

Kimono Mom's Strategy to Build Personal Branding in YouTube Video Content

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Abstract. The digital era encouraged individuals to express themselves through creative content published on social media. The development of the creative industry urged content creators to form distinctive and unique personal branding to compete with others. Personal branding is an individual's effort to provide a certain image in society. Kimono Mom is a Japanese content creator who has shown self-image as an ideal housewife through cooking and parenting video on YouTube. This study obtained primary data from video content and secondary data from publications containing interviews with Kimono Mom. Methods that are used to analyze strategy of the personal branding are content analysis and literature review. Based on the research results, the personal branding built by Kimono Mom through her contents fulfilled 7 of the 8 laws of Peter Montoya's personal branding theory: Specialization, Personality, Distinctiveness, Visibility, Unity, Persistence, and Goodwill. The prominent characteristic of Kimono Mom's branding is the Law of Goodwill as proven by the benefits given to the viewers.

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1 Introduction

Personal branding is the art of attracting and maintaining more clients by actively shaping public perception.¹ As well as companies and products, people as individuals can also create their branding to give a particular image in society. The vast influence of the internet in the current digital era made it easier for people to work on building their personal branding through creative content created on social media. YouTube as a widely used platform worldwide has become one of the go-to options for creators to publish their content and build their self-brand. A creator who can properly manage personal branding has a greater chance of attaining the expected reputation. Personal branding is the process of building a person's unique abilities and character to become an identity that distinguishes an individual from others.¹ So, it is likely that the content creators who have managed to achieve success have a distinctive feature that stands out compared to their competitors.

Kimono Mom, a Japanese content creator, is one example of a creative actor who has managed to reap success through self-branding. In her contents, Moe, Kimono Mom's nickname, shares Japanese recipes along with her life as a housewife who is raising a child. In her first video, Kimono Mom deliberately did not cut the part when she left the kitchen to soothe her crying daughter, Sutan (3 years old).² In subsequent videos, Moe often included scenes where Sutan is distracting her while cooking to give a natural setting for the depiction of a housewife's daily life. In addition, a distinct characteristic of Moe is the Japanese cultural aspects within her content, given that Moe was once a *geisha*, a traditional Japanese artist and entertainer. Moe lived in Kyoto where she began learning to be a *geisha* at the age of 15 and became a full-fledged *geisha* by the time she was 20. Moe said being a *geisha* was challenging, but she loved it.³ In the video titled "Meet Maiko in Kyoto | Mom is a former maiko", Moe shared how *geisha* work in Gion City, the place that was once home for her to learn lots of things about being a *geisha*.⁴ In building personal branding through her YouTube channel, Moe did not lose her old identity as a *geisha*, but instead combined it with her current life as a mother, thus making her known as Kimono Mom, an ideal housewife closely related to Japanese culture.

Several prior studies have relevance to the discussed topic, namely research conducted by Situmorang J.R., & Putri B.P.S.⁵, Imawati, et. al.⁶, Amalia T.W., & Satvikadewi A.A.I.P.⁷, Pertiwi, et. al.⁸ The research also addressed how a content creator builds personal branding in social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and Blog. Despite sharing a similar topic of content creators' personal branding, this research focused on Japanese

content creators so the results of the analysis are likely to be different from past studies that have analyzed local content creators from Indonesia.

This study is qualitative research that used content analysis and literature review as the methods. Primary data in this research are Kimono Mom's videos on YouTube, while secondary data are obtained from articles containing interviews with Kimono Mom. The theory used for this research is the personal branding theory propounded by Peter Montoya.

2 Result and Discussion

According to Montoya, eight laws can be used as the key reference in building personal branding, as follows: 1) Specialization, 2) Leadership, 3) Personality, 4) Distinctiveness, 5) Visibility, 6) Unity, 7) Persistence, and 8) Goodwill.¹

2.1 The Law of Specialization

Specialization can be done in one or several ways, including abilities, behavior, lifestyle, target, product, profession, and service. In her attempt to create self-branding, Moe utilizes her ability to cook homemade Japanese food and parenting skills. Moe's expertise led her to successfully launched products and services offered to the public. In July 2022, Moe officially established an online store called Kimono Mom Store which sells Japanese-designed kitchenware.⁹ The following year, Moe started a program called Kimonoko Online Cooking Class that offers her viewers the experience of getting live and exclusive cooking lessons with Kimono Mom.¹⁰

2.2 The Law of Personality

Initially, Moe did not want to involve Sutan in her videos due to privacy. However, Moe felt that as the mother of a young child, Sutan's presence in her activities was inevitable.³ Thus, Moe presents herself as an imperfect mother who is raising a child with all the hardships and struggles. In an interview, Moe said that she did not want to teach Sutan to be a good girl but wanted her to grow up as a happy, free, and strong girl.¹¹ Therefore, Moe built her personal branding based on her true personality with all its flaws.

2.3 The Law of Distinctiveness

The unique thing that stands Moe out from other creators is that she does not exclude the tough part of being a mom in her videos. Moe herself thinks this is likely the reason why people are fond of her content. "The image of a mother is universal, it doesn't change much around the world, so the presence of a mother is always close to people's hearts," Moe said.³ The idea is supported by a comment which pointed out that the way Moe featured her natural interactions with Sutan is a unique value for the Kimono Mom channel.



Fig.1. A comment on “*Karaage*/Japanese cooking” video¹²

Furthermore, Moe's branding which is closely related to Japanese culture is also a distinct point. Aside from the kimono that she always wears and the Japanese foods she cooks, Moe has also created some videos about Japanese traditions. For example, in the video "Family Summer Tradition in Japan | Flowing Noodles | Vlog", Moe introduced *nagashi somen*, a traditional Japanese dish served during the summer.¹³ There is also a video where Moe took Sutan along to Kyoto and performed the Japanese traditional tea ceremony, *chanoyu*.¹⁴

2.4 The Law of Visibility

To make her branding visible to the broader public, Moe is also trying to reach international viewers. She has been learning English since the beginning of her career as a content creator to communicate with viewers all around the world.¹⁵ Although she has to use automatic translation, Moe still provided subtitles in multiple languages in her videos. Moe's global reputation has led her to embark on the Kimono Mom World Tour starting in February 2023, where she is invited to other countries such as Hong Kong and Thailand to hold fan meeting events and collaborate with foreign content creators.¹⁶

2.5 The Law of Unity

Moe's personal life is a reflection of her personal branding. Moe mentioned that throughout her life, she has done things for herself, not for others. "Like wearing a kimono, I wear it for myself, not for the

views. That is my identity," Moe said in an interview.¹¹ She stated that Kimono Mom's YouTube content is now an inseparable part of her life.³

2.6 The Law of Persistence

Within her 3-year career as a content creator, Moe has consistently established her persona as Kimono Mom, creating content about cooking, parenting, family, and Japanese culture. The 346 videos on the Kimono Mom channel consisted of 87 cooking videos, 46 videos of her life as a mother (Mom's life in Japan), 34 videos that focused on Sutan (Kid's life in Japan), and the rest are vlogs that film Moe and her family's activities, mostly about traveling or exploring Japanese traditions.¹⁷

2.7 The Law of Goodwill

During the process of self-branding, Moe also considers the relationship between herself and the viewers to gain a positive perception. In each of her videos, Moe has received lots of positive comments, both for the content and Moe as an individual. Some comments also expressed gratitude to Moe because they have learned various things from her channel.



Fig. 2. A comment on “Onigiri/Japanese food cooking” video¹⁸



Fig. 3. A comment on “Potato Salad | Japanese style” video¹⁹

In most of her recipes, Moe suggested alternative ingredients that are accessible outside of Japan so that people from other countries can easily make traditional Japanese dishes. Her viewers found it very helpful and appreciated the thoughtfulness.



Fig. 4. A comment on “Japanese stew *oden* | Recipe | Healthy winter food” video²⁰

The Law of Goodwill is quite a strong point that represents the strategy of Kimono Mom's personal branding because other than the previously quoted comments, there are still plenty of opinions regarding the viewers' perspective of Kimono Mom's positive image and her contents that are beneficial for them.

3 Conclusion

Kimono Mom's personal branding strategy fulfilled seven out of eight laws of personal branding, which are Specialization, Personality, Distinctiveness, Visibility, Unity, Persistence, and Goodwill. The Law of Leadership is not fulfilled because as a content creator, Kimono Mom does not express leadership or act as a leader, but rather emphasized The Law of Goodwill which focused on creating a good name for her personal branding, which is successfully proven by numerous favorable comments on her videos.

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