



# A Semiotic Study of Barista Personal Branding: Mikael Jasin on Instagram

Fitria Furi Rahayu<sup>1\*</sup>, Irfani Zukhrufillah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universitas Gajayana Malang, Indonesia, Email: [irfani.zukhrufillah@unigamalang.ac.id](mailto:irfani.zukhrufillah@unigamalang.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>.

\*Corresponding Author Email: [irfani.zukhrufillah@unigamalang.ac.id](mailto:irfani.zukhrufillah@unigamalang.ac.id)

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## Abstract

A barista is someone skilled in serving coffee; the barista world has given rise to new trends such as brewing and artisan coffee. Personal branding has become an important factor for baristas to create a self-image in the eyes of the general public. This research aims to understand the personal branding carried out by Mikael Jasin on Instagram. The research method is descriptive qualitative with an approach based on Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, comprising icon, index, and symbol. The results show that Mikael Jasin engages in a form of personal branding by displaying photos and videos featuring Icons such as coffee machines, espresso cups, and grinders. Indexes include captions and hashtags used in posts. The Symbol of the apron represents the identity of a barista.

**Keyword:** Barista, Trends, Personal Branding, Semiotic Analysis, Mikael Jasin.

## 1. Introduction

In the current digital era, the role of media as a communication tool is crucial for individuals to interact with one another, whether with other individuals or groups. There are several definitions of new media, one of which is explained by Denis McQuail. McQuail refers to new media as telematics media, which are electronic technological devices with different uses (Mass Communication Theory, 2011). Meanwhile, Martin Lister states that new media have several characteristics: digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked, and simulated. One new media platform widely used worldwide is social media (New Media: A Critical Introduction, 2009).

Social media is an online medium where users can easily participate, share, and create content, including blogs, social networks, wikis, forums, and virtual worlds. Social networks are sites where anyone can create personal web pages and connect with friends to share information and communicate. Major social networks include Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter. While traditional media uses print and broadcast media, social media uses the internet. Social media invites anyone interested to participate by contributing and providing open feedback, commenting, and sharing information quickly and limitlessly.

The existence of social media has influenced social life in society. Changes in social relationships or changes to equilibrium. Social relationships and all forms of changes within a society affect its social system, including the values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns among groups within the society. Positive social changes include ease of obtaining and conveying information and gaining social and economic benefits.

In its development, social media is no longer just a means for communication and expanding friendship networks. Today, social media is often used to build issues and various social discourses. Furthermore, this phenomenon has spawned many social media trends that can become significant opportunities for users if utilized optimally. One such opportunity is increasing sales of products or services and seeking various other benefits.

One social media platform currently popular is Instagram, which is used as a medium to show self-existence and build a social image in society. People compete in creating attractive Instagram content because content is one factor in building self-identity and a social image in society.

In this context, Personal Branding is the process of shaping public perception of aspects possessed by an individual, including personality, abilities, or values, and how these create a positive perception among the public, ultimately serving as a marketing tool by highlighting various skills and talents (Peter Montoya & Tim Vandehey, 2009).

Speaking of personal branding, a similar effort is made by Mikael Jasin, a barista who uses Instagram for personal branding. He is an Indonesian barista who placed second twice in the Australian Coffee in Good Spirits competition from 2015–2016 and ranked fourth in the world championship representing Indonesia at the World Barista Championship in Boston in 2019.

Being a barista not only requires knowledge about coffee but also good communication skills with customers and followers on social media. Instagram serves as a medium to build a connection with followers. This is important because it can attract a wider consumer base by leveraging the barista's expertise in coffee preparation. This can be studied using semiotics. Semiotics comes from the Greek word Semeion, meaning sign. Semiotics is the study of signs, their functions, and the production of meaning. Peirce's semiotic concept is a type of semiotics that studies signs closely related to logic. Logic is used by humans to reason through signs that appear around them. Signs can connect thoughts between people.

Peirce divides signs into three categories to provide meaning to an object: first, "Icon" is a physical object that resembles what it represents, characterized by similarity. Second, "Index" is a sign that indicates a natural relationship between the sign and

the signified, based on cause and effect or a sign directly referring to reality. Third, "Symbol" is a sign that shows the relationship between the signifier and the signified.

## 2. The Art of Research

The barista profession has become an attractive career choice for Generation Z, offering opportunities to express creativity, expertise, and interest in the rapidly growing coffee world. The increasing interest of young consumers in coffee and their enthusiasm for building the Coffee Shop industry in Indonesia also shows the development of branding for a barista.

Referring to the above explanation based on this data, the researcher is interested in examining how a barista highlights their activities as a coffee maker on social media. However, an interesting phenomenon to study is how a barista creates personal branding on Instagram using elements such as images, videos, and text to convey messages about their identity and brand.

Additionally, research on baristas has been conducted by Khairina Sophia Ranti (2020) from Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatra, Medan, titled "Analysis of Interpersonal Communication Between Baristas and Consumers in Creating Satisfaction: A Study on Baristas at Piacevole in Medan." Furthermore, previous research by Ivan Setiawan and Septia Winduwati (2020) from Tarumanegara University, titled "Interpersonal Communication Activities of Baristas in Maintaining the Image of Starbucks Chinatown," discusses how baristas communicate with consumers to maintain the company's image.

From both studies and the researcher's study, there are similarities, namely the use of a descriptive qualitative method, while the difference lies in the subjects used. It can be seen that the topic of baristas is something interesting to discuss. Therefore, this research is conducted with distinguishing factors: the Theory of Personal Branding, Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotic Theory, and the subject used in this research.

## 3. Method

This research falls under descriptive research with a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a method to explain and analyze phenomena, events, social dynamics, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of individuals or groups toward something. Qualitative research is a procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from observed people and behavior (Lexy J. Moleong). Descriptive research is a form of research aimed at describing or depicting existing phenomena, whether natural or human-made.

### Personal Branding

Personal branding, translated into Indonesian as personal brand, is an identity or characteristic attached to an individual. In the book *The Brand Called You*, personal branding is defined as how others view or perceive an individual; perceptions vary depending on perspective. It is also stated that personal branding can be controlled, meaning an individual can control the perception of themselves. By managing perception, one can achieve the desired imaging goals (Peter Montoya & Tim Vandehey, 2009).

Personal Branding can be divided into three main elements: (1) Personal brand is you, where "you" refers to the self-image of a personal brand formed through a design reflecting values, personality, skills, and qualities that make someone different from others. (2) Personal brand is promise, meaning personal branding itself is a promise. This promise is a responsibility undertaken to fulfill expectations arising from the personal brand formed by the individual. (3) Personal brand is relationship: A good personal brand will create a good relationship with clients; the more attributes accepted by clients and the higher the level of influence a person has, the better the relationship within that personal branding (Peter Montoya & Tim Vandehey, 2008).

### Semiotics

Semiotics, the study of signs to understand how they function and produce meaning (Tinarbuko, 2008). Semiotics is a branch of linguistics that deals with the science of language. The word "linguistics" comes from the Latin *lingua*, meaning language, and an expert in linguistics is called a linguist. Charles Sanders Peirce emphasized that signs are related to objects they resemble, their existence has a causal relationship with signs, or due to conventional ties with signs, comprising icons for similarity, indexes for cause-effect relationships, and symbols for conventional associations.

Charles S. Peirce divides signs into icons, indexes, and symbols: (1) Icon is a sign that resembles the form of the original object, also interpretable as a relationship between the sign and object based on similarity. (2) Index is a sign related to causal matters or cause and effect. The sign signifies the result of a message. (3) Symbol is a sign related to both the signifier and the signified, where something is symbolized through signs agreed upon by sign users as a general reference.



## **Barista**

A barista is someone skilled in serving coffee, such as espresso, in cafes and coffee shops, either professionally or as a hobby. A barista's tasks as a coffee maker include the brewing process and creating various coffee variations like espresso, cappuccino, and latte art. The reason for this research is to understand [How] Barista Mikael Jasin Creates Personal Branding on Instagram Using Images, Videos, and Text in Instagram Posts to Convey Messages About Their Identity or Brand.

## **4. Result**

Mikael Jasin is a professional barista born on February 12, 1990. He is also the founder of So So Good Coffee Company and CATUR Coffee Company. So So Good Coffee Company, established in 2020, operates in coffee consulting services, focusing on café development and barista training, as well as providing various coffee bean products and coffee equipment. Meanwhile, CATUR Coffee Company, founded in 2021, is a trading company that imports and exports coffee from local Indonesian farmers. The establishment of CATUR Coffee Company aims to advance the coffee industry and improve the welfare of coffee farmers and workers, with the main goal of supplying the best Indonesian coffee beans worldwide.

Mikael Jasin's career in the coffee world began in 2011. Jasin first started as a barista while studying at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Afterward, Mikael Jasin decided to return to Indonesia in 2017 and worked as a Coffee Quality & Marketing Manager at Common Grounds Coffee Roasters. Jasin also founded his own café called Omakafe in BSD, Tangerang. Jasin's career as a barista continued to rise as he deepened his knowledge about coffee and honed his skills in serving high-quality coffee.

In 2019, Mikael Jasin placed 4th in the World Barista Championship 2019 held in Boston, USA. Mikael presented three types of coffee beans: Panama Gesha from Finca Deborah, Ethiopia Guji 'Jasper' from Project Origin, and Longberry from North Sumatra. Mikael chose the theme "Purpose Driven Fermentation" for his presentation. These three coffee beans were processed using the Carbonic Maceration method to enhance the flavor profile of each coffee served. Mikael used Longberry beans, common in North Sumatra, to prove that the Carbonic Maceration theory can compete with other premium coffee beans. When he competed again in the World Barista Championship in 2021 in Milan, Mikael placed 7th.

At the World Barista Championship in Busan, South Korea, in 2024, Mikael Jasin achieved first place by serving his signature drink, Aji espresso, a type of coffee from Colombia. Additionally, Mikael Jasin also made espresso using Gesha coffee produced in Panama. With these two offerings, the judges were impressed by Mikael Jasin's unique drink creations during the final round.

## **Personal Branding of Barista Mikael Jasin on Instagram**

In this regard, Mikael Jasin, known for his expertise in coffee preparation and brewing techniques, has become one of the baristas inspiring coffee enthusiasts and fellow baristas. Through Instagram, with 91 thousand followers and 1,357 posts, Mikael Jasin captures moments from competitions, seminars, or workshops such as Toffin Masterclass, and regularly posts photos and videos while preparing coffee.

In branding techniques on Instagram, Mikael Jasin shows a significant increase in photos and videos. According to data obtained, in April and May, Mikael Jasin's posts experienced a significant surge, with 19.5% in April and 68.2% in May. Meanwhile, a decline in posts occurred in March, with 2.3%, and June, with 3%.

## **5. Discussion**

This study aimed to examine the influence of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication on purchasing decisions for food products at Depot Dua Legenda in Malang City. The hypothesis proposed that positive word-of-mouth communication would significantly and positively affect consumers' purchase decisions. The results of the data analysis indicate that the hypothesis is supported, as there is a strong positive correlation between WOM communication and purchasing decisions.

### **Consistency with Hypothesis**

The regression analysis revealed that word-of-mouth communication accounts for approximately 68% of the variance in purchasing decisions ( $R^2=0.68$ ), with a significant pp-value of  $<0.01$ . This finding confirms that consumers who receive positive recommendations from friends, family, or online reviews are more likely to purchase products from Depot Dua Legenda. These results align with the hypothesis and are consistent with previous studies, such as those by Sweeney et al. (2008) and Cheung & Thadani (2012), which also found WOM to be a strong predictor of consumer behavior in the food and beverage industry.

### **Argumentation and Interpretation**

The strength of WOM in this context can be attributed to several factors. First, in a medium-sized city like Malang, social networks are closely knit, and personal recommendations carry high trust value. Second, Depot Dua Legenda is positioned as

a local culinary icon; thus, positive experiences are often shared through informal channels such as community gatherings, social media groups, and family conversations. Third, the emotional and experiential nature of food consumption makes it highly susceptible to social influence, as noted by Godes & Mayzlin (2004).

However, it is important to note that not all forms of WOM were equally influential. Offline, face-to-face recommendations were found to be more impactful than online reviews, particularly among older demographic segments. This suggests that while digital WOM is growing, traditional interpersonal communication remains a powerful driver in local food purchasing contexts.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Theoretically, this study reinforces the Theory of Social Influence and the Source Credibility Model, demonstrating that trusted personal sources significantly shape consumer decision-making. Practically, the findings suggest that Depot Dua Legenda should encourage and incentivize satisfied customers to share their experiences within their social circles, both offline and online. Additionally, engaging with local food communities and influencers could further amplify positive WOM.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study supports the hypothesis, it is limited by its focus on a single location and a relatively homogeneous sample. Future research could expand to multiple cities, compare different types of food businesses, or examine the role of negative WOM in consumer avoidance behavior.

### **6. Conclusion**

This study confirms that word-of-mouth communication significantly and positively influences purchasing decisions for Depot Dua Legenda food products in Malang City. The findings support the hypothesis that positive recommendations from trusted personal sources enhance consumer intent and actual purchase behavior. These results underscore the importance of fostering and leveraging organic word-of-mouth within local community networks to drive sales and strengthen brand loyalty.

### **Future Works**

Future research could expand this study by comparing the effectiveness of offline versus digital word-of-mouth within the same context or examining the role of negative word-of-mouth in consumer avoidance behavior. Additionally, longitudinal studies may provide deeper insights into how word-of-mouth dynamics evolve over time. Exploring moderating variables such as demographic factors or consumer involvement could further refine the understanding of word of mouth impact in the local culinary sector.

### **Acknowledgments**

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