The Power of Image: How Coltura Builds Its Personal Brand in Start-Up Fashion

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Abstract. *In the digital age, personal branding is built through social media. Many individuals utilize social media to create connections, establish a strong personal image, and then build businesses by leveraging personal branding as a foundation for brand development. Taking the example of Aqlima Naili Salsabila's personal branding as the founder of Coltura.id, which has influenced the image and growth of the local woven fashion brand. Using a qualitative descriptive method and an exploratory approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations at the Coltura boutique and on social media, as well as literature reviews. The findings revealed that authenticity, storytelling, connections, and effective digital collaboration strengthen consumer trust and engagement. A strong personal brand has been proven to directly impact the success of product branding.*

Keywords: Personal branding, Image, Media sosial, Start-up, Coltura.id

I.   INTRODUCTION

Datareportal, (2025) reports that, globally, internet users at the beginning of 2024 reached 5.56 billion people worldwide, equivalent to 67.9% of the total world population (8.20 billion people) (World Population Review, 2025) Additionally, the data shows the growth of global social media usage, with active users reaching 5.24 billion, equivalent to 63.9% of the world's total population. This figure indicates that 94.2% of internet users use social media. On average, global internet users spend 6 hours and 38 minutes online each day. The large number of internet users and the time spent online indicate that the internet has become an integral part of daily activities and the lives of most people worldwide, and also shows that most people are connected through the virtual world.

The shift in global communication trends from localized communication (pre-internet era) to more global communication access (post-internet era) has also led to changes in the ways and tools humans use to present themselves (Cullen et al., 2024). From relying on face-to-face interactions and conventional methods such as advertising, promotions through events, newspapers, radio, and television, as well as building connections through direct networks, people now have broader and more efficient options using social media to showcase their skills, personality, and the products they offer. The use of social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn, and many other evolving social media platforms. One advantage is that anyone can build their personal brand through these platforms, which are open to everyone and all skill levels.

In the digital age, information is easily accessible and creates trends that spread across a country and even the world. Social media plays a role in the spread of global trends in lifestyle, music, fashion, food, living standards, and even issues and perspectives (Wike et al., 2022) Amidst the flood of uniform information in the digital age, personal branding has become a key element that distinguishes one person from another. It is not merely a way of presenting oneself, but a representation of values, uniqueness, and identity that makes a person appear authentic and valuable in the eyes of the public (Arrunda, 2019). Despite the increasingly interconnected world with similar trends, individual uniqueness remains the primary value that distinguishes one person from another.

Personal branding has a significant influence and is more important than corporate branding (Raihan, 2022). Personal branding creates a positive self-image in the public eye (Kanasan & Rahman, 2024), which can also build consumer trust in the products offered based on the trust in someone's branding (Pratondo & Opier, 2024).

Customers trust influencer recommendations more than company advertisements, which can enhance brand credibility and purchase intent compared to conventional company advertising methods (Celestin, 2024). This indicates that people focus more on someone they recognize, follow, and admire, and those who possess honesty or provide reviews based on real experiences with authentic figures, strong character, and values.

In the digital age, many people build their personal brand using digital platforms, which then impacts the popularity of their business brand. James Stephen Donaldson, a YouTuber with over 350 million subscribers on his @MrBeast account as of February 2025. His success as a YouTuber has positively impacted his business, as YouTube also serves as a promotional platform between videos. Among the businesses owned by MrBeast are MrBeast Burger, Feastables, and the latest collaboration with Logan Paul, Lunchly (Piccotti, 2025).

Rachel Venya Roland, owner of the Instagram account @rachelvennya with 8.3 million followers as of February 2025, began her career as a makeup artist (MUA) and leveraged social media to build her personal brand. She uses her popularity to post images and videos related to her work as an influencer and entrepreneur, as well as her personal life. Some of her businesses include Mahika Kids, Slim Beauty Products, Eudaimonia Villa & Studio, and Raven is Odd (Ananda & Matondang, 2024).

Arief Muhammad, nicknamed "The King of YouTube" and "The King of Trending" by his viewers. (Amalia, 2020) The owner of the YouTube account @ariefmuhammaddd, which had 3.2 million subscribers in February 2025. His popularity has positively impacted the brand image of his businesses, including Billionaire's Project, Prepp Studio, Hello Nuku, Ternak Kostan, Well Planned, Grebe, RM Padang Payakumbuh, Baso Aci Akang, Cakekinian, and Elfbar distributor (Laras, 2023).

There are many more individuals who have successfully built personal branding that impacts their business image. They utilize social media as a platform to showcase who they are, their interests, skills, character, and products. Many successful individuals have built personal branding through social media across various professions, including artists, influencers, entrepreneurs, content creators, comedians, and even construction workers. This presents an opportunity to expand connections and gain the trust of the general public, which in turn impacts one's career and business.

Aqlima Naili Salsabila, the founder of Coltura.id, a young entrepreneur, received the Santripreneur Award in 2019. Additionally, she is an influencer who emphasizes the importance of personal branding through seminars and social forums. The owner of the Instagram account @aqlima.ns uses social media to post images and videos related to her activities as an influencer and entrepreneur, as well as her personal life. This approach also promotes her business to potential customers (followers and non-followers).

The use of social media is highly important when applied to local businesses, especially those that empower and promote local culture. For example, Coltura.id, a boutique specializing in traditional woven fabrics from Central Java. Social media is used as a promotional tool that can also serve as an educational platform for the general public, particularly the younger generation, to recognize that this nation also possesses a culture that is no less impressive, a culture that can keep pace with trends and produce globally competitive products. An effort made by Coltura.id and its founder to build personal branding through social media. By using a young generation model, trendy designs, and campaigns in every post made by Aqlima Naili Salsabila on her Instagram account, always wearing woven fabrics, which simultaneously serves as a promotional tool while building personal branding. Personal branding of oneself while also building the corporate brand. How effective is this approach, and does it have a significant impact on Coltura.id's corporate brand?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Start-Up

A start-up is a newly established company that is in the early stages of operation and has an innovative business model with high growth potential in the future (Bankman & Gilson, 1999). In general, start-ups have limited resources such as funds, networks, and market influence, so branding strategies are an important element in building identity and public trust (Carter et al., 1996).

Personal Branding

Personal branding is a strategic process of shaping the identity and public perception of a particular individual or

entity. Personal branding aims to differentiate oneself from competitors and build an authentic image (Rangarajan et al., 2018). In the business world, particularly in the fashion industry, personal branding is not merely an identity or communication tool but also the foundation for creating an emotional connection with consumers. According to (Labrecque et al., 2011), he emphasizes that personal branding can create competitive value, especially for startups that are still building their market reputation.

Image

Images play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions because they can convey messages quickly, emotionally, and effectively (Hamid & Ikbal, n.d.) According to Maamarah & Supramono, (2016) images in the context of fashion are not only useful for aesthetics but can also represent values, lifestyles, and identities.

The power of image has been proven to increase brand recall, create emotional attachment, and strengthen brand positioning in the minds of consumers (Miati, 2020). This is particularly relevant for brands such as Coltura, which is trying to stand out in the competitive fashion market by promoting a unique raw material, namely woven fabric.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) is a theory that states that an organization's competitive advantage comes from its internal resources, not just external factors (Peng, 2001). In the fashion industry, especially for start-up brands like Coltura, personal branding plays a crucial role in the internal strength that shapes the brand image and attracts early consumers.

According to Talaja (2012), for a resource to create sustainable competitive advantage, it must meet the VRIN criteria: Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable. In the context of a start-up business, resources such as reputation, unique skills, and the founder's personal branding can become highly valuable intangible assets.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach complemented by exploratory methods, aimed at delivering in-depth, nuanced insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Tilaar et al., 2022). Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a "straightforward descriptive summary" of an event or experience in everyday language, staying close to participants' words and contexts rather than generating high-level theoretical constructs (Colorafi & Evans, 2016).

Data collection was carried out using three primary methods: first, in-depth interviews with two key informants Aqlima, owner of Coltura, and her personal assistant, Putri were conducted in a semi-structured format to allow open-ended exploration of their experiences and strategies. Secondly, direct observation took place both at Coltura's offline store in Dusun VI, Jaten, Karanganyar, and on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. This dual observation strategy aligns with previous qualitative studies on personal branding via social media, which emphasize contextual behaviors beyond interview settings . Thirdly, a literature review was undertaken to frame the study in existing theory and empirical evidence concerning personal branding, brand image, and purchase intention within the past decade (Sunjaya et al., 2024).

The research locus was Coltura's boutique in Dusun VI, Jaten, Karanganyar the region's sole tenun boutique making it a distinctive cultural and commercial site for studying personal branding within the traditional weaving market. This setting enables contextual understanding of how personal branding operates in a niche, heritage-based small business.

Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic coding, identifying major themes and narrative patterns related to personal branding's role in shaping brand perception and sales (Macalik, 2023). This process involved iterative reading of interview transcripts, observational notes, and social media artifacts to generate categories enabling a holistic interpretation consistent with interpretive thematic analyses found across contemporary qualitative branding research (Naeem et al., 2023).

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that personal branding at Coltura is rooted in authenticity and cultural representation,

which aligns with recent research emphasizing that authenticity is a central element of effective personal branding, enhancing brand credibility and emotional resonance (Lückenbach et al., 2023). Aqlima deliberately aligns her personal identity with the cultural and craft values of Coltura, ensuring consistency across both offline and online platforms a key principle in effective personal branding that enhances clarity, favorability, and brand attachment . Moreover, this approach transcends mere self-promotion; personal branding is used as a strategic vehicle to convey core values, foster trust, and broaden business connections reflecting how authenticity-driven identity work enhances stakeholder legitimacy and venture success (Merriënboer et al., 2023).

One distinctive strength is Coltura's use of both hard selling and soft selling through collaborations, as mentioned in the interview: *"Keunikannya tidak hanya hard selling tetapi juga soft selling yang diterapkan dalam kolaborasi-kolaborasinya..."* (Aqlima, 23/01/2025). This approach reflects the principles of emotional branding and storytelling marketing, which serve to deepen consumer engagement and enhance brand equity (Dave et al., 2025; Chang, 2025)

Moreover, Aqlima's network-building has significantly amplified Coltura's visibility. Her participation in public events and collaborations with governmental and institutional partners such as Dinas Pariwisata Karanganyar and organizations like the UN demonstrates how founder-driven personal branding can effectively extend business reach. Recent research supports this, showing that personal branding is not created in isolation but emerges through complex social relationships with diverse stakeholders, enhancing brand legitimacy and stakeholder engagement in small firms (Dumont & Ots, 2020). In particular, founders who actively collaborate with gatekeepers and institutional partners build a co-created brand identity, which plays a vital role in brand expansion and recognition (Venciute et al., 2024)

Another insight is the use of social media for relatability. As Putri noted, showcasing the process, not just the outcome, enhances trust: *"...konten-konten sekarang ini tidak hanya menampilkan output namun juga prosesnya..."* (Putri, 23/01/2025). This aligns with recent findings that transparent brand communication, particularly sharing production processes and raw stories, significantly enhances perceived authenticity and trust, ultimately driving consumer engagement (Yang & Battocchio, 2021).

Despite Coltura's achievements, challenges remain. The generational gap between the millennial founder and Gen Z audience requires constant adaptation. Aqlima needs to further integrate Gen Z preferences into her digital strategies, as suggested by the assistant: *"...personal branding mba Aqlima itu tidak seefektif company brandingnya"* (Putri, 23/01/2025).

Nonetheless, Coltura's personal branding positively impacts sales and outreach, as evidenced by new customers gained after public engagements. These findings confirm the value of founder-driven branding in early-stage businesses, where the founder's identity significantly shapes brand recognition and stakeholder relationships (Astner & Gaddefors, 2024). Moreover, personal branding not only affects the individual and the company but also creates opportunities for the broader ecosystem—including team members and collaborators—who benefit from increased exposure and extended networks.

Cari gambar/grafis yang menunjukan bahwa personal branding Aqlima lebih kuat dari branding coltura

Perkuat model personal branding Aqlima sebagai santripreneur (ini utnuk memperkuat Ekonomi Syariahnya dalam paper ini)

Bagaimana coltura bisa disebut sebagai start up? Buatkan analisis dan kritiknya

Brand image seperti apa yang dilakukan oleh coltura? Buatkan analisis krititisnya

V. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the strategic role of personal branding, particularly when grounded in authenticity and cultural identity, in shaping the success of start-up businesses. Through the case of Coltura, it becomes evident that the founder's personal image—when aligned with the brand's values and consistently communicated—can significantly enhance visibility, trust, and brand credibility. Aqlima's integration of storytelling, cultural representation, and relationship-building has not only strengthened her individual identity but also reinforced Coltura's positioning within a competitive creative market. The brand's use of both soft and hard selling strategies, along with strategic collaborations and transparent engagement on social media, demonstrates the potential of founder-driven branding to influence consumer connection and market growth.

However, this research is not without limitations. As a single case study focusing on a specific brand and founder, the findings may not be fully generalizable across industries or contexts. Future research could benefit from comparative studies involving multiple founders or creative SMEs in different cultural settings. Nevertheless, the insights drawn from Coltura offer practical implications for entrepreneurs and brand strategists, especially in early-stage ventures, highlighting the need to invest in personal branding as an integral part of brand development. This study also encourages policy makers and local institutions to support creative entrepreneurs by fostering opportunities for strategic collaboration and visibility at broader levels.

VI.   ACKNOWLEDGMENT

VII.   REFERENCES

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