



THE POPULAR IMAGE OF THE YOUNG GENERATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA (A Comparative Study of Jerome Polin and Vina Mauliana's Self- Branding on Instagram)

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how two young public figures, Jerome Polin and Vina Mauliana, represent themselves and construct personal branding through Instagram. Employing a document study approach and critical discourse analysis of selected posts from 2023 to 2024, this research explores how both figures build their digital identities as popular personalities. Drawing on Erving Goffman's theory of self-presentation, Stuart Hall's concept of representation, and the framework of personal branding, the study finds that both individuals utilize social media not only to share knowledge and motivation, but also to construct a public persona that is inspirational, professional, and widely relatable. The analysis reveals that Jerome projects a productive and global intellectual image through an educational-entertainment communication style, while Vina presents a reflective and spiritual persona using an emotional and personal narrative approach. The comparison of these representational strategies demonstrates that young people are capable of constructing diverse yet consistent self-branding via social media, depending on the personal values they emphasize. These findings affirm that digital identity in the social media era is not a fixed entity, but rather a symbolic construction consciously shaped through online visual and verbal interactions.

Keywords: Social media, Self-branding, Self-representation, Generation Z, Jerome Polin, Vina Mauliana.

A. Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of the lives of Indonesian youth, particularly among the Millennial (Generation Y) and Generation Z cohorts. The emergence of this communication medium has transformed the way individuals



construct and represent their identities within digital spaces. According to the 2024 report by We Are Social and Kepios (Datareportal, 2024; Statista, 2024), there are over 139 million active social media users in Indonesia, with the majority falling within the 18–30 age range. This phenomenon reflects that social media functions not only as a communication tool but also as a platform for self-expression, image building, and personal career development.

Given the high level of activity among young people on social media, these platforms function not only as spaces for interaction but also as "stages" where users consciously construct their self-identities. Particularly for the younger generation, who have grown up alongside technology, they exhibit strong adaptive characteristics toward digital tools (digital natives), critical awareness of social issues, and a strong drive to present unique and socially relevant self-images (Buckingham, 2008; Prensky, 2001). The process of shaping a digital persona through strategically crafted narratives, visuals, and messages is known as self-branding.

Self-branding, or personal branding, can be understood as the way individuals form a positive and consistent self-image through visual appearance, speech style, and displayed values to achieve social or professional goals (Montoya, 2002). Interestingly, among young people, self-branding goes beyond aesthetics or mere entertainment; many actively showcase educational values, spirituality, productivity, and intellectualism as integral parts of their digital identity. Figures such as Jerome Polin (born 1998), an influencer with a higher education background and educational content, represent Generation Z, while Vina Mauliana (born 1994), a late Millennial, is a young motivator known for her inspirational narrative approach. Both are selected in this study because they have successfully cultivated popular social media images (Junaidi & Azeharie, 2021). Their examples illustrate how self-branding has shifted from lifestyle visualization to a more meaningful form of "value branding," reflecting broader behavioral trends among youth in the digital realm. (Mujianto et al., 2021)

Theoretically, this phenomenon, driven by digital media transformation, is closely linked to Erving Goffman's (2016) theory of self-presentation. Goffman conceptualizes social life as a theatrical performance where individuals manage impressions in interactions with audiences. In the context of social media, the digital space functions as a "front stage" where users consciously choose how they wish to be perceived by the public. Analyzing captions, photos, bios, and communication styles employed by social media personalities like Jerome Polin and Vina Mauliana reveals carefully constructed self-representations aimed at building credible, inspiring, and appealing social images. (Papacharissi, 2010)

Furthermore, Stuart Hall's (2013) theory of representation provides a crucial framework for understanding how identities are constructed through media.

Representation is not merely a reflection of reality but a process of meaning production influenced by social, cultural, and power contexts. In this regard, the image of "intelligent, productive, and popular youth" constructed by figures like Jerome and Vina is not simply a mirror but a symbolic construction conveying particular social messages. (Rahayu & Marka, 2024) Their digital identities function not only as personal portrayals but also as symbols of values highly regarded in contemporary society: hard work, education, success, and personal uniqueness.

Previous studies have addressed similar issues from various perspectives. For instance, research by Salma, Nursanti, and Utamidewi (Salma et al., 2024) examined how university students use LinkedIn to build strong professional images focusing on career advancement, networking, and personal branding strategies. Meanwhile, Nur Aini and Najib (Nur Aini, 2021) explored the religious aspirations of Muslim influencers on Instagram, highlighting how symbolic representations of hijrah are communicated in online content narratives. However, there remains a paucity of research specifically analyzing how the "intellectual yet popular" image is constructed by two productive-educational young Indonesian figures like Jerome and Vina on visually oriented social media platforms such as Instagram, employing distinct but equally positive and inspiring branding approaches.

This study aims to fill this gap in digital communication scholarship. It will not only address *self-branding* as a digital communication strategy but also dissect how the combination of intellectual and popular values is consciously constructed by these two young figures to form credible and inspiring digital identities. Employing discourse analysis of social media documents (captions, bios, visuals, hashtags), this research will uncover patterns of self-representation crafted by these young personalities, reflecting the cultural dynamics of media among Indonesian youth. (Marwick & Boyd, 2011)

Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to investigate how Jerome Polin and Vina Mauliana develop their self-branding as intellectual-popular figures on social media, particularly on Instagram. Through discourse analysis of their digital content, the study seeks to answer how their self-representation strategies are constructed and what meanings such digital identities hold within the cultural communication landscape of Indonesian youth. The urgency of this research lies in its contribution to enriching digital communication studies in Indonesia, especially in understanding the dynamic practices of self-representation and personal imaging in visual social media, and how these shape social communication patterns among today's youth.

B. Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a document study method, which focuses on the analysis of Instagram social media content of two young Indonesian public figures, namely Jerome Polin and Vina Mauliana. Both were chosen because they are considered to represent two different personal branding styles, but they are equally

powerful. Jerome Polin is known as the representative of Generation Z with an educational and global image, while Vina Mauliana is a late millennial generation, appearing with a distinctive reflective and spiritual approach (Pujileksono, 2015). This method was chosen because it is suitable to examine how self-representation practices and personal branding strategies are constructed through digital content, especially through openly published texts and visuals. (Badara, 2012)

This research is interpretive, with the main focus on understanding the meaning formed by the subjects through their narratives, symbols, and communication styles. The main data was taken from @jeromepolin and @vinamauliana Instagram uploads, including captions, bios, images and short videos uploaded during January 2023 to December 2024. Content selection is carried out purposively only including uploads that are educational, reflective, or inspiring, and have high engagement and highlight personal branding or clear self-representation. However, in this study, the researcher also realized that there were limitations in accessing the entire archive of uploads from the subject's account as a whole due to the lack of a chronology-based structured search feature on the platform. Furthermore, the analysis technique used in this study is critical discourse analysis (AWK) (Lubis, 2021), as developed by Norman Fairclough (1997). This approach allows researchers to not only read the text on the surface, but also to trace the social and ideological context that shapes the production of meaning in the text.

The analysis is carried out through three main stages: first, text description, which includes observation of caption structure, content visualization, and the use of certain keywords or symbols; second, context interpretation, which is an effort to understand the relationship between the message conveyed and the socio-cultural background of social media users; and third, social explanation, which is the interpretation of the meaning of digital identity representation that appears in content as a reflection of the cultural dynamics of the young generation in Indonesia. With this approach, the research is expected to be able to uncover the patterns of self-representation strategically constructed by Jerome Polin and Vina Mauliana, as well as explain how intellectual-popular personal branding is constructed as a form of digital identity that is relevant in the communication landscape of the algorithmic era.

C. Finding and Discussion

This section presents the results of an analysis of Jerome Polin and Vina Mauliana's Instagram content in the period January 2023 to December 2024. Analysis was conducted on a number of selected uploads that reflect the practice of self-branding, especially in the context of self-image as a popular and inspirational intellectual figure. This research refers to a critical discourse analysis approach (Weissenrieder & Fairclough, 1997), by identifying the text, visual, and social context elements of each content analyzed. Then, it should also be noted that the data used in this study came from uploads that were selected representatively and relevant to the focus of the study. Although not all uploads

from @jeromepolin (2024) and @vinamauliana (2024) accounts were analyzed, the selection of content samples took into account the variations in communication styles, personal values, and branding strategies that consistently appeared in their respective social media profiles.

As explained in the previous section, the reason they were chosen was because they were included in the criteria as figures who have strong digital influence, and both present a distinctive form of self-branding among young social media users. Meanwhile, the difference in generational backgrounds actually enriches the study because it shows a variety of approaches in building digital identities that are popular in the contemporary social media space. The results of this study show that although both figures display an inspirational and productive image of a personal person, it turns out that the approach used is very different in terms of style, values, and communication strategies used and displayed.

1. Self-Representation on @jeromepolin Account

Jerome Polin is widely known as a young public figure who built his self-image through a combination of academic intelligence, a spirit of nationalism, and a lighthearted and entertaining style of communication. Based on the results of an analysis of uploads throughout 2023–2024, it appears that Jerome has consistently formed a digital identity as "a smart young person who remains humble and fun." For example, in several educational short video uploads (reels), Jerome conveys topics of mathematics, logic, and the Japanese language in a simple, lighthearted way, and interspersed with typical Gen Z humor.

Visually, Jerome tends to display a casual style of dress and cheerful expression, with a setting that often shows the context of studying, studying, or other positive activities. This strengthens his positioning as a relatable intellectual figure. In the bio section of the Instagram account, there is information on education and YouTube channels, which shows the strengthening of personal branding across platforms. Narratively, the captions used contain many motivational expressions and thought-provoking sentences, such as: "Learning is not a matter of being smart, but a matter of consistency." This representation shows how Jerome built an identity as an inspirational young man who remained down-to-earth, making himself a symbol of non-elitist success. Here are some samples of uploads from @jeromepolin accounts:

Table 1 Self-Representation on @jeromepolin Account

Yes	Post Date	Content Description	Analysis Caption	Visual Analysis	Branding Value	Meaning of Representation
1	January 2023	Japanese Learning Videos	Educational, Interactive, Light	Casual, Expressive	Intellectual, Fun	Citra 'Pintar Tapi Approachable'
2	March 2023	Stories of Lectures in Japan	Reflective, Inspirational	Campus, Close-Up Face	Productive, Disciplined	A Symbol of Success Through Education

3	June 2023	Collaboration with Public Figures	Brief Educational Insights	Formal-Casual, Status Symbol	Networking, Credibility	Symbol of Young Authority
4	August 2023	Mathematics in everyday life	Funny, Applicative, Light	Public Location, Casual Style	Street-Smart	Education in Everyday Life
5	January 2024	Jerome Speaks at International Forum	Proud and Reflective, Narrative of Global Contribution	Formal Stage, Expression of Confidence	Global Intellectuals, Outstanding Indonesian Youth	Global Competitive Youth
6	May 2024	Throwback to the Struggle to Learn Mathematics	Personal, Remembering Difficult Times, Inspiring	Old Photos, Nostalgia Tone	Humble, True Learner	A Long Journey to Shape Yourself
7	October 2024	Q&A With Followers About Learning Motivation	Interactive, Build Closeness, Educational	Casual Style, Enthusiastic Expression	Responsive, Community-Building	Interaction as an Identity Strategy
8	December 2024	Past Failure Stories	Motivating, Honest, Personal	Dark Tone, Serious Expression	Humble	Reflection on Failure as a Strength

Source: Jerome Polin's Instagram profile; <https://www.instagram.com/jeromepolin/>

Based on the table above, it can be seen that Jerome's content consistently displays the values of productivity, education, and motivation in a relaxed and entertaining communication style. An informative yet light caption strategy makes educational messages easy to digest, Teruma for young audiences. The dynamic and expressive visuals also strengthen the image of the intellectual figure that can be found digitally (accessible). These findings reinforce that Jerome applies an effective *edutainment* approach in building personal branding as an inspirational figure from Generation Z.

2. Self-Representation on @vinamauliana Account

Different from Jerome who carries intellectual branding through academic and entertainment approaches, Vina Mauliana displays the image of productive, independent, and spiritual young women, who are also loaded with messages of motivation for life. In the uploads studied, Vina often uses long captions containing self-reflection, inspirational messages, and narratives of personal life experiences. This shows that Vina's self-branding strategy focuses on an intimate storytelling approach, where the audience is invited into the reflective world of a young woman who grows mentally and spiritually.

The visuals displayed by Vina are also consistent with her branding tone: soft colors, calm poses, and expressions that are not excessive. This reinforces his image as a figure who is balanced between rationality, spirituality, and professionalism. In her Instagram bio, she displays words such as "content creator, storyteller, and lifelong

learner" which shows her personal positioning as a learner as well as an inspiration. From the perspective of Hall's representation (1997), Vina presents an identity construct that reflects the contemporary values of young Indonesian women: intelligent, religious, and productive without losing their emotional side. The depiction to review Vina's figure, can be reviewed based on a sample of uploads from @vinamauliana account:

Table 2 Self-Representation on @vinamauliana Account

Yes	Post Date	Content Description	Analysis Caption	Visual Analysis	Branding Value	Meaning of Representation
1	February 2023	Ungkapan Self-Worth	Reflective Narrative, Puitis	Pastel Color, Calm Face	Emotional Intelligence	Spiritual Depth & Self-Healing
2	April 2023	Morning Routine	Discipline, Soft Motivation	Flatlay, Productive Activity	Professional, Empowered	Modern Feminine Symbols & Focus
3	July 2023	Hijrah Story	Spiritual, Contemplative	Closed Clothing, Nuansa Syahdu	Religious-Modern	The Identity of Productive Muslim Women
4	October 2023	Learning From Failure	Light but deep	Background Netral	Mature, Reflective	Narrative Grows From Mistakes
5	March 2024	Talk about burnout and how to recover from it	Full of Empathy, Self-Compassion Narrative	Warm Tone, Honest Expression	Caring for Mental Health, Supporting	Strong and Self-Aware Women
6	June 2024	Educational Content Collaboration with Psychologists	Collaborative, Educational, Psychological Perspectives	Casual Style With Experts	Open to Knowledge, Professional	Synergy of Knowledge & Self-Worth
7	November 2024	A Message For Those Who Are 'Lost'	Dialogical, Empathetic Sentences	Close-Up + Soft Backsound	Supportive, Intimate	Emotions as a Tool for Self-Connection & Public
8	December 2024	Year-End Reflection and Journaling	Reflective, Poetic, Inspirational	Flatlay Jurnal, Vibe Cozy	Introspektif, Personal Growth	The Meaning of Life as a Process

Source: Vina Maulina's Instagram Profile; <https://www.instagram.com/vinamauliana/>

Based on the results of the content analysis in the table above, it can be seen that Vina Mauliana consistently carries a reflective and spiritual narrative as part of her self-branding strategy. Each upload not only contains a calm and curated visual aesthetic, but also shows the depth of the message in the caption that tends to be poetic and emotional. This approach builds strong emotional connections, especially with young female audiences who are looking for a safe and inspiring space on social media. Her soft, narrative, and touching communication style makes Vina a representative figure of self-branding based on spirituality and empathy, typical of the late Millennial generation who are active in the digital realm.

3. Analysis of Popular Image as a Digital Identity of the Younger Generation & Comparison of Representation Strategies of the Two Figures

From the results of the initial analysis, it can be concluded that both Jerome and Vina display different but complementary forms of self-branding in the construction of the digital identity of the younger generation. Jerome appears as a fun and accessible educational-popular figure, while Vina forms a more contemplative and inspirational persona. Both of them harness the power of social media as a tool to convey value, form communities, and strengthen their public personalities. This suggests that intellectual imagery is no longer limited to formal institutions, but is also creatively constructed through digital spaces that are visual, narrative, and emotional.

a. @jeromepolin- Popular and Relatable Intellectual Symbols

From Jerome's content analysis, it can be seen that there is consistency in building a self-image as a young figure who is intelligent, productive, but still fun. The use of lighthearted and humorous language in educational videos shows Jerome's efforts to bridge the impression of "smart child" with language that is easily accepted by Gen Z. This strategy shows the practice of impression management (Goffman, 2016) in the form of a balance between academic credibility and social closeness. His visuals often show study spaces, campuses, or collaborations with influential figures, indicating that Jerome consciously strengthened his positioning as a young intellectual connected to both formal and informal systems. This representation shows that education can be packaged as entertainment, making it part of the lifestyle and aspirations of young people.

b. @vinamauliana- Reflective and Spiritual Young Women's Image

On the contrary, Vina Mauliana emphasizes a personal branding style that is more contemplative and emotional. Through long captions with narrative and reflective tones, he builds his persona as a figure who is not only productively successful, but also emotionally and spiritually. The language used tends to be poetic and full of empathy, inviting the audience to enter a deeper inner space. The visuals of the content support the branding character: soft color tones, calm facial expressions, and simple yet meaningful visual compositions. This combination makes Vina a symbol of young women who are intelligent, self-aware, and relevant to the discourse of equality and modern religiosity. She manages to display an inclusive identity - spiritual but progressive, feminine but strong.

c. Comparison of Representation Strategies

In order to understand more deeply how the practice of self-representation and personal branding is constructed by each figure, it is necessary to map the comparative characteristics of uploads from @jeromepolin and @vinamauliana accounts. Although both are known as productive and inspirational young figures on social media, the communication approach used shows a different spectrum of expression. Jerome Polin

presents Generation Z with a dynamic edutainment style, while Vina Maulina, as part of the late Millennial generation, displays a more intimate reflective and spiritual approach. The table below summarizes the strategic differences and similarities in terms of tone captions, content visualization, branding value, and their style of interaction with the audience. To clarify the differences and similarities between these two public figures, here is a comparison table:

Table 3 Comparison of Representation Strategies

Aspects	Jerome Polin	Vina Mauliana
Tone Caption	Educational, Relaxed, Humorous	Reflective, Poetic, Spiritual
Visual Style	Cheerful, Expressive, Dynamic	Calm, Warm, Minimalist
Focus Branding	Intellectual, Productive, Global	Modern Spirituality, Self-Healing
Communication Strategy	Edutainment, Informative Storytelling	Storytelling Reflective, Self-Talk
Personal Values	Perseverance, Simplicity	Empathy, Self-Awareness
Relationship with the Audience	Spacious, Fun	Intimate, Profound
Tone Caption	Educational, Relaxed, Humorous	Reflective, Poetic, Spiritual

From the table, it can be seen that Jerome Polin tends to display intellectual imagery with a relaxed and entertaining feel, making educational content feel lighter and more accessible. On the contrary, Vina Mauliana highlights a reflective and emotional image, with content that tends to be personal and therapeutic. This difference shows the diversity of self-representation strategies in building self-branding among the younger generation, from an academic merit-based approach to an approach that prioritizes emotional maturity and spirituality. Nevertheless, both managed to create a consistent and authentic narrative, thus strengthening the public's perception of their digital identity as inspirational young figures.

4. Synthesis of Findings

The phenomenon of self-representation by Jerome Polin and Vina Mauliana also shows that platforms such as Instagram have become a new symbolic space for young people to shape and negotiate their social identities. In the context of digital culture, identity is not fixed or essential, but rather fluid and can be strategically constructed through visual selection, narrative, and online interaction. This is in line with Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) thinking about liquid modernity, where identity becomes something that is constantly reshaped through personal choices in an increasingly open space.

In addition, the personal branding practice carried out by Jerome and Vina shows a tendency to capitalize on self-image, where the narrative of productivity, intelligence, and spirituality is used to build personal attractiveness as well as symbolic selling value in

the digital space. In a critical media perspective, this can be read as a form of *commodification of self* – when an individual's identity becomes a product that is marketed to gain recognition, influence, and even monetization potential (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). But on the other hand, this condition also reflects the ability of the younger generation to use social media creatively and strategically, not only for existence, but also as a tool for empowerment and education.

Furthermore, the presence of these two figures reflects a shift in the way Indonesian people, especially young people, interpret success and example. If in the past intellectual symbols were often associated with formal institutions and elitist impressions, now intellectual images can be communicated with an inclusive, lighthearted, and even entertaining approach. This trend shows that social media has democratized access to public identity, where anyone can construct themselves as an influential figure, as long as it is able to combine content consistency, authentic value, and audience readability.

The difference in approach used by Jerome and Vina shows that self-representation and *self-branding* on social media is not a single process, but is very contextual and influenced by personal values and relationships that are intended to be built with the audience. Jerome builds a dynamic and inclusive intellectual image, while Vina presents an emotionally powerful reflective and therapeutic image. Both of them managed to create a digital persona that was consistent and had a strong resonance among their followers. This shows that the current generation not only uses social media for existence, but also as a medium for identity construction and meaningful value delivery. These findings are in line with and reinforce Goffman's theory of self-presentation and Stuart Hall's concept of representation that identity is constructive and dynamic in the digital socio-cultural space.

D. Conclusion

This research shows that social media, especially Instagram, has become an important space in the formation of the digital identity of the Young Generation in Indonesia. Through the analysis of the content of two young public figures, Jerome Polin and Vina Mauliana, it was found that the practice of self-branding was carried out strategically to build an image as a popular-intellectual figure. Although seen using different approaches – Jerome with an educational-entertainment style and Vina with a reflective-spiritual approach – both construct a credible, inspirational and close self-identity to young audiences.

Intellectual image in the digital context is no longer tied to formal symbols such as degrees or educational institutions alone, but is displayed through personal narratives, *relatable* communication styles, and consistency in conveying the values of productivity, learning, and a complete personality. These findings reinforce Goffman's (2016) theory

of *impression management*, as well as enrich the understanding of Hall's (2013) theory of representation, emphasizing that digital identity is the result of complex social and symbolic processes, not just self-reflection. Then, the juxtaposition of the two figures also shows that digital identity is not a singular form, but a reflection of personal values communicated through text, visuals, and digital interaction.

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