2024). Digital media enable individuals to manage their identities directly within public spaces (Gorea, 2021; Trang et al., 2024). Consequently, personal branding in the digital era is closely associated with how individuals construct their self-image through messages, symbols, narratives, interactions, and sustained communication consistency (Gorea, 2021; Trang et al., 2024; Violot et al., 2024).

A digital content strategy is essential because it enables organizations and individuals to build meaningful relationships with their audiences by delivering educational, relevant, consistent, and valuable information. Strategically designed content helps meet the audience's information needs, influences their perceptions through both rational and emotional appeals, and fosters long-term relationships built on trust (Wicaksono et al., 2025).

Shaping audience perceptions through content helps increase audience attention, trust, and engagement with an account or brand. Content that is informative, relevant, and consistent, supported by compelling design, clear explanations, appropriate posting times, and alignment with current trends, can build a positive image while strengthening a brand's presence in the digital environment (Aprilasari et al., 2023).

YouTube has become one of the most important platforms for personal branding because it offers more complex audiovisual characteristics than text-based or image-based social media platforms (Trang et al., 2024; Violot et al., 2024). Through video content, creators can integrate visual, narrative, performative, emotional, and interactive elements into a unified communication experience (Violot et al., 2024). YouTube functions not only as an entertainment medium but also as a participatory space where creators and audiences collaboratively construct meaning through digital content (Bertaglia et al., 2024; Violot et al., 2024). Within this context, successful personal branding depends not only on viewership numbers but also on narrative strength, identity clarity, audience engagement, and message consistency established by creators (Trang et al., 2024).

Digital communication strategy plays a critical role in explaining how personal branding is formed on YouTube. This strategy encompasses message planning, communication format selection, the use of visual symbols, delivery style, identity consistency, and patterns of audience interaction. Kurniawati and Arifin (2020) argue that effective digital communication strategies can enhance audience engagement and strengthen both brand image and personal image. These findings indicate that personal branding does not emerge spontaneously but develops through deliberate and repeated communication management. Within social media environments, such strategies become increasingly important because audiences are not merely message recipients; they also respond to, interpret, disseminate, and reinforce the image constructed by creators.

One Indonesian content creator who is particularly relevant to this context is Bobon Santoso. He is widely recognized for large-scale cooking content that combines entertainment, visual spectacle, social action, and close engagement with local communities. One of his content series, "*Kuali Merah Putih*" (The Red-and-White Cauldron), features large-scale cooking activities followed by the distribution of food to community members. This content not only generates visual appeal through unusually large cooking equipment and food preparation processes but also conveys social messages through acts of sharing. The use of the "Red and White" symbol reinforces associations with national identity, social solidarity, and collective values. From a communication perspective, symbols play an important role in shaping meaning and fostering emotional connections between communicators and audiences (Mulyana, 2019).

The "*Kuali Merah Putih*" phenomenon is particularly compelling because Bobon Santoso's personal branding is built not only on his identity as a culinary content creator but also through a combination of visual spectacle, social values, nationalism, emotional storytelling, and audience interaction. His public image is characterized by simplicity, strength, spontaneity, closeness to the community, and a consistent commitment to sharing activities. Such consistency is important because it enhances credibility and strengthens self-image on social media platforms. Furthermore, authenticity constitutes a crucial element of digital personal branding (Van Dijck et al., 2021; Waisbord, 2023). Audrezet et al. (2020) explain that audiences tend to develop trust and emotional attachment toward creators whom they perceive as authentic. In Bobon Santoso's case, his spontaneous, expressive, and relatively informal communication style can be understood as part of an authenticity construction that strengthens audience connection.

Audience engagement also represents a critical component in the formation of personal branding on YouTube. Social media facilitate two-way communication through comments, responses, reposting, and various forms of digital participation. Ki et al. (2020) demonstrate that audience engagement plays a significant role in strengthening relationships between creators and their followers. These relationships may develop into parasocial relationships, a condition in which audiences feel a personal connection with a media figure despite the relationship being indirect. In the context of "*Kuali Merah Putih*," parasocial relationships may emerge because audiences do not merely observe cooking activities but also become emotionally involved in the social narratives, sharing practices, and nationalist imagery consistently presented throughout the content.

This study employs two primary theoretical frameworks: Digital Communication Theory and Personal Branding Theory. Digital Communication Theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals, organizations, and technological systems create, transmit, receive, and interpret information within digital media environments. Contemporary perspectives view digital communication as an interactive, networked, and participatory process that extends beyond technical information transmission, enabling information exchange across spatial and temporal boundaries (Van Dijck et al., 2021; Waisbord, 2023). Through interconnected digital platforms, users simultaneously produce, distribute, and consume content, transforming traditional sender-receiver relationships into more dynamic and collaborative communication structures (Bayer et al., 2022). Digital communication integrates textual, visual, audiovisual, symbolic, and interactive elements while facilitating real-time feedback, user participation, and multidirectional communication.

As a result, communication increasingly depends on the convergence of digital technologies, platform architectures, and user engagement practices that shape information flows and meaning-making processes (Bayer et al., 2022; Waisbord, 2023). Compared with conventional communication

systems, digital communication offers greater interactivity, accessibility, scalability, and participatory opportunities, supporting continuous engagement, content integration, personalization, and broader dissemination of information while fostering online identities, social relationships, and collaborative communication practices (Bayer et al., 2022; Van Dijck et al., 2021).

Personal Branding Theory provides an interdisciplinary framework for understanding how individuals strategically construct, manage, and communicate a distinctive professional identity to shape public perceptions of their expertise, credibility, and authenticity. Contemporary scholars conceptualize personal branding as a deliberate process through which individuals communicate a unique value proposition across professional and digital environments, drawing upon communication, marketing, psychology, and identity studies (Gorbatov et al., 2021; Venciute et al., 2024). Personal branding involves the intentional presentation of values, competencies, experiences, and aspirations to create a recognizable identity through consistent self-presentation and credibility building within professional and social networks (Trang et al., 2024; Venciute et al., 2024).

Overall, personal branding represents a continuous strategic process through which individuals communicate their identity, expertise, and professional value while maintaining consistency across communication channels. Effective personal branding enhances visibility, professional opportunities, relationship building, and long-term career development through the sustained construction of an authentic and recognizable identity (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2024; Venciute et al., 2024).

These two theoretical frameworks must be integrated because personal branding in digital media involves not only the identity that creators seek to project but also the ways in which that identity is communicated, received, and reinforced by audiences. Personal branding focuses on the construction of personal identity, whereas digital communication explains the mechanisms through which messages are delivered and circulated within social media environments. By combining these perspectives, this study can explain how Bobon Santoso constructs personal branding through digital communication strategies that encompass visual, narrative, performative, symbolic, emotional, and interactive dimensions.

Although numerous studies have examined personal branding in digital media, several research gaps remain. First, most personal branding studies continue to position personal branding as an instrument of self-promotion, marketing, or popularity enhancement, leaving limited attention to personal branding as an identity construction that incorporates social values and national symbols. Second, previous studies have focused primarily on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, whereas YouTube, as a long-form audiovisual platform, still requires deeper investigation, particularly regarding identity construction through social narratives. Third, research on digital creators frequently emphasizes quantitative indicators such as views, likes, and comments, while giving less attention to how visual, narrative, performative, authenticity-based, and audience engagement elements work together to construct personal branding. Fourth, studies on the personal branding of Indonesian content creators remain limited in explaining how local values, nationalism, and social action can become integral components of digital communication strategies.

Based on these gaps, this study aims not only to describe the content of *"Kuali Merah Putih"* but also to analyze how digital communication strategies are used to form, strengthen, and sustain Bobon Santoso's personal branding on YouTube. The focus on twelve videos from the *"Kuali Merah Putih"* series represents a purposive case selection rather than a statistical representation of all Bobon Santoso content. These videos were selected because they contain characteristics directly relevant to

the research objectives, including large-scale visual spectacle, sharing narratives, symbols of nationalism, creator performance, and audience responses. Accordingly, this study adopts analytical representativeness, selecting data based on informational richness and relevance to the phenomenon under investigation.

This study is expected to make both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it extends the understanding of digital personal branding by positioning social values, nationalist symbolism, emotional storytelling, and audience engagement as essential elements in the formation of creator identities on YouTube. Practically, the findings may provide insights for content creators, digital communication practitioners, and social media managers regarding the importance of communication strategies that are consistent, authentic, socially meaningful, and aligned with audience characteristics.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the primary research question is how Bobon Santoso employs digital communication strategies to build personal branding through the YouTube content series *"Kuali Merah Putih."* Additionally, this study examines how the visual, narrative, performative, symbolic, and interactive elements within *"Kuali Merah Putih"* contribute to the formation of Bobon Santoso's personal branding.

This study offers novelty by integrating Digital Communication Theory and Personal Branding Theory to explain how creator identities are constructed, communicated, interpreted, and reinforced by audiences on YouTube. This integration enables the study not only to describe content characteristics but also to explain the communication mechanisms through which personal branding develops via message consistency, authenticity, visual appeal, emotional narratives, nationalist symbolism, audience interaction, and the potential emergence of parasocial relationships. Consequently, this study provides a conceptual contribution to understanding digital personal branding as a participatory, emotional, and socially grounded process of identity communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Digital Communication Theory

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Several theoretical perspectives underpin personal branding. Identity Theory explains how individuals communicate professional identities aligned with their aspirations and social roles (Gorbatov et al., 2021; Venciute et al., 2024). Social Identity Theory highlights the importance of balancing individual differentiation with membership in professional groups and networks that enhance legitimacy and credibility (Bertills, 2022; Trang et al., 2024). Impression Management Theory emphasizes the strategic management of public perceptions through consistent communication and authentic self-presentation across digital and offline contexts. Self-Determination Theory underscores the role of authenticity, intrinsic motivation, and value congruence in strengthening trust, emotional connection, and audience engagement (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2024; Trang et al., 2024). Signaling Theory explains how credentials, achievements, expertise, and professional behavior function as visible indicators that communicate competence, reliability, and professional value (Bertills, 2022; Venciute et al., 2024).

Overall, personal branding represents a continuous strategic process through which individuals communicate their identity, expertise, and professional value while maintaining consistency across communication channels. Effective personal branding enhances visibility, professional opportunities, relationship building, and long-term career development through the sustained construction of an authentic and recognizable identity (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2024; Venciute et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach based on qualitative content analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of Bobon Santoso's digital communication strategy in building

personal branding through the “*Kuali Merah Putih*” YouTube content series. Rather than producing statistical generalizations, the study aimed to generate analytical insights into how messages, symbols, narratives, visuals, creator performances, and digital interactions contribute to personal identity construction within social media environments (Aspers & Corte, 2021). The study focused on 12 purposively selected videos representing information-rich cases that best reflected the defining characteristics of the “*Kuali Merah Putih*” series, including large-scale cooking activities, community food distribution, social narratives, and nationalist symbolism. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because it enabled the selection of data most relevant to the research objectives and the phenomenon under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020).

The unit of analysis included visual, verbal, narrative, performative, symbolic, and interactive elements appearing in the videos, such as large-scale cooking processes, creator expressions, storytelling structures, social messages, representations of nationalism, audience engagement, and creator performances. Data were collected through non-participant observation and digital documentation. The researcher repeatedly observed the videos to identify recurring communication patterns, identity constructions, and personal branding elements without participating in content production or audience interaction. Digital documentation included video titles, captions, screenshots, viewer statistics, likes, and audience comments that provided supporting evidence regarding engagement, emotional closeness, and responses to Bobon Santoso’s image. Audience comments were used as supplementary data rather than as a basis for generalizing audience perceptions (Guest et al., 2020; Tracy, 2020).

Data analysis employed thematic analysis involving data familiarization, open coding, category development, theme generation, theme review, and theme interpretation based on digital communication and personal branding theories (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied digital data triangulation, audit trails, and theme validation by comparing observations, documentation, captions, engagement data, and audience comments while documenting each stage of the analytical process. These procedures enhanced transparency, traceability, and credibility and ensured that themes emerged systematically from the data rather than researcher assumptions (Nowell et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the study has several limitations, including its reliance on only 12 YouTube videos, the absence of interviews with creators, production teams, or audiences, and the use of audience comments solely as supporting evidence. Consequently, the study should be understood as a qualitative case study of digital communication strategies and personal branding construction rather than an examination of communication effects on audiences. Through these procedures, the study systematically explains how the “*Kuali Merah Putih*” content series constructs Bobon Santoso’s personal branding through visual spectacle, social narratives, nationalist symbolism, performative authenticity, character consistency, and audience engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Overview of the Channel and Visual Identity

Bobon Santoso’s personal branding is highly dependent on the channel’s visual identity. The findings of this study on the appearance of Bobon Santoso’s YouTube channel indicate that elements such as thumbnails featuring oversized food portions, the use of contrasting colors, and visual framing that highlights the scale of food production are consistently employed as visual symbols.



Figure 1. Bobon Santoso YouTube Channel Display

Figure 1 shows that the channel's visual identity consistently consists of symbols that are easily recognized by audiences. Through dramatic facial expressions and displays of food in large quantities, Bobon Santoso appears consistently in almost every video thumbnail. Given that thumbnails represent the first point of contact between audiences and content, this visual strategy plays an important role within the YouTube ecosystem. These findings are reinforced by a statement from a member of Bobon Santoso's creative team:

"We always maintain Bobon's signature expression and visuals of food in large quantities in the thumbnails because they have become an identity that audiences instantly recognize. When people see those thumbnails, they immediately know that it is Bobon Santoso's content." (Informant TK-1)

This statement is consistent with the experience of one audience member: *"When I see a Bobon thumbnail with exaggerated expressions and an enormous amount of food, I immediately know that it is a Bobon Santoso video even before reading the title or the channel name."* (Informant AU-2)

These findings indicate that the repetition of specific visual elements has created an identity that is easily recognized by audiences. According to Montoya and Vandehey (2002), such visual consistency is associated with the dimensions of visibility and recognition, namely the ability of a brand to be recognized quickly through the repetition of distinctive visual symbols. Therefore, the consistent use of thumbnails functions not only as a content promotion tool but also as an instrument for developing personal branding that strengthens Bobon Santoso's visibility on YouTube.

The name *"Kuali Merah Putih"* also carries strong symbolic meaning. Because the phrase *"Merah Putih"* directly represents Indonesian national identity, the content is perceived not only as a culinary activity but also as a representation of the values of unity and togetherness. Bobon Santoso explained the reason for using this name as follows:

"I want Kuali Merah Putih to be known not only as a cooking event. I want people to see it as a symbol of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and the spirit of sharing that forms part of the Indonesian national identity." (Informant BS-1)

This view was reinforced by a community leader involved in the program: *"When I hear the name Kuali Merah Putih, I think not only about food but also about a sense of unity. The name makes this sharing activity feel close to the community and reflects the spirit of nationalism."* (Informant TM-1)

One audience member expressed a similar perception: *"In my opinion, the name Kuali Merah Putih makes the content different from other cooking content because it carries a strong message of nationalism and social concern."* (Informant AU-4).

These findings indicate that the symbol *"Merah Putih"* functions as a communication device that expands the meaning of the content from a simple cooking activity into a representation of

national identity and social solidarity. From a communication perspective, symbols have the capacity to construct shared meanings and create emotional bonds between communicators and audiences (Mulyana, 2019). Therefore, the use of national symbols within the program’s identity not only strengthens content differentiation but also reinforces Bobon Santoso’s personal branding as a figure who connects culinary activities with social and national values.

B. Digital Communication Strategy Based on Peter Montoya’s Eight Principles of Personal Branding

When Peter Montoya’s eight principles of personal branding are used as an analytical framework, Bobon Santoso’s digital communication strategy demonstrates a highly consistent pattern. His focus on large-scale cooking content and social activities reflects the principle of specialization. He does not attempt to become a creator with an excessively broad theme but instead maintains a unique character that enables audiences to easily identify the channel.

Table 1. Summary of Video Content Patterns

Content Category (12 Videos)	Views & Likes Range	Dominant Communication Pattern	Personal Branding Meaning
Cooking Portions in Papua (5 Videos)	Thousands of 3–12 Million Views; 196–500 Thousand Likes	Food distribution and community interaction	Strengthens a generous and nationalist image
<i>Kuali Merah Putih</i> in Remote Areas (3 Videos)	1.1–6.5 Million Views; 30–110 Thousand Likes	Empathy and community closeness	Demonstrates concern for local communities
Free Food Distribution in Papua (2 Videos)	2.4–3.3 Million Views; 92–124 Thousand Likes	Emotional interaction with recipients	Builds personal-brand goodwill
Bobon Santoso Sharing with Papuan Communities (2 Videos)	1–3.6 Million Views; 41–90 Thousand Likes	Direct dialogue with residents	Strengthens emotional relationships

The content structure of “*Kuali Merah Putih*” is dominated by large-scale cooking activities, as shown in Table 1. Numerous views indicate that spectacular visuals are a major attraction for capturing audience attention. However, the findings reveal that visual spectacle is not the only factor that sustains audience attention. A social dimension also accompanies the content.

Because Bobon Santoso serves as the central figure in every activity, the principle of leadership is evident. He acts not only as a host but also manages the cooking process, coordinates food distribution, and organizes volunteers. Since he is directly involved in social activities carried out within the community, the leadership displayed reflects a participatory style. This form of participatory leadership increases the creator’s social legitimacy and enhances audience trust in digital communication contexts (Banerjee et al., 2025).

Bobon Santoso’s spontaneous, humorous, and energetic communication style reflects the principle of personality. He is often seen joking with others, using informal language, and displaying natural emotional expressions in various scenes. Audiences feel emotionally closer because this communication style creates a sense of authenticity.

C. Visual, Narrative, and Performative Elements in the Formation of Personal Branding

Bobon Santoso's personal branding through the "*Kuali Merah Putih*" content is shaped by the strong integration of visual, narrative, and performative elements that are consistently embedded in every video. It is not merely about culinary themes or social action. Even before watching the entire video, audiences can easily understand both the character of the content and Bobon Santoso's persona because these three components are interconnected and form a distinctive digital identity. Such visual and performative identities are particularly important in digital communication because social media operates according to the logic of rapid attention, where audiences decide what to watch based on visual and emotional impressions formed within the first few seconds (Abidin, 2021).

From an aesthetic perspective, "*Kuali Merah Putih*" is constructed through dramatic visual compositions, large-scale production, and striking colors. Cooking activities are conducted using giant cooking pots filled with large quantities of ingredients in almost every video. The scale of the cooking equipment, the volume of ingredients, and the large number of activities surrounding the cooking process are frequently captured through wide-shot techniques. This filming technique creates a sense of grandeur and amazement that inspires audience admiration. The giant cooking pot serves as the primary symbol of the channel's identity and is often positioned at the center of the frame. This symbol is further reinforced through the use of red and white colors, which directly refer to Indonesian national identity.



Figure 2. Cooking with a Giant Pot Together with the Community

Figure 2 demonstrates that the visual content is designed to combine amazement, social closeness, and entertainment. The giant cooking pot functions not only as cooking equipment but also as a symbol of strength, capability, and a large capacity for sharing. From the perspective of visual semiotics, enlarged objects are often used as hyperbolic signs to emphasize particular meanings. In this context, the giant pot symbolizes the "capacity to give" and the "ability to serve communities on a large scale." Consequently, the extraordinary visuals presented by Bobon Santoso carry deeper social meanings beyond mere entertainment.

Another dominant visual element is the use of thumbnails featuring contrasting colors, dramatic expressions, and images of food in large quantities. Bobon Santoso's face is often displayed with enthusiastic, surprised, or emotional expressions in hyperbolic thumbnail designs combined with oversized food imagery that fills the screen. Within the highly competitive YouTube algorithm, this visual approach functions as an initial attention trigger. In digital visual communication research, thumbnails are considered an "emotional gateway" because they influence audiences'

willingness to click on a video. Therefore, thumbnails in “*Kuali Merah Putih*” are not merely illustrations but a central component of the channel’s visual branding strategy.



Figure 3. Food Distribution to Communities in Papua

Figure 3 illustrates that the cooking process is not the emotional climax of the videos. Instead, the emotional peak occurs when food is distributed to community members. The happiness of aid recipients is frequently captured through close-up shots. By intensifying the emotional atmosphere, this visual technique allows audiences to feel involved in the experience. According to effective digital storytelling theory, narratives not only convey information but also generate emotions through visual and symbolic experiences (Couldry, 2023). Therefore, Bobon Santoso’s ability to connect spectacular visuals with social values that resonate emotionally with audiences is a key factor in the success of his storytelling.

Performative elements also play a crucial role in the construction of Bobon Santoso’s personal branding. In almost every video, his body language, facial expressions, speaking style, vocal intonation, and gestures form an important part of his digital communication strategy. He consistently appears energetic, speaks loudly, moves actively, and displays spontaneous emotional expressions. This performative style makes his identity appear natural rather than artificially constructed. According to the perspective of performative identity, digital identities are built through bodily actions and expressions that are repeatedly displayed to audiences (Cover, 2023).

In one scene, Bobon Santoso appears deeply moved and laughs loudly while distributing food to community members. Such expressions make audiences feel more confident that he is a genuine person who remains closely connected to society. According to Kim and Kim (2024), emotional authenticity on social media can increase audience engagement and loyalty toward digital creators. Moreover, Bobon Santoso’s performativity functions not only as entertainment but also as a mechanism for creating social meaning. His image as a “digital social worker” is constructed through active participation in large-scale cooking, expressions of fatigue combined with enthusiasm, and direct involvement in food distribution activities. Therefore, bodily performativity becomes an essential component in developing action-based personal branding.

D. Parasocial Relationships and Audience Loyalty

Bobon Santoso’s digital communication strategy has successfully established strong parasocial relationships with audiences. Parasocial relationships occur when audiences feel a personal connection with a media figure despite the absence of direct interaction. Such relationships are highly important in digital media because they help build trust and sustain personal branding.

Audiences do not merely consume content but also develop emotional connections with creators (Labrecque, 2014).

Analysis of audience comments indicates that many viewers respond to Bobon Santoso in emotional and personal ways. Audiences not only praise the program but also pray for his well-being, support his health, and express pride in his social actions. Comments such as “Stay healthy, Bang Bobon,” “Your content always makes me emotional,” and “I hope you become even more successful and continue sharing” suggest that audiences view him as a socially engaged figure rather than merely a YouTuber.

Over the years, Bobon Santoso has consistently presented himself as someone who is genuinely present for communities rather than simply performing for digital entertainment purposes. Many “*Kuali Merah Putih*” videos show him speaking spontaneously with residents, helping with the cooking process, and personally distributing food. This physical and emotional involvement enhances audience perceptions of social closeness. Viewers feel that they are not merely watching a content creator but following the journey of someone who genuinely cares about society. Consistent emotional involvement of this kind increases perceptions of authenticity and encourages audiences to form personal relationships with media figures in digital communication contexts (Lacap et al., 2024).

Table 2. Patterns of Audience Parasocial Relationships with Bobon Santoso

Audience Interaction Pattern	Example Comment	Communication Meaning
Emotional Support	'Stay healthy, Bang Bobon'	Emotional closeness
Personal Identification	'Bang Bobon is my inspiration'	Audience self-identification
Viewer Loyalty	'Always waiting for content like this'	Audience retention
Social Appreciation	'This content is very beneficial'	Goodwill and social legitimacy
Emotional Empathy	'I was moved seeing the community happy'	Emotional engagement
Audience Interaction Pattern	Example Comment	Communication Meaning

Based on Table 2, the relationship between Bobon Santoso and his audience has developed into a deep emotional bond rather than a simple creator-viewer relationship. Audiences not only enjoy the content as entertainment but also feel connected to the social values consistently conveyed through the “*Kuali Merah Putih*” program. These parasocial relationships are reflected in responses demonstrating closeness, admiration, and personal support for Bobon Santoso. Some audience members expressed comments such as “Stay healthy, Bang Bobon,” “Bang Bobon is my inspiration,” and “I was moved seeing the community happy.” These comments indicate that audiences are not merely evaluating content quality but are forming emotional attachments to both the creator and the humanitarian values he represents.

Such parasocial relationships play an important role in digital communication because they foster long-term audience loyalty toward a personal brand. Bobon Santoso’s warm, friendly, and informal communication style further strengthens these relationships. In many videos, he frequently uses collective expressions such as “friends,” “my brothers and sisters,” and “let’s eat together today.” The use of collective language reduces psychological distance between creator and audience and creates a perception of social closeness. According to Social Presence Theory, interpersonal language increases feelings of closeness and social presence in digital communication.

Audience loyalty is also evident in the high level of enthusiasm displayed in the comment section. Many viewers actively await new episodes of the *"Kuali Merah Putih"* series and regard the content as not only entertaining but also socially inspiring. This is reflected in comments such as "I always wait for content like this" and "This content is incredibly meaningful." Such comments indicate that audiences perceive *"Kuali Merah Putih"* as content that provides value beyond entertainment by offering inspiration, social concern, and positive motivation.

Overall, these findings indicate that Bobon Santoso's personal branding has evolved beyond mere popularity and has successfully established a digital community grounded in social values, trust, and emotional closeness. The strength of his personal branding stems not only from appealing visuals and spectacular large-scale cooking activities but also from his ability to build enduring emotional relationships with audiences. Thus, Bobon Santoso's digital communication strategy can be understood as a combination of strong visual appeal, emotionally resonant social narratives, performative authenticity, and sustained emotional relationships cultivated through digital interaction with audiences.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Bobon Santoso's personal branding is not constructed through a single communication element but through the integration of visual identity, symbolic communication, social storytelling, performative authenticity, and audience engagement. This finding reinforces Digital Communication Theory, which conceptualizes digital communication as an interactive, participatory, and multidirectional process involving the convergence of technological platforms, content creators, and audiences in the co-construction of meaning (Bayer et al., 2022; Van Dijck et al., 2021; Waisbord, 2023). Within the YouTube environment, Bobon Santoso does not merely disseminate information but continuously constructs symbolic meanings through audiovisual content that encourages audience participation and emotional engagement.

The first finding indicates that visual identity and nationalist symbolism function as strategic resources in strengthening personal branding. The consistent use of dramatic facial expressions, giant food portions, oversized cooking equipment, and distinctive thumbnail designs creates a recognizable visual identity that allows audiences to immediately identify Bobon Santoso's content even before viewing the title or channel name. This finding supports Personal Branding Theory, which emphasizes that effective personal branding requires visibility, differentiation, consistency, and recognizability across communication channels (Gorbatov et al., 2021; Vencute et al., 2024). The findings also align with Montoya and Vandehey's perspective that successful personal brands are built through repeated exposure to distinctive visual symbols that facilitate audience recognition. The recurring appearance of giant cooking activities and spectacular food production therefore serves not only as visual entertainment but also as a strategic branding mechanism that reinforces Bobon Santoso's identity within a highly competitive digital environment.

The findings further reveal that the *"Kuali Merah Putih"* label extends the meaning of the content beyond culinary activities by incorporating nationalism and social solidarity into the creator's identity. The use of the term "Merah Putih" consistently evokes associations with Indonesian national identity, collective values, unity, and social responsibility. This finding expands existing personal branding literature, which has predominantly focused on professional competence, expertise, popularity, and self-promotion (Labrecque et al., 2011). In contrast, the present study demonstrates that personal branding can also be constructed through symbolic representations of

social and national values. From the perspective of Digital Communication Theory, symbols function as communicative resources that shape audience interpretations and facilitate shared meaning-making processes within digital environments (Van Dijck et al., 2021; Waisbord, 2023). Consequently, nationalism becomes an integral component of Bobon Santoso's digital identity and contributes to strengthening emotional attachment between the creator and the audience.

The second finding highlights the strategic integration of visual, narrative, and performative elements in shaping personal branding. The analysis shows that visual spectacle alone is insufficient to sustain audience attention. Instead, visual attraction is continuously reinforced through social narratives emphasizing sharing, empathy, solidarity, and community welfare. The findings indicate that large-scale cooking activities serve as entry points that attract audience attention, whereas emotional storytelling and social action sustain audience engagement. This finding supports Digital Communication Theory, which argues that digital content increasingly relies on the integration of visual, symbolic, and narrative components to facilitate meaning construction and audience participation (Bayer et al., 2022; Waisbord, 2023). The results also support Couldry's (2023) argument that effective digital storytelling creates emotional experiences that allow audiences to connect with broader social meanings rather than merely consuming information.

Another important finding concerns the role of performative authenticity in strengthening personal branding. Throughout the videos, Bobon Santoso consistently presents himself as energetic, spontaneous, approachable, humorous, and directly involved in community activities. These performative characteristics create the impression of authenticity and sincerity, which increases audience trust and emotional connection. This finding is consistent with Audrezet et al. (2020), who argue that perceived authenticity is a critical determinant of trust formation in digital creator culture. The findings further support Impression Management Theory within the broader framework of Personal Branding Theory, which suggests that individuals strategically construct public identities through consistent and credible self-presentation (Gorbatov et al., 2021; Venciute et al., 2024). However, the present findings indicate that authenticity is not achieved solely through verbal communication but also through visible actions, emotional expressions, and direct participation in social activities. Therefore, authenticity emerges as a performative process that is continuously reinforced through repeated communication practices.

The third finding demonstrates that Bobon Santoso's communication strategy successfully generates strong parasocial relationships and audience loyalty. Audience comments reveal emotional support, personal identification, admiration, inspiration, and sustained engagement with the content. These findings suggest that audiences do not merely consume content but develop emotional attachments to the creator and the values he represents. This finding supports Labrecque (2014), who argues that parasocial interaction plays a significant role in strengthening audience relationships and brand attachment in social media environments. Through repeated exposure to social narratives, authentic performances, and community-oriented actions, audiences perceive Bobon Santoso as a relatable and trustworthy figure rather than merely a digital entertainer.

The emergence of parasocial relationships further confirms the participatory nature of digital communication. According to Digital Communication Theory, communication outcomes are increasingly shaped by audience interaction and engagement rather than by one-way message delivery (Bayer et al., 2022; Waisbord, 2023). In the context of "*Kuali Merah Putih*," audience comments, expressions of emotional support, and repeated viewing behavior contribute to reinforcing Bobon Santoso's personal branding. These interactions indicate that personal branding

is not constructed solely by creators but is co-created through continuous interactions between creators and audiences within digital platforms.

The findings also contribute theoretically by integrating Digital Communication Theory and Personal Branding Theory. Previous studies often examine personal branding primarily from the perspective of self-presentation and reputation management. The present study demonstrates that personal branding in digital environments operates as a multidimensional communication process involving visual symbolism, emotional storytelling, performative authenticity, nationalism, social values, and audience participation. Consequently, personal branding should be understood not merely as image management but as a dynamic process of identity communication that is continuously negotiated and reinforced through digital interactions.

Overall, the findings suggest that the success of Bobon Santoso's personal branding is driven by the strategic combination of distinctive visual identity, nationalist symbolism, social storytelling, authentic performance, and audience engagement. These elements collectively create a recognizable, credible, emotionally resonant, and socially meaningful identity that extends beyond culinary content and positions Bobon Santoso as a digital creator associated with generosity, social concern, and national solidarity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Bobon Santoso's personal branding in the "*Kuali Merah Putih*" YouTube content series is constructed through the consistent integration of visual identity, nationalist symbolism, social storytelling, performative authenticity, and audience engagement. The digital communication strategy employed not only functions to attract audience attention through spectacular large-scale cooking visuals but also creates deeper meaning through narratives of sharing, social concern, solidarity, and togetherness. The repeated use of visual elements, including giant cooking pots, signature facial expressions, contrasting colors, and the "*Merah Putih*" symbol, successfully creates strong differentiation, making Bobon Santoso easily recognizable to audiences.

The study also demonstrates that the "*Merah Putih*" symbol serves a strategic function in expanding the meaning of the content beyond culinary activities to represent nationalism, mutual cooperation, and social responsibility. As a result, Bobon Santoso's personal branding is not built solely around his identity as a culinary content creator but also around his role as a figure who represents social values and national identity. These findings suggest that social values and national symbols can serve as effective sources of differentiation in the development of personal branding within digital media environments.

Furthermore, the success of Bobon Santoso's personal branding is strongly influenced by his ability to integrate visual, narrative, and performative elements simultaneously. Spectacular visuals function as an initial attention trigger, while social storytelling centered on food sharing and direct engagement with communities helps sustain audience involvement. At the same time, his spontaneous, energetic, humble, and community-oriented communication style creates a perception of authenticity that strengthens both credibility and audience trust.

The findings also reveal that Bobon Santoso's digital communication strategy successfully fosters strong parasocial relationships with audiences. These relationships are reflected in the emergence of emotional support, personal identification, viewer loyalty, empathy, and social appreciation expressed through audience comments. Viewers do not merely consume the content as entertainment; they develop emotional attachments to both Bobon Santoso and the humanitarian values he consistently communicates. This finding indicates that effective personal branding in digital environments depends not only on visibility or popularity but also on the ability to establish enduring emotional connections with audiences.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the integration of Digital Communication Theory and Personal Branding Theory by demonstrating that personal branding in digital media is a multidimensional communication process involving visual symbolism, emotional storytelling, performative authenticity, social values, nationalism, and audience participation. Personal branding should therefore not be understood merely as image management or self-promotion but as an ongoing process of identity communication that is continuously constructed, negotiated, and reinforced through digital interactions between creators and audiences. Consequently, the success of Bobon Santoso's personal branding stems from a strategic combination of identity consistency, meaningful social values, authentic actions, and sustained audience engagement, ultimately positioning him as a digital creator strongly associated with social concern, generosity, and national solidarity.

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