DOI: https://doi.org/10.58905/apollo.v3i2.441

# Cultural and Tourism Ambassador: Jaka Rara of Cirebon City in **Building Personal Branding**

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Abstract. Building a positive reputation in the community is an important part of personal branding, especially for those who serve as cultural representatives, such as Jaka Rara, the cultural and tourism ambassador of Cirebon City. In an effort to preserve the culture and local wisdom of Cirebon, social media serves as a strategic platform to introduce cultural values more widely to the community. This study aims to identify the strategies employed by Jaka Rara of Cirebon in building their personal brand as cultural and tourism ambassadors for the city of Cirebon. This qualitative research involves data collection through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation. The results of the research, using Peter Montoya's (2002) personal branding theory, show that Jaka Rara participants have successfully built specialization by strengthening their identity as a reflection of local culture, including the use of Cirebon's distinctive ornaments and mastery of cultural material. Additionally, the aspect of unity is evident in the consistency of cultural messages conveyed through various Instagram features, such as Q&A sessions, Instagram Live, responding to followers' comments, and creating contemporary content that reinforces the dissemination of tourism and cultural education about Cirebon City. This approach reflects the success of Jaka Rara Cirebon City in conveying cultural messages authentically and integrally.

**Keywods:** Culture, Instagram, jaka rara, local wisdom, personal branding

#### 1. Introduction

The city of Cirebon is one of the regions that reflects the cultural richness of Indonesia and is known as a city with a unique cultural identity, which is reflected in the integration of various cultural elements into the daily lives of its people. In addition, there are historical legacies such as the Keraton, the famous megamendung batik tradition, the richly philosophical mask dance art, and a variety of unique culinary delights such as empal gentong and nasi jamblang. This uniqueness makes Cirebon a space for developing a proud cultural identity. However, the current development of technology poses a major challenge in preserving the local wisdom of Cirebon's culture.

One of the efforts to preserve the local wisdom of Cirebon's culture is by holding the Jaka Rara Cirebon City Selection as the Cultural and Tourism Ambassador of Cirebon City. Jaka Rara of Cirebon City is a young person selected through a rigorous process to serve as the Cultural and Tourism Ambassador for the City of Cirebon. The Jaka Rara Selection is typically held annually by the City of Cirebon's Department of Culture and Tourism as a step to involve the younger generation in efforts to preserve local wisdom and promote the culture and tourism of the City of Cirebon in a sustainable manner.

Many studies have been conducted on personal branding on social media, but research related to cultural and tourism ambassadors, particularly Jaka Rara of Cirebon, has not yet been conducted. In addition, a shift in the phenomenon of Jaka Rara of Cirebon's personal branding strategy can also be observed, which previously focused only on offline interactions but now also uses social media, especially Instagram. This phenomenon has not been extensively studied. Therefore, this research aims to address this gap by analyzing the personal branding strategies they employ on Instagram.

This study also reveals gaps in the literature that distinguish it from previous studies. In the study by Ekawati Hariyanti and Anam Miftakhul Huda (2023) titled "Personal Branding of Puteri Indonesia Jawa Timur Through Instagram Social Media," the theory of McNally & Speak (2004) was applied to analyze personal branding strategies. Meanwhile, this study uses Peter Montoya's personal branding theory titled "The Personal Branding Phenomenon" (Montoya, 2002) and shows differences in the variables and theories used.

The purpose of this study is to determine the strategies employed by Jaka Rara in Cirebon City to build their personal branding as tourism and cultural ambassadors, analyze the role of Jaka Rara in preserving the local

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cultural values of Cirebon City, and examine the various challenges faced by Jaka Rara in building effective personal branding as cultural and tourism ambassadors of Cirebon City.

The results of this study are expected to provide positive contributions to the younger generation, local government, and cultural communities in their efforts to preserve and promote local wisdom in Cirebon City. Additionally, it is hoped that this study will complement previous relevant research.

## 2. Metodology

This study uses qualitative methods. Researchers attempt to describe the object of study through in-depth explanations and understanding of the essence of the experience. Qualitative methods can provide deeper insights into the phenomenon being studied, reveal the meaning behind the experience, and explore the social and cultural contexts that influence individuals or groups in certain situations.

This study also uses the theory of Personal Branding from Peter Montoya in his book entitled "The Personal Branding Phenomenon" (2002), personal branding is a strategic process that aims to create a unique and consistent image of an individual in the public eye. In the context of cultural promotion, personal branding can be used as a tool to convey relevant and interesting messages about local wisdom.

Personal branding is a very important strategy in both personal and professional life. There are eight concepts in personal branding development that form a strong foundation, according to Peter Montoya in his book titled "The Personal Branding Phenomenon" (2002), namely:

- a. Specialization
  - This can be understood as a distinctive feature. The more diverse and unique the skills are, the higher the level of success that can be achieved.Leadership
- b. Leadersship
  - Leader do not need to be perfect and do not have to master every aspect. Evaluation of effective leadership should be based on tangible evidence.
- c. Personality
  - Personal branding does not only focus on strengths and perfection, but also acknowledges imperfections. Thus, the personality concept that emerges from personal branding does not have to be perfect, but must reflect a positive attitude towards others.
- d. Distinct / Unique
  - An effective personal brand needs to be presented in a unique way compared to others, so that the brand has a distinct identity.
- e. Appearance
  - Individuals who frequently appear and actively demonstrate their existence tend to be better known than those who have many abilities but never appear.
- f. Unity
  - A person's personal life must be in harmony with the moral and ethical values integrated into their personal brand. What they do in their personal life should reflect the image they want to build through personal branding.
- g. Determination
  - Building personal branding is a complex process. It requires a considerable amount of time and perseverance from the individual to remain consistent with the branding that has been established, without hesitation or the desire to change it. This perseverance is a key factor in achieving personal image success.
- h. Good Intentions
  - Good intentions in developing personal branding have a significant impact, especially in shaping positive personal branding. A person needs to demonstrate values that are considered important in front of others.

There are many ways and strategies to build personal branding, one of which is using the social media platform Instagram, which has become an effective method for individuals to explore their identity in today's modern era. This phenomenon reflects the fact that more and more people are displaying and sharing various aspects of their lives through Instagram. This is because Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms in the world. Since its launch in 2010, the platform has successfully attracted over 400 million active users. Indonesia is among the countries with the highest number of Instagram users (Widyastuti et al., 2022). This can serve as a support for individuals or groups looking to develop their personal branding.

The following are some of the main features of Instagram that support its users' activities, both in building personal branding and for other purposes:

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- a. Feed: An area for sharing permanent photos or videos that will be displayed on the user's profile.
- b. Reels: Short videos with a maximum duration of 90 seconds, equipped with creative editing features, are very popular for entertainment and promotion.
- c. Stories: Content consisting of photos or short videos that can only be accessed for 24 hours.
- d. Live Iinstagram: A feature that enables direct interaction with followers.
- e. Direct Message (DM): A means of communicating privately with other users.

Therefore, the more often someone updates their status and uploads photos, the more it will contribute to increasing their popularity on Instagram. In addition, the status and photos uploaded on Instagram also increase their interest in this platform, with the aim of documenting every moment that occurs (Nurfalah et al., 2021).

The data collection methods used in this study include in-depth interviews based on a pre-established guide, observation, and documentation consisting of photos, videos, and activity reports. The validity of this research was tested using source triangulation, which involves comparing one set of data with another and analyzing them at different times to identify similarities, differences, and source characteristics to ensure the accuracy and truthfulness of the data (Sugiyono, 2013). The informants for this study were the Head of the Cirebon City Tourism and Culture Office, the Chair of the Jaka Rara Association, participants in the Jaka Rara program for the 2020–2024 period, and the people of Cirebon City.

The data analysis techniques used in this study include data reduction, which is the process of selecting data relevant to personal branding strategies; data presentation, which is done through descriptive narratives based on field research findings; and drawing conclusions to formulate effective personal branding strategies in promoting local wisdom.

### 3. Result and Discussion

A concrete way to optimize efforts to preserve culture and local wisdom in the city of Cirebon is to encourage the participation of the younger generation as the successors of cultural traditions. In this case, the active role of Jaka Rara of Cirebon in building personal branding as a Cultural Ambassador is very important. The following are the results of research based on eight indicators of personal branding formation according to Peter Montoya (2002):

A. Jaka Rara's Strategy in Building Personal Branding

Tourism is a modern industry that contributes to economic growth, creates jobs, and develops supporting sectors such as souvenirs, accommodation, and transportation services (Wahab, 1996). And according to Edward B. Tylor, culture is a system that encompasses knowledge, beliefs, arts, ethics, laws, traditions, and other skills acquired by individuals as part of a community (Soekanto Soerjono, 2017).

An ambassador is a person who has been appointed, approved, and given a special mandate by the government to represent a country, institution, company, university, or educational institution in another country (Lubis, 2019). Meanwhile, a tourism ambassador is someone who is considered capable of establishing cooperation with local governments and playing a role in promoting the tourism potential of a region (Nainggolan et al., 2018).

Jaka Rara in Cirebon is a young generation that represents the culture and tourism of Cirebon City. The selection of Jaka Rara is also based on various criteria that must be met. According to Ramdan, the current chairman of the Jaka Rara Association, Jaka Rara participants are always selected based on several predetermined criteria, namely:

- a. Not yet married
- a. 17 23 old age
- b. Have a minimum education equivalent to high school
- c. Native/Resident of Cirebon City
- d. Have an attractive appearance and a good personality
- e. Drug-free, no tattoos, and no piercings (men)
- f. Able to communicate in Indonesian, regional languages, and foreign languages (at least English).

As ambassadors, each Jaka Rara of Cirebon City demonstrates unique and distinctive characteristics, depending on the potential and background of each individual. Some individuals possess exceptional communication skills, enabling them to convey cultural information in a persuasive and communicative manner during various activities, while others have a talent for modeling, allowing them to showcase local attire and identity with confidence. Some individuals have expertise in singing regional and cultural songs, while others have a talent for traditional dances such as Topeng Dance or classical Cirebon Dance. These diverse skills are an advantage for Jaka Rara in promoting Cirebon culture through various media and creative approaches, tailored to the characteristics of the audience they encounter.

Thus, Jaka Rara of Cirebon, as the young generation representing the city of Cirebon and as Cultural and Tourism Ambassadors of the city, plays a role in disseminating knowledge and traditions within their community, with the aim of introducing the collective way of life passed down from generation to generation. Since public

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figures or influencers who serve as role models for teenagers have a greater influence, given that this group is highly integrated with technology and social media platforms (Nuruzzaman, 2024).

Jaka Rara's responsibilities as an ambassador mainly involve facilitating communication, building diplomatic relations, and introducing the uniqueness and richness of Cirebon's culture and tourism. This is done through various activities such as art exhibitions, cultural performances, seminars, educational outreach, and others.

During their tenure, Jaka Rara's efforts to build personal branding as cultural and tourism ambassadors implemented various strategies so that their identity as representatives of Cirebon culture could be widely recognized. Interviews with Jaka Rara participants revealed that they built personal branding by highlighting the distinctive characteristics of Cirebon culture, such as using cultural attributes, attending various local events, posting activities on social media, and having insight into the culture.

In addition, they also demonstrate their capabilities in the field of culture by deepening their knowledge of Cirebon's history, art, and traditions. Their involvement in various cultural events and active participation on social media further strengthen their personal branding as cultural and tourism ambassadors. One of the strategies implemented by Jaka Rara to build their personal branding is by creating consistency in the narratives and visuals they present, both in direct interactions with the public and on social media. This consistency in communication aligns with the pillar of unity in Montoya's theory, where a personal brand must have a consistent message to be easily recognized by the public. Currently, Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms used by various age groups, from adults, teenagers, to the elderly (Khumayah et al., 2023). As the most widely used platform, Instagram offers them the opportunity to share visually appealing content, such as photos, videos, and live streams related to their activities.

Referring to Erving Goffman's theory of Self-Presentation, individuals strive to present a certain image to their audience through a carefully designed "front stage" (Goffman, 1959). In this case, Instagram serves as a "stage" for Jaka Rara to showcase their persona as cultural ambassadors. Through high-quality posts, they selectively construct a narrative about their identity and role in Cirebon culture.

Substantial technological advances have given rise to a new generation and changed the way people interact and communicate (Lestari, A. D. 2025). Currently, social media serves as a strategic platform for Jaka Rara to build communication with a wider audience, including the local community and digital users. The existence of social media not only supports interaction but also enables the formation of a structured identity. According to Dr. Rulli Nasrullah in his book titled "Perspectives on Communication, Culture, and Sociotechnology," in this context, Jaka Rara can leverage social media, particularly Instagram, to convey cultural messages, introduce tourism potential, and build a strong personal brand.

## B. The role of Jaka Rara as Cultural and Tourism Ambassador of Cirebon City

Culture is not merely a legacy, but also needs to be constructed and re-represented by individuals in society (Hall, 1997). In this case, Jaka Rara not only serves as a visual cultural icon, but also as an agent that represents and conveys the cultural values of Cirebon through their behavior, interactions, and narratives presented on various platforms.

Effective communication can be achieved if the communicator has ethos or credibility, appeal, and power, according to (Effendiy, 2009), and in this case, Jaka Rara as an ambassador carries out his role through various cultural activities, such as:

- a. Government Protocol Agenda: Jaka Rara of Cirebon actively participates in various official local government events, including state ceremonies, inaugurations, commemorations of important days, and welcoming important guests from within and outside the country. Their presence serves as a representation of the younger generation of Cirebon City.
- b. Contributing to Cultural Events: In the context of arts and culture, Jaka Rara often acts as a moderator, performer, or cultural ambassador who introduces the rich traditions of Cirebon. This aims to preserve local values and foster a sense of pride in culture among the community, especially among the younger generation.
- c. Attending Regional Festivals: Jaka Rara serves as a regional representative in a number of festivals, both at the local and national levels, such as the Keraton Festival, Cirebon Creative Festival, and other tourism promotion events. His presence aims to strengthen the cultural image of Cirebon and attract tourists with a communicative and representative approach.
- d. Conducting Cultural and Tourism Education: As a representative in the field of culture and tourism, Jaka Rara is responsible for raising public awareness of the importance of cultural preservation and promoting local tourism potential. These efforts are carried out through seminars, workshops, and social media campaigns.
- e. Conducting Educational Programs: The chairperson of the Jaka Rara Association in Cirebon explained that Jaka Rara also conducts educational programs by visiting schools and universities to introduce Cirebon

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culture, with the aim of raising awareness among the younger generation to love their culture in an era of globalization that can erode local identity.

f. Tourism Promotion with Stakeholders: To increase the reach of its promotions, Jaka Rara collaborates with the Tourism Office and local communities, including MSME players, cultural communities, and tourism activists. They actively contribute to developing tourism potential through creative content, digital campaigns, and direct promotional activities on various platforms and events.

Not only do they participate in cultural events, but they also utilize social media, particularly Instagram, as a tool to build their personal branding as cultural ambassadors. Through this platform, they can reach a wider audience, both locally and internationally, in introducing the cultural richness of Cirebon. By posting photos, videos, and using interactive features such as Instagram Stories and Reels, they showcase various aspects of Cirebon's culture, including batik, traditional cuisine, traditional arts, local history, regional events, and more.

And social media serves not only as a communication tool but also as a space to represent identity (Nasrullah, 2015). Jaka Rara utilizes Instagram as a means to present themselves as knowledgeable about culture, involved in preserving traditions, and as role models for young people who care about local heritage through consistent, engaging, informative, and interactive content.

The results of the interviews indicate that Jaka Rara utilizes various Instagram features to enhance interaction and visibility, including:

- a. Instagram Reels to share short videos about traditional arts, Cirebon culture, and coverage of Jaka Rara of Cirebon activities.
- b. Instagram Stories to showcase their daily activities as cultural ambassadors, which play a role in building closeness with the audience.
- c. Live Streaming to interact directly with the public in cultural education sessions or discussions about Cirebon culture.

This approach is in line with the theory of Social Media Branding, which emphasizes that social media is not merely a communication tool, but also a platform for shaping identity and personal branding (Nasrullah, 2015). By utilizing social media optimally, Jaka Rara can reach a wider audience, including the local community, tourists, and cultural observers from outside the region.

#### C. Challenges Faced by Jaka Rara of Cirebon in Building Personal Branding

Jaka Rara plays a significant role in promoting the culture and local wisdom of Cirebon City, but they also face a number of challenges in building their personal branding. These challenges result in differences in the communication style and approach used.

- a. Competition with Other Content on Social Media: Information about culture is often less interesting than entertainment content, which is more popular, so creative strategies are needed to attract the audience's attention.
- b. Lack of Understanding of Digital Marketing: Some members of Jaka Rara still struggle to increase their content engagement and reach, particularly in understanding Instagram algorithms and digital marketing techniques, even though consistency is a key element in creating a strong and memorable personal brand (Kaputa, 2012).

To address the various challenges encountered in the process of building personal branding, Jaka Rara has implemented several initiatives, including:

- a. Organizing social media training to improve understanding of digital branding strategies. This was done during the briefing session for the Grand Finalists of Jaka Rara of Cirebon, as preparation for the finalists in their role as cultural and tourism ambassadors for the city of Cirebon.
- b. Establishing partnerships with several influencers and local media outlets to expand the distribution of cultural content, such as local media accounts in Cirebon, namely @aboutcirebon, @dialogcirebon, @disbudparkotacirebon, @pemdakotacirebon, @cirebonbribon, and others.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, Jaka Rara of Cirebon has successfully created a strong personal brand as a cultural and tourism ambassador for the city of Cirebon. Jaka Rara's strategy is realized through visual consistency, positive communication, and the authentic presentation of local cultural values on social media, especially Instagram. Participants utilize digital features such as live streaming, Q&A, and creative content to present a professional and inspiring image. Jaka Rara in Cirebon plays a crucial role as a cultural ambassador, actively promoting and preserving local culture through various activities and platforms. Jaka Rara is involved in government protocol events, cultural events, regional festivals, public education, and tourism promotion. Additionally, they utilize social media, particularly Instagram, to reach a wider audience by sharing creative and informative content about art, traditions, cuisine, and other cultural riches of Cirebon. In its implementation, Jaka

Rara faced challenges such as time management and digital skills of Jaka Rara participants, but these challenges were successfully overcome through a creative and collaborative approach, namely by conducting training and collaborating with relevant parties.

## 5. Acknowladgements

The author wishes to express profound gratitude to the supervising lecturers for their guidance, support, and invaluable contributions throughout the research and writing processes. Special recognition is also extended to all lecturers at Swadaya Gunung Jati University for the knowledge and insights shared during the course of study. Additionally, the author conveys appreciation for the support and facilities provided by Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, which played a crucial role in the successful completion of this research. Lastly, heartfelt thanks are directed to the author's family and friends for their steadfast encouragement, motivation, and support throughout this journey.

## 6. Conflict of Interest

The author acknowledges that several challenges were encountered during the research and writing process, such as limited knowledge and constrained guidance time due to the supervisors' busy schedules. Nevertheless, the author declares that there is no conflict of interest, either financial or non-financial, that could influence the results or interpretation of this research.

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