

THE POWER OF PERSONAL BRANDING: HOW FOOD VLOGGERS INFLUENCE SUBSCRIPTION DECISIONS ON YOUTUBE CHANNEL

O PODER DA MARCA PESSOAL: COMO OS VLOGGERS DE CULINÁRIA INFLUENCIAM AS DECISÕES DE INSCRIÇÃO EM CANAIS DO YOUTUBE

Article received on: 9/1/2026

Article accepted on: 7/4/2026

Mohamad Hadi Prasetyo*

*Doctoral of Economic Study Program, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan; Bandung, Indonesia
hadi.p@ekuitas.ac.id

Marcellia Susan**

**Management, Universitas Kristen Maranatha, Bandung, Indonesia
hadi.p@ekuitas.ac.id

Vera Intanie Dewi*

*Doctoral of Economic Study Program, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, Bandung, Indonesia
hadi.p@ekuitas.ac.id

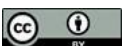
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

Abstract

The research ultimately seeks to clarify the psychological mechanisms linking personal branding to subscription behaviour. It concludes that understanding audience perception is crucial for strengthening digital engagement. A quantitative method using path analysis was employed to assess the structural relationships among personal branding, personal image, and subscription decisions. The sample included 800 respondents (400 Gen Y and 400 Gen Z) who follow Indonesia's ten most popular food vloggers, using structured questionnaires to gather data. The study concludes that personal image is a critical psychological bridge between personal branding and audience commitment. Generational distinctions further reveal that creators must tailor their approach to different demographic expectations. The findings strengthen theoretical models that connect branding, perception, and digital engagement. They suggest that effective digital personas are central to audience loyalty across platforms. Managers and creators should design branding strategies that resonate culturally and emotionally. Strong personal branding can translate into long-term subscriber loyalty and greater ecosystem value. The study is limited to focuses solely on food vloggers, which restricts generalization to other countries and content categories. Future research should broaden geographical and content scope while integrating behavioral analytics. Such expansions would deepen understanding of how personal branding operates across diverse digital ecosystems.

Resumo

A pesquisa visa, em última instância, esclarecer os mecanismos psicológicos que ligam a marca pessoal ao comportamento de assinatura. Ela conclui que compreender a percepção do público é fundamental para fortalecer o engajamento digital. Foi empregado um método quantitativo com análise de caminhos para avaliar as relações estruturais entre marca pessoal, imagem pessoal e decisões de assinatura. A amostra incluiu 800 participantes (400 da Geração Y e 400 da Geração Z) que seguem os dez vloggers de culinária mais populares da Indonésia, utilizando questionários estruturados para coletar dados. O estudo conclui que a imagem pessoal é uma ponte psicológica fundamental entre a marca pessoal e o engajamento do público. As distinções geracionais revelam ainda que os criadores devem adaptar sua abordagem às diferentes expectativas demográficas. Os resultados reforçam modelos teóricos que conectam marca, percepção e engajamento digital. Eles sugerem que personas digitais eficazes são essenciais para a fidelidade do público em todas as plataformas. Gestores e criadores devem elaborar estratégias de marca que tenham ressonância cultural e emocional. Uma marca pessoal forte pode se traduzir em lealdade de assinantes a longo prazo e maior valor para o ecossistema. O estudo se limita a focar exclusivamente em vloggers de culinária, o que restringe a generalização para outros países e categorias de conteúdo. Pesquisas futuras devem ampliar o escopo geográfico e de



Keywords: Personal Branding. Personal Image. Food Vlogger. Youtube.

conteúdo, integrando análises comportamentais. Tais expansões aprofundariam a compreensão de como a marca pessoal opera em diversos ecossistemas digitais.

Palavras-chave: Marca Pessoal. Imagem Pessoal. Vlogger de Culinária. YouTube.

1 INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital platforms has redefined media consumption patterns, with YouTube emerging as the most utilized platform globally—accessed by 93.8% of internet users based on the We Are Social report of 2023. It has evolved into a powerful medium for individuals to disseminate content, establish public personas, and monetize audience engagement (Kemp, 2023). Many people are attracted to YouTube as a business platform, hoping to grow their channels and take advantage of the financial benefits of AdSense partnerships and advertising (Azizah, 2020). Within this ecosystem, food vloggers have gained prominence, not only as entertainers and information providers but also as influential figures capable of shaping food-related trends, consumption habits, and purchase behavior (Grzesiak, 2018).

Table 1

Most-Used Social Media Platforms

No.	Social Media Platform	Percentage of Internet Users that have used each platform
1	Youtube	93.8
2	Whatsapp	87.7
3	Instagram	86.6
4	Facebook	85.5
5	Twitter/X	63.6

Source: Wearesocial.com (2023)

In a highly saturated digital content landscape, food vloggers must adopt strategic measures to differentiate their channels and attract subscribers. Monetization on YouTube requires not only a substantial number of views but also a high subscriber count, making subscriber acquisition a critical objective for content creators (Google Support). Consistency in content production, reflected in frequent video uploads, is one marker of

a vlogger's commitment and professionalism. However, the challenge lies in influencing the public's decision to subscribe, which is inherently a psychological process driven by perceived value, relevance, and identity alignment.

The decision-making process begins with audience needs and culminates in behavioral outcomes such as subscribing, engaging, or sharing content. YouTubers rely on audience engagement—views, comments, and subscriptions—to secure advertising revenue through AdSense and other partnerships. As such, YouTube has become a viable business platform, especially for niche creators like food vloggers who specialize in culinary content. Reports from Forbes (2024) and e.vnexpress.net (2024) highlight the rise of food-centric influencers, including chefs, restaurateurs, and food content creators, who are celebrated for presenting culinary experiences in authentic and engaging formats. Food vloggers significantly influence food culture and consumer behavior, shaping preferences related to dining, restaurant selection, and food purchasing (Grzesiak, 2018). Subscriber count serves as both a metric of influence and a determinant of content visibility within YouTube's algorithmic ecosystem. Despite the centrality of personal branding in the digital creator economy, limited empirical research has examined its effect on viewer engagement and subscription decisions—particularly through the lens of generational differences. This gap highlights the need to better understand how personal branding strategies are interpreted by distinct audience segments and how these perceptions drive digital consumer behavior.

Empirical studies highlight that YouTube's algorithm favors channels with high subscriber counts and engagement rates, which in turn increases their visibility (Guo *et al.*, 2025). However, research remains inconclusive on the factors that drive decision to subscribe whether audiences are drawn by the content itself, the creator's persona, or a combination of both. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for food vloggers and digital marketers seeking to optimize their branding strategies. Although personal branding has been widely explored in corporate and product marketing (Aaker, 1997; Montoya and Vandehey, 2002), its application to individual content creators remains an under-researched area (Labrecque *et al.*, 2011; Vosloban, 2013). Many existing studies focus on brand image in traditional business settings, but few have examined how personal branding and personal image influence consumer behavior within digital content

platforms. Additionally, prior research often neglects generational differences in perception and engagement with digital influencers (Kim, 2011; Khedher, 2014).

The emergence of virtual influencers has introduced new complexities into the field of digital content marketing. Unlike traditional influencers, these AI-generated personas engage audiences in human-like ways, prompting a reevaluation of trust and authenticity in branding. Joel-Edgar *et al.* (2025) emphasize that mind perception and perceived authenticity are critical factors influencing audience engagement. Their findings suggest that virtual influencers are evaluated differently from human influencers, raising important questions about the applicability and effectiveness of personal branding strategies in both human- and AI-driven marketing contexts. In the increasingly saturated digital landscape, differentiation is essential for survival. Despite the apparent homogeneity of content, digital spaces host highly fragmented communities that demand personalized engagement strategies. As Grzesiak (2018) argues, personal image plays a pivotal role in online identity construction, particularly for content creators such as food vloggers. These individuals are not only perceived through their content but also through the image they consciously construct and project. This image is an outcome of their self-identity and is interpreted through the lens of audience perception (Kim, 2011). To remain competitive, food vloggers must develop strategies that align their personal identity with the image perceived by viewers, ensuring it is positive and distinctive. YouTube serves as both a platform and a medium for constructing this image (Grzesiak, 2018). A strategically managed personal image—developed through consistent branding—is essential for achieving audience recognition and trust (Kim, 2011). Food vloggers are thus increasingly understood as personal brands, much like commercial products. Their public personas are crafted through deliberate efforts involving identity formation, brand positioning, and image evaluation (Khedher, 2014). As Montoya and Vandehey (2002) explain, personal branding is a proactive process in which individuals market themselves to shape public perception, even in the absence of direct contact. In the current digital environment, this process is not optional but necessary for content creators seeking visibility and audience engagement (Jacobson, 2020).

A key challenge for food vloggers lies in addressing the generational diversity of YouTube audiences. According to We Are Social report of 2023, Generations Y and Z comprise the majority of YouTube users. These cohorts differ in media habits,

technological fluency, and content expectations, shaped by distinct socio-cultural experiences (Dewi *et al.*, 2020; Johnson, 2017). As a result, the same personal branding strategy may yield divergent audience interpretations and levels of engagement. This generational variation influences how personal image is formed and perceived, ultimately affecting subscription behavior. Despite the growing relevance of personal branding in digital content, its impact on audience behavior—particularly across generational segments—remains insufficiently explored. Existing literature continues to emphasize product branding, often overlooking the role of individual branding in shaping viewer perceptions and interactions within competitive platforms such as YouTube.

Furthermore, Vosloban (2013) identified a critical gap in previous research — the lack of attention to generational differences in personal branding perceptions. This becomes important as each generation translates personal branding differently, as Kim (2011) stated that personal branding serves as an effective construct for shaping personal image. This study particularly raises the concern of how emerging digital content as grey literature — content that is not reviewed or published through standard academic or commercial channels — yet holds significant influence over audience behavior and consumption behaviors. While most research focuses on personal image tied to products offered, this study aims to fill these gaps by examining how personal branding influences the decision to subscribe to food vloggers' YouTube channels, with a specific focus on the differing perceptions of Generation Y and Z. By exploring generational differences, this research addresses the weakness identified in previous studies and provides valuable insights into the dynamics of personal branding, personal image, and digital consumer behavior, specifically by examining how content creators utilize information that falls into the category of grey literature to influence and build engagement with their audience.

This research contributes to the existing literature by integrating perspectives from digital branding, generational theory, and consumer behavior. It offers empirical insights into how identity, branding, and perception intersect to drive subscription outcomes on digital platforms. This study aims to examine how personal branding influences food vloggers' personal image and, subsequently, their audience's decision to subscribe. Emphasizing Generations Y and Z, the study explores age-related differences in the perception and reception of digital personal branding. Given that Generation Z is the first fully digital-native generation, while Generation Y straddles the transition from

traditional to digital media, comparing their perspectives provides valuable insights into branding effectiveness in the digital era (Bencsik *et al.*, 2016). This study extends the current body of knowledge on personal branding and digital content marketing by addressing existing research gaps. It offers empirical insights into the interplay between personal branding, personal image, and audience subscription behavior within the context of food vloggers. Additionally, the findings yield practical implications for digital content creators, enabling them to enhance their branding strategies to better attract and retain subscribers in a highly competitive online environment.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's digital landscape, brands are increasingly leveraging social media to establish their presence and engage with audiences. A growing trend in this space is the use of virtual influencers, who offer high levels of engagement, brand control, and cost efficiency (Guo *et al.*, 2025). Research indicates that virtual influencers exhibit an inverted U-shaped relationship with brand followers, highlighting the importance of strategic branding efforts (Guo *et al.*, 2025).

Rooting back to its definition, branding is the process of building a brand (Aaker, 1997; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2012). It serves as a strategic tool to achieve and sustain competitive advantage (McNally and Speak, 2003). Branding is a communication process initiated by brand owners to introduce and reinforce their brand identity among target markets (Montoya and Vandehey, 2002). The public's perception of a brand is significantly influenced by the values inherent in the brand owner. Thus, branding ensures that a brand remains memorable to consumers through differentiation. As a key component of marketing, branding aims to influence consumer behavior (Montoya and Vandehey, 2002). Branding manifests in various forms, functioning as a tool to strengthen market positioning. However, if poorly executed, it can result in brand dilution or reputational damage (Arruda, 2009; Gander, 2014). Effective branding reshapes consumer perceptions of products and services (Montoya and Vandehey, 2002) and can also influence societal values in relationships (Clifton, 2003). Differentiation has become crucial, especially in an increasingly competitive digital landscape where numerous brands vie for attention. Modern branding now extends beyond corporations to include

individuals, organizations, and even digital personas (Centeno *et al.*, 2019). The rise of digital platforms has expanded the branding landscape, allowing personal and corporate brands to leverage new marketing channels effectively (Kumar *et al.*, 2023).

Branding is indispensable in marketing, making it a necessity for every business context. Many studies on branding explore the development of effective and efficient brand management systems, covering areas such as personal branding (Labrecque *et al.*, 2011; Henseler and Guerreiro, 2020), brand perception, brand loyalty, brand knowledge, brand differentiation, brand equity, brand awareness, brand proliferation, and brand image (Aaker, 1997; Keller and Swaminathan, 2020). The overarching goal of branding is to establish a brand that differentiates itself from competitors, garners respect, and fosters strong relationships with its target audience (Aaker, 1997). A brand is more than a statement it is a dynamic relationship. In this sense, a brand possesses a distinct identity that can be continuously developed and refined (McNally and Speak, 2003). Within corporate contexts, branding extends beyond products and services to individuals, necessitating clear identity formation for effective personal branding (Centeno *et al.*, 2019). Establishing a strong brand identity fosters trust, not only in businesses but also at the individual level.

Brand identity plays a critical role in brand development and differentiation. Essentially, brand identity encapsulates the values and attributes that distinguish a brand from its competitors. As such, brand identity must be explicitly articulated. In the case of individuals, personal branding must be an authentic representation of their identity, enabling meaningful connections with the broader community. A well-established brand identity fosters brand resonance, facilitates differentiation, and reflects the brand's long-term vision (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2012). Effective brand personalization enhances emotional commitment between brand owners and their audiences (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2012), reinforcing a sense of connection (Aaker, 1997). The significance of personal branding has grown considerably, particularly among digital influencers, entrepreneurs, and professionals leveraging platforms such as YouTube and Instagram (Labrecque *et al.*, 2011). For personal branding to be effective, it must resonate with the target audience and convey authenticity, emotional engagement, and a consistent narrative. Authenticity is increasingly recognized as a pivotal element of personal branding, particularly in the context of digital influencers who must balance self-

promotion with genuine engagement (Chen and Zhao, 2021). Consequently, personal branding serves as a promotional mechanism through which individuals establish their identity, shaping their professional success, reputation, and marketability in the digital era (Khamis *et al.*, 2017).

Individuals must carefully manage the image they project, as it directly shapes both personal and professional reputations. Personal branding enables individuals to strategically influence public perception, aligning it with their business and career aspirations. Gander (2014) conceptualizes personal branding as a marketing strategy aimed at managing how others perceive an individual, emphasizing the role of self-reflection in articulating authentic personal values. When effectively executed, personal branding not only strengthens social and professional credibility but also functions as a key tool for differentiation. A strong personal brand results in a meaningful and consistent personal image—a visible reflection of one’s internal values and external characteristics (Kim, 2011). According to Kim (2011), personal branding is instrumental in shaping personal image, a relationship increasingly supported by recent studies. For food vloggers, this branding process is essential: it becomes a strategic approach to cultivate a distinct identity and gain a competitive advantage. Their personal branding emphasizes self-expression and authenticity, shaping favorable public perceptions. Ultimately, positive personal branding culminates in a visualized personal image, reinforcing identity and enhancing audience engagement (Kim, 2011).

H1a: Personal Branding Influences the Personal Image of Food Vloggers in Y Generation.

H1b: Personal Branding Influences the Personal Image of Food Vloggers in Z Generation.

Food vloggers must prioritize personal image, as they are perceived not merely as content creators but as representations of the identities they construct. Their success hinges on aligning self-constructed identity with audience perception through deliberate strategy (Kim, 2011). Image, in this context, refers to the distinct impression formed by viewers based on visual and narrative cues presented in videos. Viewers’ perceptions become a determinant in shaping personal image, which subsequently influences their decision to subscribe. This dynamic underscores the importance of forming a favorable image, particularly in a saturated digital landscape where followers, viewers, and fans

serve as tangible indicators of public approval. As Kim (2011) highlights, a positive image enhances competitive positioning by influencing consumer choices, especially when product experience is limited. In digital content, where recognition and recall are critical, personal image becomes a decisive factor in audience engagement. Thus, food vloggers must cultivate a unique and authentic persona that differentiates them from competitors, reinforcing personal image as a key antecedent to subscription intent and long-term viewer commitment.

H2a: Food Vlogger's Personal Image Influences the Decision to Subscribe to YouTube Channel in Y Generation.

H2b: Food Vlogger's Personal Image Influences the Decision to Subscribe to YouTube Channel in Z Generation.

Decision-making is a continuous process in human life (Susan, 2020), and personal branding plays a crucial role in shaping these decisions. Analogous to product branding, personal branding promotes individual strengths and uniqueness to a targeted audience (Labrecque *et al.*, 2011). It involves constructing a public identity that reflects one's values and competencies, forming what Kim (2011) describes as a "personal image"—a perception embedded by the surrounding environment based on visible personal attributes. Through this process, individuals create a self-concept that is strategically aligned with audience expectations. The development of personal identity is the initial stage in personal branding, aiming to establish a favorable image perceived as authentic and credible. As Kim (2011) notes, this image derives from both internal and external traits communicated to the public and serves as the foundation for influencing audience attitudes and behaviors. Effective personal branding thus becomes a marketing strategy that manages others' perceptions and facilitates trust, recognition, and differentiation. Once a compelling personal image is formed, it serves as a cognitive basis for viewers' decision-making, including the intent to subscribe. In this context, personal branding not only fosters identity formation but also acts as a precursor to behavioral outcomes, such as content subscription. The current study is grounded in this relationship, positing that identity, built through personal branding, shapes a publicly perceived image that directly informs subscription decisions.

H3a: Personal branding influences the decision to subscribe, mediated by personal image (Y Generation)

H3b: Personal branding influences the decision to subscribe, mediated by personal image (Z Generation)

Generational values are fundamentally shaped by differing life events and societal phenomena experienced across cohorts, which has led to the emergence and categorization of generational theory. The conceptualization of "generation" gained prominence in the early 2000s. Kopperschmidt (2000) defines a generation as a cohort of individuals who share a common range of birth years, age group, geographic location, and formative life experiences that significantly influence their developmental phases. Similarly, Howe and Strauss (1991; 2000) classify generations based on shared birth periods and comparable historical contexts. Over time, demographic shifts driven by technological advancement have influenced generational composition. As the productive age progresses, workforce demographics evolve, leading to continual generational transitions. In the context of the digital age, recent research by Bencsik *et al.*, (2016) provides further insights into contemporary generational classifications.

Table 2

Generation Grouping in the digital era

Year of birth	Name of Generation
1925-1946	Veteran Generation
1947-1960	Baby Boom Generation
1961-1980	X Generation
1981-1995	Y Generation
1996-2010	Z Generation
2011-present	Alfa Generation

Source: Bencsik *et al.* 2016

Z generation is strongly connected to the internet, so it is also called the internet generation. This generation has been aware of technology since childhood, which indirectly influences the growth phase of their lives. This means that there are differences in behavior between generations because historical events are also different. The role of generation in this research creates a different point of view. Everyone tries to carry out a personal branding strategy for their reasons to market themselves which will affect the individual's image. By marketing themselves, they will have their own identity as a guide in introducing themselves. Apart from that, each person's behavior also reflects the

branding they do. Therefore, a perception arises from society. This indicates that there is an image captured by other people as a result of the identity they introduce (Kim, 2011).

YouTube is the most widely used media platform, valued for its accessibility. However, with so many individuals and businesses leveraging YouTube for content creation, the platform has become increasingly saturated. As a result, food vloggers must develop strategic approaches to ensure that their image is perceived positively by the public. Online social communities carry considerable influence and reach; therefore, food vloggers must cultivate a strong and distinctive personal image to stand out and become the preferred choice among viewers. Gaining a large number of viewers and subscribers is the ultimate goal, and personal image plays a critical role in achieving this competitive advantage. Personal branding empowers individuals to shape the identity they wish to project, and effectively managing this branding is key to enhancing personal image. Food vloggers must be intentional about this process in order to attract audience attention and secure long-term engagement. A strong personal image translates into tangible benefits, including greater monetization potential driven by a growing subscriber and viewer base. Importantly, food vloggers must also consider how to appeal to YouTube audiences across different generational cohorts (Potgieter and Doubell, 2018).

3 METHODS

This study investigates the influence of personal branding on the personal image of food vloggers and its impact on viewers' subscription decisions, with a focus on generational differences between Generation Y and Generation Z. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method, which enables large-scale data collection and the assessment of perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors across demographic groups. The study population comprises Indonesian YouTube viewers who follow the ten most popular food vloggers, whose channels collectively exceed 10.8 billion views. Due to the large audience base, purposive sampling was applied to select respondents from Generations Y and Z who actively engage with these vloggers (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). An initial screening question in the questionnaire ensured that only relevant participants were included. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure perceptions of personal branding, personal image, and subscription decisions. The

instrument was developed based on validated scales from previous studies on branding and consumer behavior, and underwent a pre-test to ensure clarity and content validity.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to compare generational perceptions of each variable. Second, path analysis was employed to examine both direct and mediated relationships among personal branding, personal image, and subscription decisions. The analysis was conducted separately for Generation Y and Generation Z to highlight potential differences in the structural relationships between variables (Kline, 2018).

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3

Respondents

Item	Category	Percent (%)	
		Y	Z
Gender	Male	51.25%	43.00%
	Female	48.75%	57.00%
Last time watching food vlog on youtube	A few days ago to 1 month ago	46.25%	49.75%
	2 months to 3 months ago	38.50%	36.25%
	More than 3 months ago	15.25%	14.00%
Foodvlogs that are often watched	Farida nurhan	1.37%	1.24%
	Hobby makan	13.65%	13.17%
	Jessica jane	3.07%	10.68%
	ken & grat	10.81%	9.85%
	MGDALENAF	13.65%	12.45%
	Nex Carlos	17.06%	14.00%
	Ria SW	1.71%	6.95%
	Tanboy kun	19.34%	15.56%
	Tasyi Athasyia	8.53%	6.22%
	The Santoso	10.81%	9.85%
	Foodvlogs that are subscribed	Farida nurhan	1.56%
Hobby makan		14.30%	6.86%
Jessica jane		1.95%	14.13%
Ken & Grat		12.09%	9.60%
MGDALENAF		11.70%	16.46%
Nex Carlos		16.12%	17.01%
Ria SW		1.95%	9.19%
Tanboy kun		19.51%	12.07%
Tasyi Athasyia		9.75%	5.49%
The Santoso		11.05%	7.54%

The respondents in this study were those who were in the generation Y and Z categories, were in the province with the largest population, had watched culinary vlogs, and had subscribed to culinary vlog channels. The results of the analysis of the data that have been obtained, starting from analyzing the descriptive and verification results. Descriptive analysis shows respondents' perceptions and assessments regarding research variables. The following are the results of the recapitulation of descriptive analysis in this research.

Table 4

Descriptive Analysis Score

Variable	Gen Y (1980 - 1995)		Gen Z (1996 - 2010)	
	Total Score	Average	Total Score	Average
Personal Branding	3237.64	8.09	3318.12	8.30
Personal Image	3309.89	8.27	3426.11	8.57
Decision to Subscribe	3021.53	7.55	3114.00	7.79

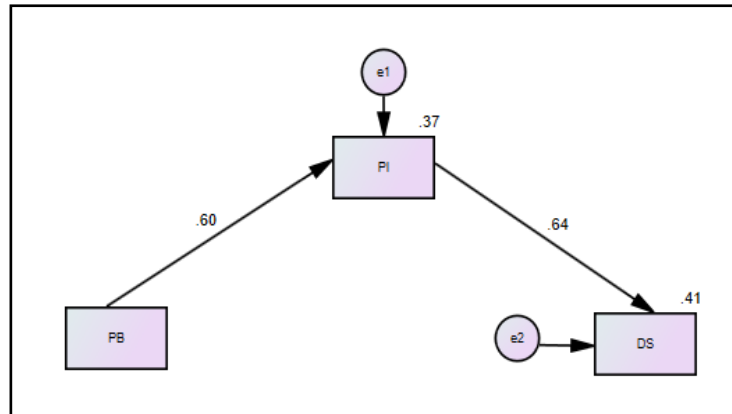
Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for each research variable, comparing responses from Generation Y and Generation Z. On the personal branding variable, both groups reported positive perceptions, with Generation Z showing a higher mean score ($M = X$) than Generation Y ($M = Y$), indicating a 0.21-point difference. This suggests a stronger recognition of the relevance of personal branding among Generation Z. For the personal image variable, responses were also positive across both groups, with a more notable difference of 0.30 points in favor of Generation Z. This indicates that Generation Z respondents perceive food vloggers' image—defined as their persona and competence in culinary content—more favorably. In contrast, the decision to subscribe variable yielded moderately positive responses. Generation Y showed relatively lower scores, suggesting a higher threshold before deciding to subscribe. Both groups appear to require sustained engagement rather than immediate appeal to commit to a subscription.

These findings formed the basis for the subsequent path analysis, which tested three relationships: (1) the effect of personal branding on personal image, (2) the effect of personal image on subscription decisions, and (3) the mediating role of personal image in the relationship between personal branding and subscription decisions. This analysis was conducted separately for each generational cohort

4.1 Y generation

Figure 1

Path Coefficient Value in Y Generation



Upon the establishment of the comprehensive model, the subsequent step is to perform a hypothesis test in order to assess which of the variables exert a statistically significant influence.

- a. The Influence of Personal Branding on Personal Image; The relationship between Personal Branding and Personal Image is positive (value on ρ), 0.605, meaning that when there is an increase in Personal Branding it will increase Personal Image. Based on the provisions previously stated, the p-value obtained is 0.001 so that the p-value $< \alpha = 0.05$ and the calculated t is greater than 1.97. This means that H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted, so there is a significant influence between Personal Branding and Personal Image. Thus the hypothesis which states that there is a significant influence between Personal Branding and Personal Image can be accepted.
- b. The Influence of Personal Image on Decision To Subscribe; The relationship between Personal Image and the Decision to subscribe is positive (value at ρ), 0.642, meaning that when there is an increase in Personal Image it will increase the Decision to subscribe. The p-value obtained is 0.001 so that the p-value $< \alpha = 0.05$ and the calculated t is greater than 1.97. This means that H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted, so there is a significant influence between Personal Image on the

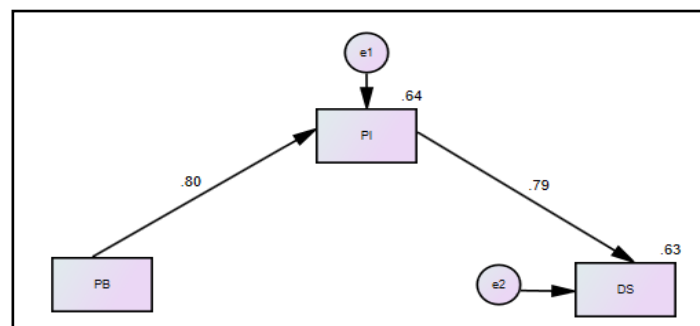
Decision to subscribe. Thus the hypothesis which states that there is a significant influence between Personal Image on the Decision to subscribe can be accepted.

- c. The Influence of Personal Branding on Decision To Subscribe Through Personal Image; To test the significance of personal image as a mediating variable in the model, it can be checked from the results of the Sobel test with the first detail being to find the t-count value of Personal Branding on Personal Image and secondly looking for the t-count of Personal Image on Decision to Subscribe. Based on the calculation results, the calculated t value for testing the mediating effect on this hypothesis is 11.235. If $\alpha = 0.05$ then $t_{table} = 1.97$. From the calculation above, it can be concluded that the t count (11.235) is greater than the t table (1.97) with a significance level of 0.05, so it can be concluded that personal image is able to mediate the relationship between personal branding and the decision to subscribe. Thus hypothesis 3 is accepted. Based on the research model, the equation in this model consists of 2 sub-structure models. The first model is the influence of personal branding on personal image of 36.6% and the second model is the influence of personal image on the decision to subscribe of 41.2%.

4.2 Z generation

Figure 2

Path Coefficient Value in Z Generation



- a. The Influence of Personal Branding on Personal Image; relationship between Personal Branding and Personal Image is positive (value on ρ), 0.802, meaning that when there is an increase in Personal Branding it will increase Personal

Image. Based on the provisions previously stated, the p-value obtained is 0.001 so that the $p\text{-value} < \alpha = 0.05$ and the calculated t is greater than 1.97. This means that H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted, so there is a significant influence between Personal Branding and Personal Image. Thus the hypothesis which states that there is a significant influence between Personal Branding and Personal Image can be accepted.

- b. The Influence of Personal Image on Decision To Subscribe; The relationship between Personal Image and the Decision to subscribe is positive (value at ρ), 0.795, meaning that when there is an increase in Personal Image it will increase the Decision to subscribe. The p-value obtained is 0.001 so that the $p\text{-value} < \alpha = 0.05$ and the calculated t is greater than 1.97. This means that H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted, so there is a significant influence between Personal Image on the Decision to subscribe. Thus the hypothesis which states that there is a significant influence between Personal Image on the Decision to subscribe can be accepted.
- c. The Influence of Personal Branding on Decision To Subscribe Through Personal Image; To test the significance of personal image as a mediating variable in the model, it can be checked from the results of the Sobel test with the first detail being to find the t-count value of Personal Branding on Personal Image and secondly looking for the t-count of Personal Image on Decision to Subscribe. Based on the calculation results, the calculated t value for testing the mediating effect on this hypothesis is 18.774. If $\alpha = 0.05$ then $t_{\text{table}} = 1.97$. From the calculation above, it can be concluded that the t count (18.774) is greater than the t table (1.97) with a significance level of 0.05, so it can be concluded that personal image is able to mediate the relationship between personal branding and the decision to subscribe. Thus hypothesis 3 is accepted. Based on the research model, the equation in this model consists of 2 sub-structure models. The first model is the influence of personal branding on personal image of 64.4% and the second model is the influence of personal image on the decision to subscribe of 63.2%.

5 DISCUSSION

The Influence of Personal Branding on Personal Image; relationship between Personal Branding and Personal Image is positive (value on ρ), 0.802, meaning that when there is an increase in Personal Branding it will increase Personal Image. Based on the provisions previously stated, the p-value obtained is 0.001 so that the p-value $< \alpha = 0.05$ and the calculated t is greater than 1.97. This means that H01 is rejected and Ha1 is accepted, so there is a significant influence between Personal Branding and Personal Image. Thus the hypothesis which states that there is a significant influence between Personal Branding and Personal Image can be accepted.

The Influence of Personal Image on Decision To Subscribe; The relationship between Personal Image and the Decision to subscribe is positive (value at ρ), 0.795, meaning that when there is an increase in Personal Image it will increase the Decision to subscribe. The p-value obtained is 0.001 so that the p-value $< \alpha = 0.05$ and the calculated t is greater than 1.97. This means that H01 is rejected and Ha1 is accepted, so there is a significant influence between Personal Image on the Decision to subscribe. Thus the hypothesis which states that there is a significant influence between Personal Image on the Decision to subscribe can be accepted.

The Influence of Personal Branding on Decision To Subscribe Through Personal Image; To test the significance of personal image as a mediating variable in the model, it can be checked from the results of the Sobel test with the first detail being to find the t-count value of Personal Branding on Personal Image and secondly looking for the t-count of Personal Image on Decision to Subscribe. Based on the calculation results, the calculated t value for testing the mediating effect on this hypothesis is 18.774. If $\alpha = 0.05$ then t table = 1.97. From the calculation above, it can be concluded that the t count (18.774) is greater than the t table (1.97) with a significance level of 0.05, so it can be concluded that personal image is able to mediate the relationship between personal branding and the decision to subscribe. Thus hypothesis 3 is accepted. Based on the research model, the equation in this model consists of 2 sub-structure models. The first model is the influence of personal branding on personal image of 64.4% and the second model is the influence of personal image on the decision to subscribe of 63.2%.

This study confirms that personal branding significantly affects personal image, which subsequently influences the decision to subscribe to digital content. Both Generation Y and Z acknowledge the value of branding; however, Generation Z demonstrates more selective engagement. These findings support earlier research on branding and consumer behavior (Kim, 2011; Vosloban, 2013) and highlight the importance of authenticity in personal branding (Labrecque *et al.*, 2011; Henseler & Guerreiro, 2020). The study extends previous analyses of individual branding within digital content domains (Khedher, 2014; Centeno *et al.*, 2019), showing that personal traits and perceived competence are critical in shaping personal image and influencing audience decisions (Montoya & Vandehey, 2002). Moreover, it reinforces the need for adaptive branding strategies in response to platform algorithms, user behavior, and the rise of virtual influencers, thereby contributing to digital marketing discourse.

Several limitations are acknowledged. The focus on food vloggers may not capture branding dynamics in other sectors. Future studies should examine various influencer types across industries such as fashion, technology, and education to assess whether branding strategies differ. Additionally, as the study relies on self-reported data, future research should incorporate observational or experimental methods to reduce bias. The lack of cultural and geographical analysis is another limitation, as branding effectiveness varies across contexts (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2002; Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Furthermore, while this study examines initial subscription decisions, it does not address long-term engagement. Given audience fluidity in digital environments, future research should explore factors sustaining loyalty, such as content diversity and platform-specific engagement tools (Kumar *et al.*, 2023). The emergence of AI-generated content and virtual influencers also raises new questions about trust and engagement, warranting further investigation into AI-driven branding. Lastly, a longitudinal approach could provide valuable insights into the evolution of personal branding and its impact over time. In sum, this research provides empirical evidence of the strategic role personal branding plays in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors across generational lines. As digital platforms continue to transform personal identity into a marketable asset, understanding the dynamics of personal branding becomes not only relevant but essential for creators, marketers, and scholars alike.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the Doctoral Program of Economics at Parahyangan Catholic University for their academic support during this research. Appreciation is also extended to all respondents from Generations Y and Z who participated in this study. The authors are grateful to the editors and reviewers of the *Journal of Marketing Innovation* for their valuable suggestions that improved the quality of this article.

REFERENCES

- Aaker, D. A., & Joachimsthaler, E. (2012). *Brand leadership*. Free Press business, London.
- Aaker, J. L. (1997). "Dimensions of Brand Personality." *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34(3), 347–356.
- Arruda, W. (2009), "Brand communication: the three Cs", *Thunderbird International Business Review*, Vol. 51 No. 5, pp. 409-16.
- Azizah, K. (2020, August 24). *Subscribe Adalah Langganan, Kenali Fungsi, Keuntungan Dan Cara Menambahkan*. <https://www.merdeka.com/trending/subscribe-adalah-langganan-kenali-fungsi-keuntungan-dan-cara-menambahkan.html>
- Bencsik, A., Csikos, G., & Juhaz, T. (2016). Y and Z Generations at Workplaces. *Journal of Competitiveness*, 8(3), 90–106. <https://doi.org/10.7441/joc.2016.03.06>.
- Centeno, E., Cambra-Fierro, J., Vazquez-Carrasco, R., Hart, S. J., & Dinnie, K. (2019). The interplay between SME owner-managers and the brand-as-a-person. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. 28/4 (2019) 555–572. Emerald Publishing Limited SSN 1061-0421.
- Chen, Y. R. R., & Zhao, X. (2021). Digital dialogue in online brand communities: Examining the social network outcomes of brands' dialogue with Facebook users. *Telematics and Informatics*, 57, 101507.
- Clifton, R., & Simmons, J. (2003). *Brands and branding*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Dewi, V., Febrian, E., Effendi, N., & Anwar, M. (2020). Financial literacy among the millennial generation: Relationships between knowledge, skills, attitude, and behavior. *Australasian Accounting, Business and Finance Journal*, 14(4), 24-37.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American journal of theoretical and applied statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.

- Gander, M. (2014). Managing your personal brand. Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education, 18(3), 99-102.
- Grzesiak, M. (2018). Profiling of YouTube users as a basis for creating the strategy for a personal brand of celebrities. *Studia Ekonomiczne*, 360, 106-127.
- Guo, Z., Yang, H., & Yang, W. (2025). A new social media programme for brands? A study of the relationship between virtual influencers and brand followers. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 84, 104241.
- Henseler, J., & Guerreiro, M. (2020). Design and marketing: Intersections and challenges. *Creativity and innovation management*, 29, 3-10.
- Howe, N., & Strauss, W. (1991). Generations: the history of America's future, 1584 to 2069.
- Jacobson, J. (2020). You are a brand: social media managers' personal branding and "the future audience". *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 29(6), 715-727.
- Joel-Edgar, S., Chowdhury, S., Nagy, P., & Ren, S. (2025). Virtual influencers in social media versus the metaverse: Mind Perception, blame judgements and brand trust. *Journal of Business Research*, 189, 115139.
- Johnson, K. M. (2017). The importance of personal branding in social media: educating students to create and manage their personal brand. *International journal of education and social science*, 4(1), 21-27.
- Keller, K. L., and Swaminathan, V. (2020). "Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity". Pearson Education.
- Kemp, N. (2023). Digital communication, texting, and literacy acquisition. *Routledge International Handbook of Visual-motor skills, Handwriting, and Spelling*, 446-457.
- Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity studies*, 8(2), 191-208.
- Khedher, M., (2014). Personal branding phenomenon. *International journal of information, business and management*, 6(2), p.29.
- Kim, M. K. (2011). The personal branding strategy for effective construction of personal image. *Journal of Fashion Business*, 15(5), 87-102.
- Kline, R. B. (2018). Response to Leslie Hayduk's review of principles and practice of structural equation modeling. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 45(3-4), 188-195.
- Kumar, H., Gupta, P., & Chauhan, S. (2023). Meta-analysis of augmented reality marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 41(1), 110-123.

- Kupperschmidt, B. R. (2000). Multigeneration employees: strategies for effective management. *The health care manager*, 19(1), 65-76.
- Labrecque, L I, Markos, E, and Milne, G R. (2011). Online Personal Branding: Processes, Challenges, and Implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 25 (2011) 37–50.
- McNally, D., & Speak, K. D. (2003). *Be your own brand: A breakthrough formula for standing out from the crowd*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Montoya, P. and Vandehey, T. (2002) *The personal branding phenomenon : realize greater influence, explosive income growth and rapid career advancement by applying the branding techniques of Michael, Martha & Oprah*. [Peter Montoya Inc.]
- Potgieter, A., & Doubell, M. (2018). Authentic personal branding is not your social media page. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 9(4), 1-13.
- Susan, M. (2020). Financial literacy and growth of micro, small, and medium enterprises in west java, indonesia. In *Advanced issues in the economics of emerging markets* (pp. 39-48). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Vosloban, R. I. (2013). Employee's personal branding as a competitive advantage: A managerial approach. *The International Journal of Management Science and Information Technology (IJMSIT)*, (10-(Dec)), 147-159.