

Representation of a Female Fitness Influencer in Building Personal Branding on Instagram

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Abstract

This study entitled “Representation of a Female Fitness Influencer in Building Personal Branding on Instagram @desyindarta” aims to understand how the personal branding of a female fitness influencer is constructed through Instagram and the representation reflected in the personal branding. Social media functions not only as a platform for sharing information but also as a space for individuals to present their identity, build self-image, and produce meanings. In this context, female fitness influencers represent a healthy lifestyle and the image of women who actively engage in fitness activities. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using interviews and content analysis of the Instagram account @desyindarta. The analysis applies Montoya’s (2002) Eight Laws of Personal Branding framework to examine how personal branding is constructed through integrated elements. In addition, the concept of representation is used to understand the meanings that emerge from the personal branding. The findings show that Desy Indarta’s personal branding is shaped through consistency of values, motivational narratives, and practices that align with Montoya’s Eight Laws of Personal Branding. Through the visual and verbal narratives presented in her content, this personal branding conveys a representation of women as active, disciplined, and empowered. Desy Indarta not only demonstrates her competence in fitness but also builds an image as an inspirational figure who encourages audiences, particularly women, to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Therefore, the personal branding functions not only as a self-communication strategy on Instagram but also contributes to shaping the representation of women in fitness within the digital space.

Keywords: representation, fitness influencer, personal branding, instagram, women

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

The development of fitness and workout culture in modern society has undergone a significant transformation, particularly in the digital era. Health is no longer viewed solely as the absence of illness but has become part of an ideal lifestyle that is displayed through digital platforms (Fitriana & Darmawan, 2021). Healthy living has evolved into a popular trend adopted by many individuals as a way to maintain physical fitness and overall well-being amid increasingly demanding daily routines (Wildan et al., 2025). Surrahmi (2024) describes this phenomenon as popular health, referring to health trends that spread widely and gain popularity through social media.

The growing interest in fitness activities accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when restrictions on physical interactions encouraged people to seek alternative ways to stay active and healthy (Fitriana & Darmawan, 2021). Workout activities became a practical solution for

maintaining both physical and mental health during periods of social distancing. As a result, fitness-related content experienced significant growth across various digital platforms, particularly social media (Ahrens et al., 2022). Among social media platforms, Instagram has emerged as one of the most influential channels for the dissemination of health and fitness information because of its large user base and highly visual content format.

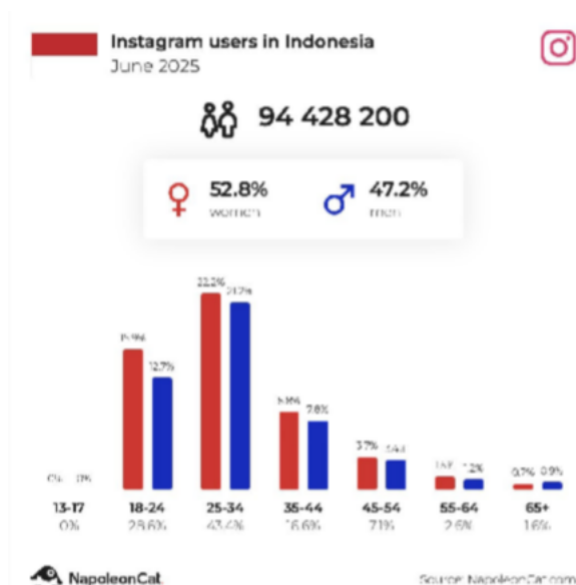


Figure 1. Instagram user in Indonesia (June, 2025)

Source: NapoleonCat, 2025.

According to NapoleonCat (2025), Instagram recorded approximately 94.4 million active users in Indonesia as of June 2025. The majority of these users were between the ages of 18 and 34, representing a highly active demographic in consuming, sharing, and engaging with digital content. This large user base has positioned Instagram as an important platform for shaping public perceptions and lifestyle trends.

1.2 Explore Importance of the Problem

The rise of social media has also contributed to the emergence of influencers as key opinion leaders in digital spaces. Influencers are individuals with substantial online followings whose content can influence audience attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Hariyanti & Wirapraja, 2018). In the fitness sector, influencers frequently provide workout guidance, nutrition recommendations, and motivational content. Research by Surrahmi (2024) found that approximately 70% of respondents became familiar with healthy lifestyle practices through social media, while 65% reported trusting health-related advice from influencers. Safdar and Eman (2025) emphasize that trust plays a crucial role in digital health communication, making influencers powerful actors in shaping public understanding of health and fitness.

However, the growing popularity of fitness influencers also raises concerns regarding misinformation and unrealistic body standards. Abdullah and Amelia (2025) highlight that the abundance of unverified health information on social media may negatively impact public health. Furthermore, fitness content often promotes idealized body images that can contribute to body dissatisfaction and social pressure, particularly among women (Ahrens et al., 2022). In this context, fitness influencers become important figures in constructing meanings related to health, beauty, and self-improvement.

The representation of women in digital media is particularly relevant because social media influences how women perceive themselves and their social roles by promoting idealized standards and expectations (Sugitanata et al., 2024). Through personal branding practices, female influencers strategically present themselves in ways that communicate specific values, lifestyles, and identities. Personal branding enables individuals to establish credibility, differentiate themselves from others, and build meaningful connections with their audiences (Judijanto et al., 2024).

1.3 Describe Relevant Scholarship

Previous studies have demonstrated that personal branding on Instagram plays an important role in helping female public figures establish credibility, authenticity, and audience engagement. Research on female influencers in the fields of diet, fitness, beauty, entrepreneurship, and pageantry has shown that effective personal branding is often built through content consistency, clear specialization, authenticity, and strong visual identity (Luthfiyyah et al., 2020; Efrida & Diniati, 2020; Lois & Candraningrum, 2021; Hakim & Febriana, 2023; Catharine et al., 2024). These studies commonly apply Montoya's personal branding framework and highlight how influencers strategically communicate their values and expertise through Instagram.

In addition, a study on representation has explored how women are portrayed on social media. Saputri (2024), for instance, found that Instagram can function as a space for challenging gender stereotypes and promoting women's empowerment through feminist narratives. While previous studies have examined personal branding among female influencers and the representation of women on social media, limited research has specifically investigated female fitness influencers by integrating both perspectives.

Furthermore, Stuart Hall's perspective on representation has primarily been applied to traditional media, where representation is largely produced by media institutions. In contrast, social media enables individuals to actively construct and manage their own representation through personal branding practices. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining how a female fitness influencer constructs personal branding on Instagram and how representation emerges through that process.

1.4 State Research Objective

This study focuses on the Instagram account @desyindarta, a fitness influencer and certified fitness coach. Her content reflects a unique combination of fitness expertise, motherhood, and her identity as a Muslim woman, making her an interesting subject for examining how female fitness influencers construct and communicate their personal brands.

Given the limited research integrating personal branding and representation in the context of female fitness influencers, this study aims to analyze how a female fitness influencer is represented through the construction of personal branding on Instagram. In addition, the study seeks to identify how visual and verbal narratives contribute to the representation of female identity within that personal branding.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore how a female fitness influencer constructs personal branding on Instagram and how such branding represents women in the digital fitness sphere. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of social phenomena or experiences encountered by research subjects, such as their motivations, perceptions, and actions (Hadi et al., 2021). The object of this research was the Instagram account @desyindarta, owned by Desy Indarta, a certified fitness coach and fitness influencer specializing in strength training and calisthenics.

Data collection consisted of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to provide detailed and contextual

explanations while enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes during the interview process (Harahap, 2020). The key informants included Desy Indarta as the main informant, Puji Astuti and Rininta Arie as external informants who are followers and clients of the influencer, and two expert informants, Dr. Rubiyanto, M.M., a communication scholar and author of a book on personal branding, and Dr. Geofakta Razali, M.I.Kom., a communication scholar specializing in postmodern perspective.

Secondary data were gathered from books, academic journals, previous studies, and content published on the Instagram account @desyindarta to support and contextualize the findings.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied data triangulation, which involves the use of multiple data sources collected at different times, settings, and from different individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In particular, source triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from different informants with varying roles and perspectives, including the main informant, external informants, and expert sources.. The validity of the findings was further strengthened through literature review and Instagram content analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman Flow Chart Analysis, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, allowing patterns and meanings related to personal branding and representation to emerge systematically (Miles & Huberman, as cited in Samsu, 2017).

3. Result

3.1 Personal Branding of Desy Indarta

This study examined how a female fitness influencer, Desy Indarta, constructs personal branding through Instagram. The findings were derived from semi-structured interviews with five informants and content analysis of Instagram reels and stories published on the account @desyindarta. The analysis was guided by Montoya's Eight Laws of Personal Branding framework (Montoya, 2002, as cited in Raharjo, 2023).

The findings indicate that Desy Indarta's personal branding strongly reflects the law of specialization, which emphasizes focusing on a specific area of expertise as a primary identity. Through her Instagram account, Desy consistently presents content related to strength training and calisthenics. Interview data revealed that followers perceive her as a credible fitness figure because of her expertise in these areas. This specialization strengthens audience recognition and reinforces her professional identity as a certified fitness coach.

The law of leadership is reflected in the credibility she has established through her professional experience and educational content. Her Instagram posts frequently include motivational messages, audience engagement, and the achievements of her clients, many of whom are mothers. As a result, her content is perceived as both empowering and relatable, positioning her as a trusted reference for audiences pursuing healthier lifestyles.

The law of personality is demonstrated through Desy's confidence despite receiving negative comments and confronting gender stereotypes that associate muscularity with men and slimness with women. Rather than conforming to these expectations, she consistently promotes strength training as an empowering activity for women while encouraging a balanced and sustainable approach to healthy living.

The findings also reveal the law of distinctiveness, as Desy differentiates herself through her identity as a hijab-wearing fitness influencer, a profile that remains relatively uncommon in the fitness industry. Her content consistently emphasizes strength, functionality, and women's empowerment instead of physical appearance or body aesthetics. This distinctive positioning reflects her personal values while maintaining her identity as a Muslim woman.

Furthermore, the law of visibility is reflected in her strategy of maintaining an active digital presence. Desy described Instagram as her "digital CV," where she showcases her expertise and professional identity. She actively utilizes posts, reels, stories, and audience interactions to

maintain visibility, while many clients reported discovering her coaching services through Instagram.

The law of unity is evident in the consistency between her online identity and everyday life. Followers perceive her content as authentic because it reflects her actual daily activities. Her role as a fitness coach is consistently integrated with her identity as a mother, while the healthy lifestyle promoted through her content is also practiced within her family environment.

Similarly, the law of persistence is reflected in her long-term commitment to fitness. Initially created as a platform for documenting her personal fitness journey, her Instagram account gradually developed into a professional platform while maintaining a consistent focus on strength training, healthy aging, and long-term well-being.

Finally, the law of goodwill emerges through content that promotes positive values and social responsibility. Desy carefully selects brand collaborations, avoiding endorsements that do not align with her values. In addition, her charitable activities, motivational messages, and continuous support for followers contribute to a positive public image and strengthen audience trust.

3.2 Representation of Female Fitness Influencer

The findings further demonstrate that Desy Indarta's personal branding contributes to the representation of women in the digital fitness environment. Guided by Stuart Hall's theory of representation (Hall, 2004, as cited in Makiyah et al., 2024), the analysis shows that her Instagram content constructs an alternative image of female fitness that differs from conventional representations centered on physical appearance.

Rather than emphasizing beauty standards or body aesthetics, Desy represents women through values of strength, discipline, competence, and long-term well-being. Her identity as a certified fitness coach, a mother, and a Muslim woman wearing the hijab is consistently integrated into her content, creating a representation that combines professionalism, authenticity, and personal values. This representation challenges traditional gender stereotypes by demonstrating that women can simultaneously maintain their cultural and religious identity while actively participating in strength-based fitness activities.

The findings indicate that Desy Indarta's personal branding extends beyond self-promotion and functions as a medium for constructing empowering representations of women in the fitness domain. Through the combination of professional competence, credibility, authenticity, and values related to strength and healthy living, she establishes a strong personal brand while contributing to broader discussions on women's representation, fitness culture, and digital identity. These findings suggest that social media serves as a space where personal branding and representation intersect, shaping how individuals and social groups are perceived in contemporary digital society.

4. Discussion

This study found that Desy Indarta's personal branding on Instagram (@desyindarta) reflects the successful integration of Peter Montoya's Eight Laws of Personal Branding, namely specialization, leadership, personality, distinctiveness, visibility, unity, persistence, and goodwill Montoya (2002, as cited in Raharjo, 2023). The findings indicate that these elements work together to create a coherent personal brand while simultaneously shaping representations of women within the digital fitness environment.



Figure 2. Desy Indarta's Weighted Chin-Up Progress
Source: Instagram reels @desyindarta, 2025

A key finding is that Desy's personal branding is strongly rooted in her professional competence in fitness, particularly strength training and calisthenics. As a certified coach and educator, she consistently shares workout-related content that functions as a digital portfolio, allowing audiences to observe her expertise, achievements, and development over time. This finding is also relevant to the law of visibility in personal branding, as Instagram functions not only as a platform for self-presentation but also as a strategic space for maintaining professional presence and reaching potential clients. At the same time, Desy's consistent focus on strength training and calisthenics supports Montoya's argument that specialization is essential for creating a strong personal brand because it enables audiences to associate an individual with a specific area of expertise (Montoya, 2002, as cited in Raharjo, 2023). Her sustained focus on strength training and calisthenics reinforces perceptions of credibility. Similar findings were reported by Luthfiyyah et al. (2020), who found that a clear specialization supported by professional competence contributes to the development of a strong and credible personal brand among fitness influencers.

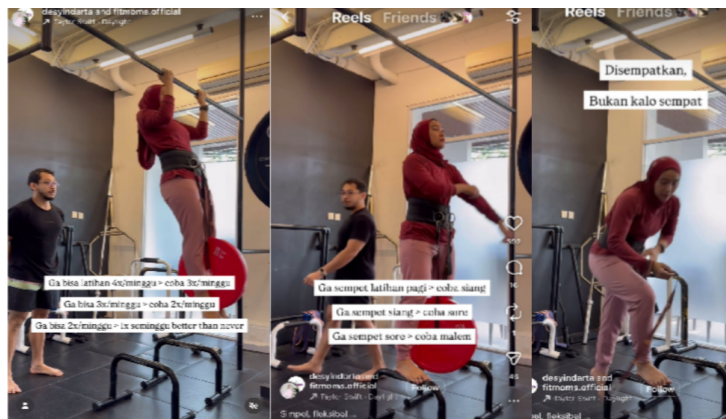


Figure 3. Featuring a Motivational Message on Training Consistency
Source: Instagram reels @desyindarta, 2025.

Beyond competence, the findings suggest that Desy's personal branding reflects elements of leadership within the fitness field. This finding suggests that leadership in personal branding is not solely derived from formal authority or professional credentials, but also from the ability to influence audiences' attitudes and behaviors through consistent communication. Her content frequently conveys clear and assertive messages that encourage audiences to view fitness as a long-term commitment rather than an activity that is only pursued when convenient. By communicating values related to discipline, responsibility, and long-term well-being, Desy positions herself not merely as a source of motivation but also as a figure who guides how audiences understand and approach fitness in their everyday lives. This supports the concept of leadership in personal branding, which emphasizes the ability to influence and guide others within a particular field.

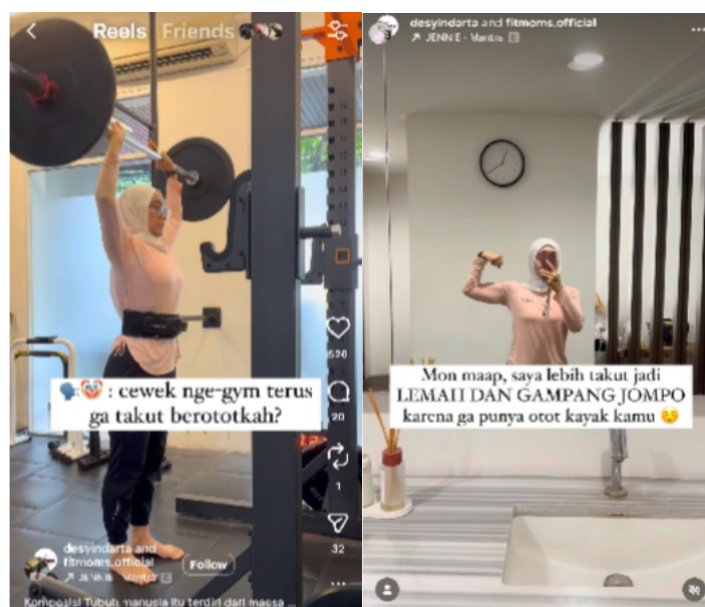


Figure 4. Desy's Content Challenging Gender Stereotypes in Strength Training
Source: Instagram reels @desyindarta, 2025.

Another notable finding highlights the role of personality in strengthening Desy's personal brand. Rather than merely reflecting individual characteristics, Desy's personality functions as a symbolic expression of the values she promotes through her fitness journey. Desy presents herself as a confident woman who remains committed to strength training despite negative comments and gender stereotypes that often position muscularity as incompatible with conventional femininity. For instance, in one of her posts, Desy included an in-text narrative reflecting a question she frequently receives about whether she is afraid of becoming too muscular from going to the gym. She then stated that she was more concerned about becoming weak and frail due to a lack of muscle. This response demonstrates how Desy actively redefines dominant assumptions about women's bodies by framing strength and physical capability as desirable attributes rather than traits that diminish femininity. Her communication style is characterized by a firm, straightforward, and realistic approach to healthy living, emphasizing balance, sustainability, and long-term commitment rather than restrictive practices. These characteristics contribute to a personality that is perceived as authentic and relatable, while also reinforcing the broader message that fitness can be approached in a realistic and sustainable manner.

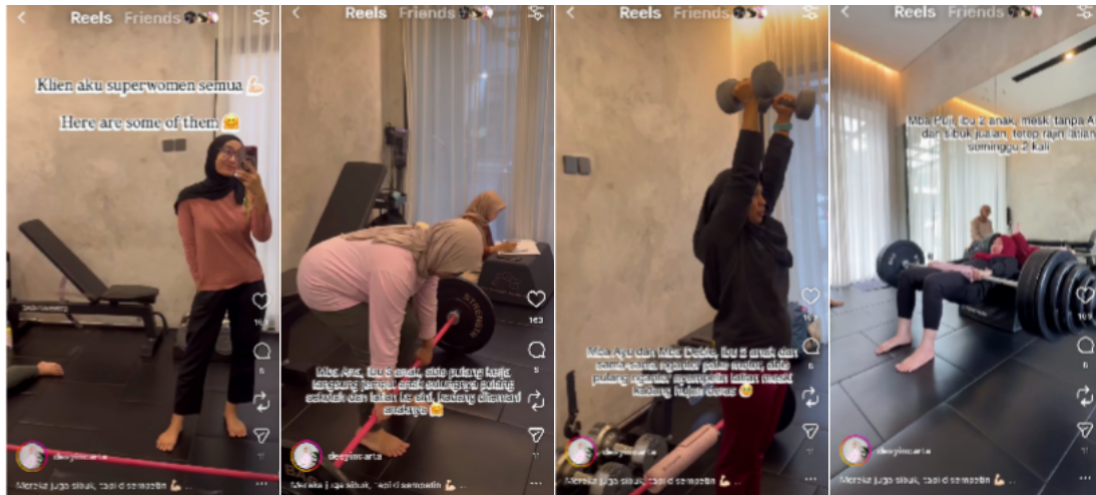


Figure 5. Desy Indarta's Reels content featuring client appreciation.

Source: Instagram reels @desyindarta, 2025.

The study also highlights how personal branding functions as a representational practice. Drawing on Hall's theory of representation (Hall, 2004, as cited in Makiyah et al., 2024), the findings suggest that Desy's content does not merely reflect reality but actively produces meanings about women and fitness. Through her visual and verbal narratives, Desy represents women as strong, disciplined, resilient, and capable of engaging in physically demanding activities. This representation is further reinforced through content featuring her clients, many of whom are mothers, whom she refers to as "superwomen," emphasizing their ability to remain active, strong, and committed to fitness alongside their daily household responsibilities. The representation conveys the idea that women, particularly mothers, can remain active, productive, and physically strong while balancing their family roles. It also challenges traditional assumptions that physically demanding forms of exercise, particularly strength training, are more appropriate for men than women. Previous studies on gender and sport have shown that women are frequently associated with appearance, aesthetics, and traditional femininity, whereas strength, muscularity, and physically demanding sports are more commonly linked to masculinity (Kenschaft et al., 2016). In contrast to fitness content that frequently emphasizes body aesthetics and physical appearance, Desy's content places greater emphasis on strength, functionality, and personal empowerment. The representation conveyed through Desy's content offers an alternative understanding of femininity by emphasizing competence, strength, and physical capability.

From a postmodern perspective, this finding illustrates how social media allows alternative meanings of femininity to emerge and coexist with dominant gender norms, rather than being defined by a single, fixed standard. Her identity as a hijab-wearing woman who actively participates in strength training further strengthens this alternative representation and differentiates her from many fitness influencers in the digital sphere.

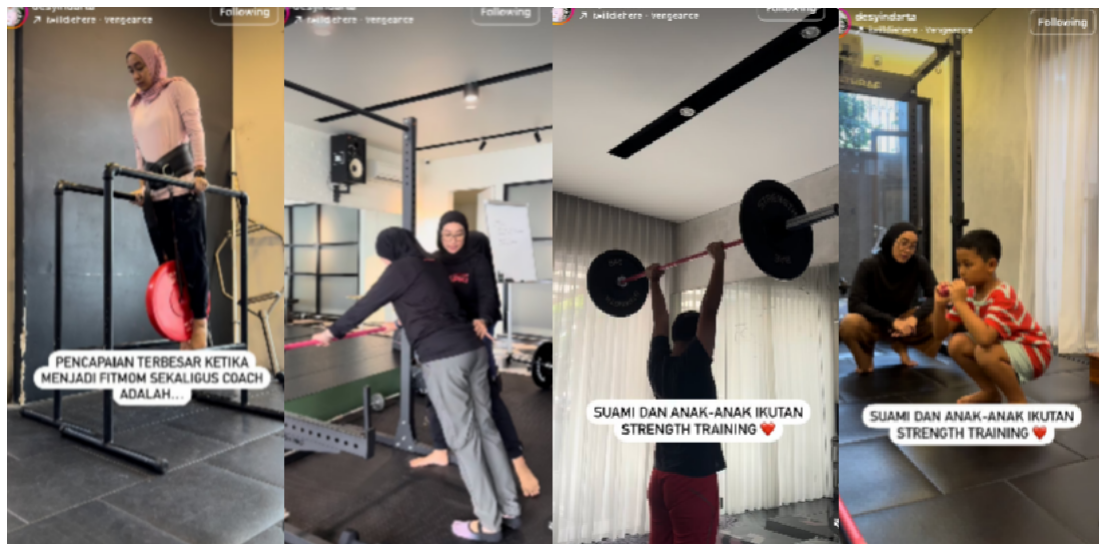


Figure 6. Demonstrating the Unity of Her Roles as a Fit Mom and Coach

Source: Instagram reels @desyindarta, 2025.

Another finding relates to the unity between Desy's online identity and her personal life. The study found that the healthy lifestyle promoted through her Instagram content reflects practices that are genuinely embedded in her daily routine. Several posts also portray the integration of her fitness role and her role as a mother, suggesting that the values communicated through her content are not limited to her professional identity but are also reflected in her personal and family life. This alignment strengthens the authenticity of her personal brand, as audiences are able to observe consistency between the image presented on social media and the lifestyle practiced in everyday life. This representation conveys the meaning that women, particularly mothers, can remain active, productive, and strong in the fitness domain while balancing their family responsibilities. Several posts also illustrate how fitness activities can coexist with and even support women's everyday roles as mothers. Rather than portraying fitness as separate from family life, Desy's content presents both roles as mutually compatible and complementary. This finding supports Montoya's principle of unity, which emphasizes the importance of consistency between public image and personal values (Montoya, 2002, as cited in Raharjo, 2023).

The findings also demonstrate the importance of persistence in maintaining a personal brand. Desy's branding did not emerge instantly but developed gradually through the long-term sharing of fitness-related content. The evolution of her Instagram account from a space for personal documentation into a platform recognized for fitness-related content further illustrates how personal branding can develop organically through sustained commitment and consistency over time. Her continued focus on fitness content allows audiences to consistently associate her identity with fitness. Furthermore, persistence is reflected not only in the consistency of the content she shares but also in the lifestyle and values she continuously promotes. Desy emphasizes health and physical capability across the lifespan, including healthy aging and maintaining strength throughout different stages of life. This suggests that fitness is positioned not merely as a means of achieving an ideal body or following temporary trends, but as a form of self-empowerment that enables women to maintain their health, strength, and overall quality of life in a sustainable manner. Through this consistent message, Desy reinforces a personal brand that encourages women to view fitness as a long-term investment in their well-being rather than a short-term pursuit of appearance-related outcomes.

Finally, the study found evidence of goodwill through Desy's commitment to responsible fitness communication. Rather than accepting commercial product or supplement endorsements, despite receiving such offers, she chooses not to promote products that she does not personally use. Instead, she prioritizes maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the

information she shares, particularly regarding health, fitness, and lifestyle-related topics. She also seeks to address common misconceptions surrounding fitness and dieting, reflecting a commitment to providing accurate and responsible information to her audience. In addition, Desy occasionally expresses her views on social and national issues in Indonesia through reposted content and personal commentary on social media. She has also shared her participation in disaster-relief donation initiatives, reflecting social awareness beyond fitness-related topics. Collectively, these practices contribute to a positive public image and strengthen audience trust, illustrating how goodwill can enhance the sustainability and credibility of a personal brand.

Beyond personal branding, the findings revealed broader meanings related to the representation of women. Hall (2004, as cited in Makiyah et al., 2024) argues that representation is a process through which meaning is produced and communicated within culture. The findings suggest that Desy's personal branding functions not only as a strategy for establishing a professional identity but also as a means of constructing meanings about women and fitness in digital spaces. Through visual and verbal narratives, Desy represents women as active, disciplined, empowered, and capable. Her content portrays fitness not merely as a means of achieving physical appearance goals but as a pathway to self-development, confidence, and personal empowerment. This representation challenges conventional portrayals of women that often prioritize beauty and physical attractiveness over strength and competence. Furthermore, followers interpreted Desy's content as both educational and motivational. While physical fitness remains a visible theme, it is consistently accompanied by messages emphasizing health, discipline, and sustainable lifestyle. This finding supports previous studies suggesting that social media influencers can shape audience perceptions and behaviors through authentic, relatable, and trustworthy communication (Surrahmi, 2024; Safdar & Eman, 2025).

Overall, the results demonstrate that Desy Indarta's Instagram account functions not only as a platform for personal branding but also as a medium through which alternative representations of women in fitness are constructed and communicated. By integrating the principles of personal branding with empowering narratives, Desy contributes to reshaping perceptions of women in fitness and to broader discussions on women's representation, fitness culture, and digital identity.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the personal branding constructed by Desy Indarta through her Instagram account, @desyindarta, reflects all eight elements of Peter Montoya's personal branding framework: specialization, leadership, personality, distinctiveness, visibility, unity, persistence, and goodwill (Montoya, 2002, as cited in Raharjo, 2023). Among these elements, specialization and leadership emerged as the most dominant factors in shaping her personal brand. Through consistent fitness-related content, professional expertise, and the communication of values and perspectives related to health, discipline, and long-term well-being, Desy has established herself as a credible and influential figure within the fitness community, particularly among women, many of whom are mothers.

The findings demonstrate that her personal branding extends beyond the mere showcasing of personal fitness activities. Instead, it positions her as a trusted source of inspiration for audiences, particularly women and mothers, in pursuing a healthy lifestyle. Through her role as a certified coach and fitness educator, Desy influences how audiences perceive fitness and women's participation in fitness. Her credibility is further strengthened by distinctive characteristics that differentiate her from other fitness influencers in the digital environment, particularly her identity as a hijab-wearing fitness coach and her emphasis on strength, functionality, and empowerment rather than physical appearance.

This study also reveals that Desy's personal branding contributes to the representation of women in the fitness domain. Through visual and verbal narratives that emphasize discipline, consistency, and strength, she portrays women as capable, empowered, and active individuals. Her identity as a hijab-wearing fitness coach who actively engages in strength training challenges traditional assumptions that often limit women's participation in physically

demanding fitness activities. As a result, her content promotes a broader understanding of femininity, one that includes competence, resilience, authority, and physical strength.

The study further found that this representation is constructed through both visual and verbal narratives communicated on Instagram. The visual narratives are reflected in the documentation of fitness activities and the integration of motherhood with a fitness-oriented lifestyle, while the verbal narratives are conveyed through captions, motivational messages, and the consistent communication of values and perspectives related to fitness.

Overall, this research highlights that personal branding on Instagram functions not only as a strategy for building personal and professional identity but also as a mechanism for constructing social representations. The findings demonstrate that the values, identities, and meanings communicated through personal branding contribute to how women are represented in digital fitness spaces. Therefore, Desy Indarta's personal branding serves not only as an effective communication strategy but also as a meaningful contribution to the representation of women in fitness and digital media.

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