

Personal branding strategy through Instagram account @sukmamargaretta in shaping public image

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze Sukma Widi Margaretta's personal branding strategy through her Instagram account @sukmamargaretta in shaping her public image as a mountaineering influencer. This phenomenon is relevant to increasing popularity of social media as a medium of self-identity and lifestyle representation, especially in outdoor activities which are now widely displayed in visual and narrative formats by influencers. As a female climber, Sukma not only represents courage and resilience in conquering nature, but also presents an educative, reflective and authentic narrative that distinguishes her from other climbing influencers. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews with Sukma and her teams and visual documentation from Sukma's Instagram account, and involves three active followers as supporting informants. The results showed that Sukma managed to build a consistent and strong personal branding through voice differentiation, narrative style, and emphasis on safety and ecological values. Her strategy not only impacts the formation of a positive public image, but also contributes to the empowerment of women in the digital realm as well as the preservation of natural culture through social media. This research confirms the importance of ethics and responsibility in digital communication practices and encourages media literacy so that the public can respond to visual content with a critical and reflective attitude, without getting caught up in the romanticization of high-risk activities such as tourism mountain climbing.

Keywords

Personal branding, Social media, Influencer, Mountaineering, Women empowerment

Introduction

Social media has transformed how individuals communicate and construct self-image in the digital era. Among various platforms, Instagram has become a dominant medium for visual identity and narrative expression through features such as reels, stories, and live streaming [1]. In Indonesia, Instagram users reached 103 million in 2025 about 36.3% of the population demonstrating its broad influence on digital interaction and identity

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building [2]. The emergence of influencers marks a new communication phenomenon, where individuals shape public perception and lifestyle through digital content [3]. In the context of mountaineering, influencers transform climbing into visually aesthetic, educational, and emotional experiences [4]. Sukma Widi Margaretta, an Indonesian female mountaineering influencer and digital content creator, exemplifies this emerging trend through her Instagram account @sukmamargaretta, which focuses on mountain exploration, outdoor education, and responsible climbing practices. Through this platform, she combines natural landscape aesthetics with mountaineering ethics and reflective storytelling, positioning social media not merely as a space for visual self-presentation but as a medium for educational communication. Her emphasis on authenticity and educational values distinguishes her content from mainstream adventure influencers who often prioritize spectacle and visual performance. This phenomenon reflects a broader shift in influencer culture, where credibility, environmental awareness, and knowledge-sharing increasingly shape audience trust and engagement, highlighting the importance of examining personal branding as a form of socially responsible digital communication. Her authenticity and educational focus distinguish her from other influencers such as Shabela, Anggi Marselina, and Tiara Yolanda.

In Indonesia, climbing is still associated with masculinity. This perception is related to social constructs that place extreme sports in a realm that demands physical strength, courage, and endurance attributes that in patriarchal cultures are often attributed to men. In the Indonesian social context, traditional gender roles tend to push men into competitive and risky public spheres, while women are more often directed toward activities that are considered safer and more domestic. Data from the Indonesian Rock-Climbing Federation shows that male athletes still dominate participation in various competition categories, even though female involvement continues to increase. This dominance, coupled with media representation that highlights male athletes, reinforces the social construct that rock climbing is a masculine domain. Thus, this association is more a result of cultural constructs and gender relations than purely biological differences [5]. Sukma's presence challenges this view by representing women as capable and independent climbers. However, the popularity of climbing content also raises safety concerns, as reflected in several accidents in 2025, driven partly by Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and low climbing literacy [6]. Influencers, therefore, play a vital role as communicators and constructors of social reality [7]. Drawing from previous studies this research examines Sukma Widi Margaretta's personal branding strategy on Instagram in shaping her image as a mountaineering influencer [8]. The study highlights is important because previous research has generally discussed influencer personal branding in the context of self-image formation and digital popularity, while the aspects of educational value, safety, and ecological awareness have not been specifically studied. The novelty of this study lies in the analysis of female climber influencer personal branding as a strategic communication practice that not only builds public

image but also promotes digital literacy and more inclusive gender representation on social media.

Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze Sukma Widi Margaretta's personal branding strategy in shaping public image through the Instagram account @sukmamargaretta as a mountaineering influencer in 2024. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to describe in depth the complex phenomena of communication and self-representation, focusing on the meaning from the research subject's point of view. The object of this research is the content of @sukmamargaretta's Instagram account, especially visual and narrative uploads related to personal branding in the context of mountaineering. This research also involves direct participation from the account owner, namely Sukma Widi Margaretta and three active followers who have followed the @sukmamargaretta account for at least one year.

Data collection techniques consisted of in-depth interviews and documentation. Interviews were conducted with Sukma Widi Margaretta and three active followers of her Instagram account. Interviews were conducted in structured and unstructured forms to obtain exploratory information. Documentation in the form of screenshots of Instagram posts and comments from the audience were also collected as visual and narrative data to be analyzed. Data analysis was carried out using the model which includes four stages, namely: (1) data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation; (2) data reduction by simplifying information to focus on the main themes; (3) data presentation in the form of narratives and tables if needed; and (4) conclusion drawing based on patterns that emerge in the data. Data validity testing was carried out through source triangulation techniques, namely by comparing the results of Instagram content observations, resource person interviews, and other supporting documents. This step aims to ensure the consistency and credibility of the data obtained, and increase the validity of the overall research finding result Results and Discussion.

Results and discussion

Results

Authenticity and Differentiation of Sukma Widi Margaretta as a Mountaineering Influencer. Sukma Widi Margaretta demonstrates distinctive authenticity and differentiation in constructing her personal branding as a mountaineering influencer show in [Figure 1](#). She develops a unique narrative style and visual approach that integrates aesthetic representation with educational messaging, allowing her content to function not only as visual entertainment but also as a medium of knowledge dissemination. This strategy strengthens her positioning compared to other

mountaineering influencers who tend to emphasize visual aesthetics or adventure documentation alone.

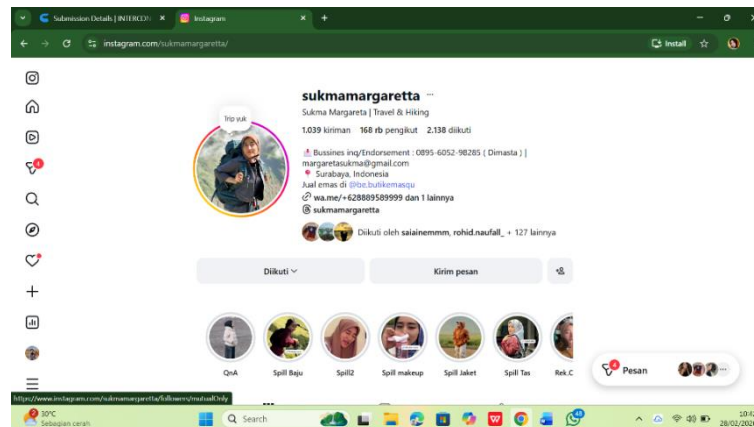


Figure 1. Instagram @sukmamargaretta

Furthermore, Sukma consistently conducts destination research before producing content, ensuring narrative accuracy while embedding moral, safety, and ecological values within her storytelling. Her reflective and warm communication style reinforces perceived authenticity, which is considered a fundamental element of effective personal branding. Through this approach, audiences perceive her communication as credible, responsible, and value-oriented rather than purely performative.

The integration of education, safety awareness, and environmental ethics becomes a key differentiating factor that positions Sukma not only as a digital content creator but also as an educative communicator within the mountaineering community.

Sukma Widi Margareta demonstrates distinctive authenticity and differentiation in constructing her personal branding as a mountaineering influencer. She develops a unique narrative style and visual approach that integrates aesthetic representation with educational messaging, allowing her content to function not only as visual entertainment but also as a medium of knowledge dissemination. This strategy strengthens her positioning compared to other mountaineering influencers who tend to emphasize visual aesthetics or adventure documentation alone.

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The integration of education, safety awareness, and environmental ethics becomes a key differentiating factor that positions Sukma not only as a digital content creator but also as an educative communicator within the mountaineering community. Personal branding is a rapidly growing concept in communication and management research. According to personal branding refers to the strategic process by which individuals identify, develop, and manage their reputation to influence others' perceptions [9]. The concept was first popularized by Tom Peters (1997) through his "Brand You" idea, emphasizing the importance of self-marketing in a competitive environment. In the digital era, this concept has become closely associated with social media as a platform for self-promotion and reputation management [10]. Sukma Widi Margaretta began creating content on social media in 2021 but started focusing seriously on her personal branding as a mountaineering influencer in 2023. Her decision to concentrate on outdoor content stemmed from her lifelong interest in nature and economic considerations.

By observing algorithms and analyzing similar content, she developed a distinctive voice-over style and a visual approach that combine aesthetic beauty with educational messages. This aligns with Bahar et al. who identify differentiation, excellence, and positioning as the key components of effective personal branding [11].

Sukma consistently researches destinations before producing content, develops accurate narratives, and integrates moral and safety messages into her videos. Her warm and reflective communication style distinguishes her from other influencers. This supports those who argue that authenticity is the foundation of personal branding; individuals who remain genuine tend to gain higher audience credibility than those who fabricate personas. Instagram, as a digital medium, enables this process by erasing traditional boundaries between professionals and amateurs, as well as between producers and consumers [12]. Interactive features such as comments and direct messages foster two-way communication and strengthen engagement. The influencer phenomenon, which emerged in the early 2000s, has evolved into a profitable full-time career [13]. According to influencer segmentation is primarily determined by follower count, reflecting their digital reach and perceived credibility.

Audience Perception of Sukma's Public Image

The success of an influencer's personal branding depends heavily on how audiences interpret and internalize the messages conveyed. Based on interviews with three active followers of the @sukmamargaretta account, Sukma has successfully cultivated a positive public image through an educational, empathetic, and authentic communication style. State that public image is an accumulation of perceptions shaped through continuous interaction and experience—both of which are evident in Sukma's relationship with her audience [14]. Informant ME, who has followed Sukma since 2022, stated that Sukma's voice-over style and assertive narration make each upload more lively and inspiring. ENA, another follower, described Sukma's content as calming and deeply reflective, emphasizing respect for nature and careful preparation before climbing. Both informants agreed that Sukma's self-presentation feels natural and non-exaggerated, consistent with the self-presentation theory which suggests that consistent identity portrayal fosters credibility and trust [15].

Furthermore, Sukma frequently interacts with her followers through comment replies, Q&A sessions, and Instagram Stories. This builds "intimacy at a distance", where social closeness in digital spaces enhances emotional attachment and loyalty [16]. Many followers also claim to have learned practical climbing knowledge and ecological awareness from Sukma's content, reflecting the active learning dimension in media engagement. That such engagement encourages audience participation and transforms followers into learning communities rather than passive consumers.

Discussion

Influencers act as digital opinion leaders who build identities through multimodal narratives [17]. When compared with other mountaineering influencers Shabela

(@shabellaaaaa), Anggi Marselina (@anggimrslna), and Tiara Yolanda (@tiarayolanda) Sukma demonstrates a more balanced and structured approach. Shabela emphasizes aesthetic visuals and fashionable adventure imagery, appealing to urban youth audiences. Anggi Marselina focuses on spontaneity and casual exploration, aligning with the concept of everyday authenticity [18]. Tiara Yolanda adopts a reflective and philosophical tone, consistent with narrative identity theory.

In contrast, Sukma combines the strengths of these approaches through edutainment integrating entertainment with education. Her content emphasizes safety, preparation, and environmental ethics, positioning her as both an adventurer and educator. This strategy aligns with strategic communication in branding, where the communicator's credibility depends on the alignment of message values and audience expectations [19]. Observations indicate that Sukma's audience perceives her as more trustworthy and relatable because her content provides practical knowledge beyond inspiration, enhancing long-term loyalty.

Implications for Women's Empowerment and Environmental Culture. The findings do not explicitly demonstrate women's empowerment as a direct outcome; however, they reveal how Sukma Widi Margaretta's communication practices indirectly contribute to shifting gender representation within mountaineering culture. Through consistent presentation of competence, safety awareness, and environmental responsibility, her content challenges the traditionally male-dominated imagery of outdoor adventure activities. Rather than framing empowerment as activism, the study indicates a form of symbolic empowerment manifested through visibility, credibility, and knowledge-based participation in digital spaces.

In addition, the integration of ecological messaging and responsible climbing practices reflects the role of influencers as informal environmental communicators. These findings suggest that personal branding in digital environments may function as a cultural mediation process that promotes environmental awareness through everyday storytelling rather than explicit advocacy.

Sukma's personal branding transcends self-promotion; it embodies social advocacy for women's empowerment and environmental preservation. Her consistent portrayal of women as capable, independent explorers challenges masculine stereotypes in adventure culture. As emphasized digital media provides women with a platform to reclaim agency and shape their self-representation narratives [20]. Many of Sukma's followers have been inspired to begin hiking or engage in outdoor activities after encountering her content, indicating that her influence extends to behavioral transformation. This demonstrates that personal branding can serve as a medium of symbolic liberation and social education. Furthermore, her inclusion of local cultural elements such as historical insights, myths, and traditional wisdom supports cultural preservation. Argue that digital media acts as a vital tool for intergenerational cultural transmission [21], highlight how feminine self-representation online can negotiate and resist dominant norms [22].

Sukma's approach can be viewed as a form of ecological communication, combining environmental ethics and cultural sensitivity. By emphasizing responsibility toward nature and promoting critical reflection, her content fosters collective awareness and contributes to sustainable digital citizenship. Thus, Sukma's personal branding strategy not only reinforces her credibility as a mountaineering influencer but also positions her as a transformative communicator whose influence extends beyond digital popularity to social empowerment and ecological consciousness.

Conclusion

The personal branding strategy built by Sukma Widi Margaretta through her Instagram account @sukmamargaretta has proven to be effective in shaping her public image as an educative, authentic, and inspiring mountaineering influencer. Sukma succeeded in showing that social media can be used not only to display aesthetic visuals, but also as a means of conveying deep and educational messages, especially related to climbing safety and nature conservation. Sukma's personal branding approach emphasizes narrative uniqueness, message consistency, and distinctive voice differentiation, which directly creates an emotional attachment with her audience. Her personal branding based on the values of responsibility, empathy, and ecological awareness has created a new space of representation for women on social media, proving that women can be opinion leaders who bring positive social impact without having to follow mainstream commercial standards.

Sukma's content contributes to digital literacy in the realm of outdoor activities by emphasizing the importance of knowledge, preparation, and ethics in exploring nature. She not only builds a personal brand as an inspirational figure, but also as a communicator who forms a community that is aware of the risks and value of every step taken in explorative activities. Thus, Sukma's personal branding strategy is not merely image-oriented, but a responsible, progressive and reflective digital communication practice. Such personal branding should be used as a reference by other influencers who want to build a reputation not only through aesthetics, but also through substance, values, and real social benefits

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