

## **Social Media Marketing Communication: A Semiotic Analysis of the Personal Brand of COC Participant on Instagram**

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### **Abstract**

Social media introduces a new approach for brands to interact with their audiences. This digital transformation creates both challenges and opportunities in implementing marketing communication, especially in building more personal relationships with the audience. This study aims to explore marketing communication through social media with a semiotic analysis approach to understand the construction of meaning in digital content. Using a qualitative method through the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, this research explores the meaning within social media content. Ruangguru, as the largest education technology platform in Indonesia, was chosen for its success in integrating personal branding of participant in the viral Clash of Champion (COC) program into its marketing communication through Instagram. This study uses Montoya and Vandehey's eight laws of personal branding to analyze how Ruangguru builds the personal brand of COC participant. The research findings reveal that the personal brand of COC participant is not only represented through the academic side but also highlights the authentic personal traits. This indicates that the representation is built to create a natural image with the goal of establishing a stronger emotional connection with the audience.

*Keywords:* marketing communication, social media, personal brand, digital branding

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## Introduction

Social media has become an important instrument in marketing communication. It is viewed as an effective instrument in supporting marketing goals and strategies, particularly in audience engagement, managing interactions with the audience and communication (Alalwan et al., 2017). Mangold and Faulds (2009, as cited in Killian & McManus, 2015) stated that social media has driven a major transformation in communication, making audiences expect brands to interact through platforms where audiences have control. This indicates a shift in communication control from being brand-centric to consumer-centric, creating new approaches in how brands interact with audiences.

The characteristics of social media make it a tool for branding. Social media has interactive aspects that enhance brand awareness and strengthen brand loyalty, making it one of the best media for building loyal and sustainable audiences (Ayvaz, 2022). Interestingly, according to Karaduman (2013), social media provides opportunities to manage personal brands more easily compared to managing product or service brands. Wetsch (2012, as cited in Shafiee et al., 2020) added that the formation and development of a personal brand is essential for achieving success both personally and organizationally. Therefore, social media becomes a strategic platform in building personal brands.

Personal brand has a significant influence on the audience. Kromalcas et al. (2024) stated that personal brand aspects (particularly physical appearance) significantly affect the audience in terms of attracting attention and increasing engagement. Mello et al. (2020) argued that physical attractiveness has proven to be an important determinant of persuasion. Furthermore, Wei et al. (2022) revealed that a personal brand perceived as warm by the audiences has a more significant impact on audience's emotional engagement, while a personal brand perceived as competent is more likely to drive audience's cognitive and behavioral engagement. This indicates that personal brand influences the audience in attracting attention and increasing engagement.

Personal branding research has been conducted from various perspectives such as the study by Fitrianti et al. (2020) titled "Personal Branding Cino Fajrin through Instagram". This study aimed to analyze the process of local influencer Cino Fajrin builds and manages his personal branding on Instagram using a case study method. The results showed that Ciko Fajrin consistently developed a humorous and distinctly Semarang-style personal branding on his Instagram. This increased his personal value and marketability, leading him to collaborate with various parties. Meanwhile, Liu and Suh (2017) conducted study titled "Self-Branding on Social Media: An Analysis of Style Bloggers on Instagram". This research seeks to answer how to build a branded-self on social media and what features distinguish social media as a tool for self-branding through content analysis method. The results showed that although the majority of female style bloggers follow traditional beauty standards, social media provides opportunities to market themselves according to their increased awareness of women's rights by utilizing Instagram features.

Based on this, it is interesting to examine the representation of personal branding through Instagram. Killian and McManus (2015) stated that the virality of social media offers great opportunities for brands seeking positive attention. However, it can also harm the brand's image when audiences feel they are being treated poorly (Killian & McManus, 2015). Therefore, brands are required to maintain a balance between protecting their image and encouraging deeper relationships with the audiences.

## **Literature Review**

Personal branding is the process of building a unique personal identity, developing communication approaches for personal brand identity to audiences, and evaluating its impact on an individual's image to fulfill personal and professional goals (Khedher, 2014). According to Labrecque et al. (2011) personal branding is an effort to capture and promote one's personal strengths and uniqueness. It is understood as a strategic process involving the identification and promotion of personal strengths and uniqueness to build a strong image.

There are three dimensions that shape personal brand including competence, standards, and style (McNally et al., 2011). The first dimension relates to the identification of the roles played to meet audience expectations, such as being an expert in a particular field. The second dimension focuses on consistently maintained performance. This dimension is understood as the level of quality or consistency in performing roles. The third dimension emphasizes communication and interaction style. Brand style is understood as the emotional image formed during interaction with the audiences. These three dimensions are interconnected in forming a unity that determines the strength of a personal brand.

Meanwhile, Montoya and Vandehey (2002) present the concept of the eight laws of personal branding as the foundation for strong personal branding including specialization, leadership, personality, distinctiveness, visibility, unity, persistence, and goodwill. First, specialization emphasizes the importance of becoming an expert in certain areas as seen through ability, behavior, lifestyle, mission, product, profession, and service. Second, leadership relates to credibility as a leader through excellence, position, and recognition. Third, personality emphasizes authentic characteristics by looking at one's character, capabilities, and personal values. Fourth, distinctiveness refers to how a personal brand is expressed differently through behavior, physicality, and lifestyle.

Fifth, visibility emphasizes being active and consistently increasing one's presence to be recognized by the audiences. Sixth is unity which states that the person behind the personal brand must adhere to the ethics and behavior established by the brand. Seventh, persistence emphasizes the importance of perseverance and consistency in building personal brand. Lastly, goodwill means that personal brand brings positive values to its audience through overcoming challenges, defending noble causes, keeping promises, giving recognition to those who deserve it, and treating others with kindness.

## **Methodology**

The research uses a constructivism paradigm that emphasizes knowledge is not objective or universal, but rather the result of an interpretative process influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). A qualitative approach is used to understand the formation of meaning regarding the representation of personal brand of COC participants displayed by Rungguru on Instagram. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the characteristics of qualitative research focus on meaning and understanding, the position of the researcher as the main instrument, and involve an inductive process with descriptions in the form of words. This research applies Roland Barthes semiotic analysis as an analytical framework to reveal the meanings contained in visual and textual content on Instagram.

The research object is Instagram content from @ruangguru (<https://www.instagram.com/ruangguru/>) that features COC finalist Axel Giovanni Hartanto

from National University of Singapore. The researcher selected Axel based on criteria including his achievement in reaching the final round of the COC program, his status as an influencer, and his background as a Ruangguru user alumnus. These criteria represent Axel's ability to compete throughout the COC program, his status as an influencer shows that Axel has reach and influence on social media, and his background as an alumnus user of Ruangguru represents Ruangguru's success story. In this research, the selected content time period is from June 29 to August 17, 2024. The selection of this time period was chosen to see how Ruangguru portrayed Axel's personal brand from the airing of the first episode to the final episode of the COC program.

The researcher collected data through documentation of Instagram content from @ruangguru that features Axel during the period from June 29 to August 17, 2024. The research data includes visual content (photos/videos) and captions accompanied by coding sheets to record emerging symbols. The researcher conducted data analysis using Roland Barthes semiotic method by examining two levels of meaning, namely denotative and connotative, through identification of signifier and signified as well as determining myths. The researcher identified visual and textual signs in Instagram content that appear explicitly at the denotative level. Then, the researcher analyzed implicit meanings by relating these signs to broader contexts at the connotative level which can generate myths. Furthermore, analysis was conducted by examining elements from the personal brand concept based on Montoya and Vandehey's framework of the eight laws of personal branding to understand how Ruangguru built Axel's personal brand.

This research uses Barthes semiotic analysis method, considering its ability to reveal layers of meaning contained in symbols or signs. According to Barthes, semiotics analysis concerns the social production of meaning through systems of signs, an analysis of anything that can represent something else by interpreting verbal and nonverbal signs (Griffin, 2012). This approach is relevant for analyzing Instagram content that is rich in visual or textual symbols and aligns with the research goal of exploring the meaning of COC participants' personal brand constructed by Ruangguru through its representation on Instagram.

## **Results and Discussion**


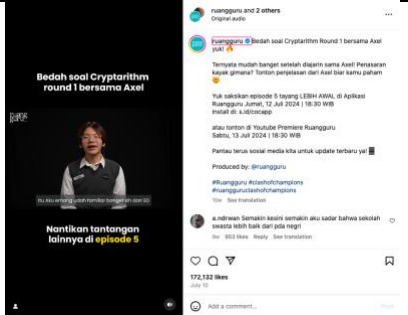
Social media provides an easier space for managing a personal brand, and developing a personal brand has become a necessity for achieving success. In line with this, Ruangguru utilizes Instagram as the main medium to build the personal brand of COC participant, namely Axel. The research findings show that Ruangguru builds Axel's personal brand through academic and non-academic/personal symbols. The representation is reflected through denotative and connotative signified and signifier through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. The researcher found 55 contents featuring Axel from June 29 to August 17, 2024. From this number, the researcher focused the analysis on 21 contents that illustrate the representation of Axel's personal brand with high audience engagement, marked by obtaining more than 100,000 likes for each post.



In the representation of academic aspects, the dominant symbols representing Axel's personal brand are NUS, double major, GPA 4.9/5.0, and achievements in mathematics. Besides these symbols, there are specific symbols such as studying with champions, shuffle and recall (memorizing 52 cards), and cryptarithm that demonstrate Axel's academic capacity in mathematics. The personal brand built through academic symbols reflects Axel as a smart

and accomplished COC participant from a top world university, not easily defeated due to his mathematical expertise, and worthy of being a mentor in the field of mathematics.

**Table 1**

*Academic Representation*

Object	Denotative	Connotative
 <p>@ruangguru's post on June 29, 2024</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Photo: Axel wearing NUS jacket. Text includes Ruangguru, COC, NUS, double major, GPA 4.90/5.00, mathematics achievements.</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> Introducing a high-achieving student from a top global university as a COC participant.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Photo: Axel is portrayed as a smart and accomplished international student participating in COC. Caption: COC is joined by outstanding students from top global universities.</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Photo: Axel appears confident. Caption: Introducing the COC participant with enthusiasm.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Photo: Axel is confident in joining COC because he comes from NUS, has a double major, a high GPA, and notable achievements. Caption: COC is high-quality because it features outstanding students from top global universities.</p>
 <p>@ruangguru's post on July 10, 2024</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Video: Axel has been familiar with Cryptarithm problems since elementary school. Caption: Breaking down Cryptarithm problems with Axel.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Video: Axel is familiar with Cryptarithm problems. Caption: Cryptarithm problems can be solved easily.</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Video: Axel has been familiar with Cryptarithm problems since elementary school, which not many people know about and are considered difficult to solve. Caption: Axel breaks down Cryptarithm problems easily.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Video: Axel states that he has been familiar with Cryptarithm problems since childhood, which are considered foreign and difficult to solve. Caption: Cryptarithm problems are considered easy by Axel.</p>

Object	Denotative	Connotative
 <p>@ruangguru's post on July 14, 2024</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Photo: NUS attributes, Computer Science, GPA 4.90/5.00, the text "Learning with the Champion", and a list of study materials in the field of mathematics. <b>Caption:</b> Learning with the champion, Axel, solving Cryptarithm problems.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Photo: Axel, as a champion, becomes a study mentor in mathematics. <b>Caption:</b> Axel, as a champion, mentors others in solving Cryptarithm problems.</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Photo: Axel appears confident as a champion inviting others to study mathematics together. <b>Caption:</b> Axel is skilled in quantitative reasoning and generously shares his tips for free.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Photo: Axel serves as a reliable mathematics mentor. <b>Caption:</b> Axel does good deeds by sharing tips freely.</p>
 <p>@ruangguru's post on July 26, 2024</p>	<p><b>Signifier</b> Photo: Axel with NUS written attribute and qualifying vs Sandy from NUS, <i>invisible maze</i> elimination. <b>Caption:</b> Congratulations and encouragement to the participants.</p> <p><b>Signified</b> Photo: Axel from NUS qualifies through the <i>invisible maze</i> against Sandy. <b>Caption:</b> Appreciation and words of encouragement to the participants.</p>	<p><b>Signifier</b> Photo: Axel passes the invisible maze against Sandy, his best friend. <b>Caption:</b> The most emotional episode showing competition between best friends.</p> <p><b>Signified</b> Photo: The consistency of Axel's abilities throughout the competition who always passes even when competing against his best friend from NUS. <b>Caption:</b> Emotional moment between Axel and Sandy.</p>

Source. Processed by Researcher (2024)

Meanwhile, in the representation of non-academic/personal aspects, the dominant symbols representing Axel's personal brand are Axel's authentic character including being kind-hearted, having strong social relationships, friendly, never giving up, handsome, and even showing Axel's weaknesses such as also feeling tired when studying. The personal brand built through non-academic/personal symbols reflects that although Axel has extraordinary

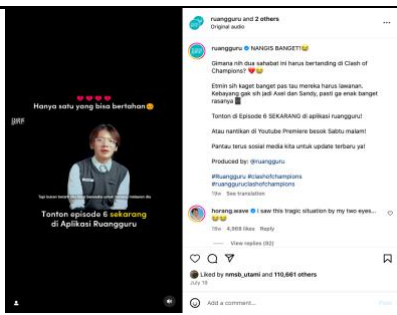

intelligence in the field of mathematics, Axel is a COC participant who is authentic and just like people in general.

**Table 2**

*Non-academic/Personal Representation*

Object	Denotative	Connotative
 <p>@ruangguru's post on July 11, 2024</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Video: Axel is actively moving with the text "Axel and his nature" accompanied by a smiling emoji with heart. <b>Caption:</b> The "most" category among all the champions.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Video: Axel shows an active personality. <b>Caption:</b> The COC participant has the nickname "the most".</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Video: Axel interacts actively and expressively, moving joyfully among other COC participants, highlighting Axel's positive traits. <b>Caption:</b> The other side of a COC participant.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Video: Axel has strong social relationships with other COC participants. <b>Caption:</b> COC participants are not only diligent in studying but also have unique behaviors.</p>
 <p>@ruangguru's post on July 13, 2024</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Video: Axel with the text "Anak Baik" (Good Kid), a smiling emoji with hearts, and a pose where Axel makes a heart symbol while smiling. <b>Caption:</b> The adorable character of a COC participant.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Video: Axel is a good kid. <b>Caption:</b> Each COC participant has their own adorable traits.</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Video: Another side of Axel shows him as a kind-hearted child full of love. <b>Caption:</b> The adorable side of a COC participant.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Video: Axel is known for spreading positive energy among COC participants, making him easy to like. <b>Caption:</b> COC participants are ordinary humans who have unique non-academic sides.</p>



Object	Denotative	Connotative
 <p>@ruangguru's post on July 19, 2024</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Video: Axel is going to compete against Sandy and continues to try his best to win against Sandy. Caption: Sad because two best friends have to face each other.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Video: Axel is determined and keeps fighting against obstacles. Caption: A competition between two close friends.</p>	<p><b>Signifier:</b> Video: Axel feels sad but doesn't give up and keeps trying to win. Caption: A fun yet bittersweet competition where two best friends must compete against each other.</p> <p><b>Signified:</b> Video: Axel is committed and never gives up, no matter the obstacle. Caption: A friendship-based competition that creates a dilemma.</p>
 <p>@ruangguru's post on August 6, 2024</p>	<p><b>Signifier</b> Video: Axel is said to be the most handsome COC participant and display of Axel's photo. Caption: Xavier's predicted answer.</p> <p><b>Signified</b> Video: Axel is one of the most handsome COC participants. Caption: Xavier's answer is still unknown.</p>	<p><b>Signifier</b> Video: The statement about Axel being the most handsome COC participant is delivered enthusiastically with a photo of Axel posing cool. Caption: Curiosity about Xavier's answer regarding the most handsome COC participant.</p> <p><b>Signified</b> Video: Axel has a face that is not only physically handsome but also has a cool aura. Axel's Asian face can be compared to Korean boyband members. Caption: Xavier's answer points to one of the COC participants.</p>

Source. Processed by Researcher (2024)

To further explore the representation of the COC participant's personal brand through Instagram, the researcher analyzed deeper elements that constitute a strong personal brand, as well as characteristics that reinforce Axel's personal brand as a "champion." This aligns with



the concept of the eight laws of personal branding by Montoya and Vandehey (2002) namely specialization, leadership, personality, distinctiveness, visibility, unity, persistence, and goodwill, as well as concepts from Demes et al. (2020) and Mello et al. (2020) regarding the characteristics of a “champion.” These elements carry meaning through the Instagram content presentation, which shapes Axel’s personal brand in depth.

### **Representation of Academic Expertise**

Axel’s personal brand with academic expertise through specialization elements becomes a prominent representation. The reflected specialization element emphasizes the importance of being an expert in a particular field to build a strong personal brand. This can be established through ability (demonstrating individual capability), lifestyle (one’s way of life), mission (a specific individual goal), product (produced outcomes), service (offered services), profession (niche market), and behavior (individual conduct).

Axel’s personal brand is built by Ruangguru through elements such as ability, mission, service, profession, and behavior. Axel is represented as a participant from one of the world’s top universities with strong abilities and achievements in mathematics (ability). He has a mission to make mathematics appear easy (mission). Axel provides online learning sessions (service). As a COC participant, he is positioned as a potential math mentor (profession), and he generously shares tips about mathematics (behavior).

At the myth determination stage, Axel is portrayed as a champion through the element of specialization emphasizing his expertise in mathematics. This expertise is represented by his university background, academic grades, achievements, and teaching abilities that are inseparable from Axel’s passion for mathematics. According to Demes et al. (2020), a champion must love their work, be motivated, dedicated, and able to help create other champions, thus creating a learning environment to help others grow and develop. The portrayal of Axel as a champion not only highlights his skills and accomplishments but also reflects his dedication in creating a supportive learning environment for others growth and development.

### **Representation of Academic Credibility**

Axel’s personal brand with representation of academic credibility through the leadership element strengthens the representation of outstanding academic expertise. In this representation, the leadership element emphasizes that personal brand gains credibility considered as a leader within its field. This can be built through excellence (individual expertise in specific fields), position (individual status), and recognition (acknowledgment in the form of awards). Axel’s personal brand representation is built by Ruangguru through excellence and recognition. He is portrayed as a COC participant who is difficult to defeat due to his expertise in mathematics (excellence) and his achievements at national and international levels (recognition). There is no representation of Axel’s personal brand through position.

At the stage of determining myths, Axel’s portrayal as a champion through the leadership element emphasizes his credibility in the field of mathematics, supported by the national and international recognition he has received. This is closely tied to Axel’s passion for mathematics since childhood. According to Demes et al. (2020), a champion must love what they do, be motivated and dedicated. The champion has passion for something, believes in it,

and is internally motivated to make a difference. The portrayal of Axel as a champion reflects that leadership in mathematics is not only determined by the recognition achieved, but also by genuine passion and deep dedication.

### **Representation of Personal Authenticity**

In addition to his academic strengths, Axel's personal brand is built through his prominent personality elements. The personality element emphasizes that a successful personal brand must be based on one's authentic personality, including their weaknesses. This law focuses on authenticity, building a personal brand that reflects someone's character, abilities, and values. Axel's personal brand representation is built by Ruangguru through his character of being kind, friendly, and genuine. This shows Axel's authenticity as an ordinary person with his natural characteristics.

At the myth determination stage, Axel representation as a champion is seen through the personality element emphasizes the kind-hearted, friendly and authentic character as his originality that gives positive vibes. According to Demes et al. (2020) a champion must have the skills to understand and share the feelings of others. The representation of Axel as a champion not only highlights his academic expertise, but also emphasizes the importance of kind-hearted character and empathy, which contribute to creating a positive and inspiring environment.

### **Representation of Personal Uniqueness**

Axel's personal brand with representation of personal uniqueness through the distinctiveness element strengthens the representation of personal authenticity. In this representation, the distinctiveness element states how personal brand needs to be displayed in a way that is different from others. This is built through behavior (individual actions and interactions), physicality (physical aspects), and lifestyle (personal life aspect). Axel's personal brand representation is built by Ruangguru through behavior and physicality. Axel is represented as a COC participant who actively interacts with fellow participants (behavior). Additionally, Axel's personal brand is built as one of the most handsome COC participants (physicality). This is displayed both through Axel's physical appearance and other participants' opinions.

At the stage of determining myths, Axel representation as a champion through the distinctiveness element emphasizes social interaction and physical appearance. According to Demes et al. (2020) a champion has the ability to understand and share others' feelings. For physical appearance, Mello et al. (2020) stated that physical attractiveness proves to be an important determinant of persuasion, and persuasive ability is crucial for a champion to possess as the capacity to invite everyone to participate. Axel representation as a champion not only highlights his ability to interact socially, but also shows that an attractive physical appearance can enhance appeal and influence.

### **Representation of Self-Visibility**

Axel's personal brand self-visibility representation strengthens the representation of his prominent academic expertise. In this representation, visibility emphasizes that to build a successful personal brand, one must be active and consistent in enhancing their presence to be recognized by the audience. To become visible, individuals must promote themselves.

Axel's personal brand is constructed by Ruangguru through the way Axel promotes himself via his academic abilities.

At the myth determination stage, Axel representation as a champion through the element of visibility highlights his ability to promote himself, particularly by showcasing his familiarity with Cryptarithm puzzles since childhood, which are typically considered obscure and difficult. According to Demes et al. (2020) persuasive ability is essential for a champion, as one's capacity to bring others along. Axel's representation as a champion not only reflects his ability to solve complex challenges, but also highlights the importance of persuasion skills to inspire others that mathematics is easy.

### **Representation of Academic Integrity**

Axel's personal brand with integrity representation through the element of academic unity reinforces the representation of prominent academic expertise. In this representation, the unity element states that the individual behind the personal brand must adhere to the behavioral ethics established by the brand. Personal actions and behaviors must reflect the projected brand. Axel's personal brand representation is built by Ruangguru through his behavior of consistently passing COC challenges from the beginning until becoming a finalist, which aligns with the image of a champion and forms a complete unity.

At the stage of determining myths, Axel representation as a champion through the unity element is evident, emphasizing the trait of never giving up on every challenge given until successfully becoming a finalist. According to Demes et al. (2020), a champion is a persistent person who tries to change the situation, dares to take risks and initiatives to solve problems, and is not afraid to fail. Axel representation as a champion affirms that perseverance and courage in facing challenges are not only keys to achieving success but also serve as inspiration to not give up in overcoming obstacles.

### **Representation of Perseverance**

Axel's personal brand, represented through perseverance, reinforces the representation of his authenticity and personal uniqueness. In this representation, the element of perseverance emphasizes the importance of persistence in building a personal brand. An individual's consistency in the personal branding process will help establish public trust in the individual as a brand. Axel's personal brand is built by Ruangguru through his consistency and determination in displaying his best abilities even when facing against his own best friend.

At the myth determination stage, Axel representation as a champion is seen through the element of perseverance, emphasizing Axel's consistency and determination to show his best abilities even though he has to face his own best friend. According to Demes et al. (2020), a champion has a strong sense of responsibility, acting with firmness, precision, and seriousness. Axel's representation as a champion not only reflects his perseverance and commitment to excellence but also demonstrates that a sense of responsibility is key to achieving success even when facing difficult situations involving close friends.

### **Representation of Praiseworthy Behavior**

Axel's personal brand with praiseworthy behavior representation through the element of good intention reinforces the representation of personal authenticity and uniqueness. In this study,

the good intention element emphasizes that a personal brand must contain good intentions and carry positive values to its audience. This can be demonstrated through manifesting positive values (hard work or self-development), fighting against obstacles, defending noble causes, keeping promises, giving recognition to those who deserve it, and the golden rule (treating others with kindness and respect).

Axel's personal brand representation is built by Ruangguru through positive values, fighting against obstacles, and the golden rule. Axel is represented as a COC participant with good behavior including being a hard worker and never giving up when facing challenges. Axel has the golden rule trait of treating others with kindness and giving recognition to those who deserve it. However, there is no apparent representation of Axel's personal brand through defending noble causes and keeping promises.

At the myth determination stage, Axel representation as a champion through the good intention element emphasizes the attitude of working hard against obstacles and treating others with kindness. According to Demes et al. (2020), a champion must anticipate problems and be proactive, be a persistent person who strives to change situation. Additionally, a champion should have the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. The representation of Axel as a champion affirms that good intentions and hard work in facing obstacles, as well as empathy towards others, not only define a champion but also create a positive impact that inspires others to act in the same way.

Through the results and discussion presented, this study has the potential to expand the understanding of how the elements that form a personal brand are conveyed through a system of signs at the levels of denotative, connotative, and mythic meanings in digital content. This encourages the development of integrating personal branding elements with a semiotic approach in the context of marketing communication through social media. At a practical level, this research provides perspectives for marketing communication practitioners in designing strategies through personal brand development on Instagram. A deep understanding of the interaction between personal branding elements and visual and textual sign systems helps create more meaningful and strategic digital content.

## Conclusion

This research reveals the personal brand representation of COC participants, especially Axel, in @ruangguru Instagram content as part of Ruangguru's marketing communication through social media. Through semiotic analysis of Ruangguru's Instagram content, this research shows that there are two important elements represented namely "champion" characteristics through academic and non-academic/personal aspects. The combination of these elements demonstrates that the representation built by Ruangguru creates a COC participant personal brand that not only inspires academically but also presents a stronger emotional connection with its audience.

In the academic aspect, Ruangguru builds the personal brand of COC participants through measurable and credible achievements. This is reflected in the emphasis on educational background from top world universities, a double major and high academic performance, as well as expertise in mathematics through national and international recognition, which are academic elements displayed by Ruangguru. Meanwhile, in the personal aspect, various characters such as perseverance, hard work, consistency, a willingness to share knowledge, and treating others kindly become personal elements constructed by Ruangguru. This reflects

that Ruangguru emphasizes the importance of balance between academic achievement and personal elements in building COC participants' personal brand. This strategy aims to create a deeper connection with the audience.

Although able to reveal the personal brand representation of COC participants in @ruangguru Instagram content, this research still has certain limitations. The limited sample, which only focuses on a single participant, does not yet provide an overview of the personal brand of other COC participants that may also be applied by Ruangguru. The choice of semiotic analysis method, which focuses more on understanding the meaning of symbols, also limits exploration of other aspects in personal brand formation. Therefore, future research is encouraged to further explore the personal brands of other COC participants. This would provide deeper insight into Ruangguru's personal branding strategy for COC participants as part of its marketing communication on social media, using other research methods to provide different perspectives.

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