

## ***Personal Branding of Dedi Mulyadi through the Representation of the Panca Waluya Policy on YouTube: A Semiotic Analysis***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The development of social media, particularly YouTube, has transformed how public figures construct personal images and communicate public policies. One figure who actively utilized YouTube was Dedi Mulyadi through the Panca Waluya policy, a character education program that involved sending troubled children to military barracks. This study aimed to analyze how Dedi Mulyadi's personal branding was constructed through the representation of the Panca Waluya policy on his YouTube channel. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach within a constructivist paradigm and applied Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. The data consisted of four selected scenes from Dedi Mulyadi's YouTube videos, analyzed at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings indicated that the Panca Waluya policy was represented as symbols of obedience, care, firmness, and success, constructing the image of Dedi Mulyadi as a paternalistic yet humanistic leader. This study concluded that YouTube played a significant role in shaping the personal branding of public figures through symbolically constructed policy representations.

## INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has significantly altered the landscape of public communication, especially regarding how public figures shape their self-representation and convey policies to the public. Today, social media facilitates the swift, interactive dissemination of information to vast audiences without any geographical or temporal constraints. As noted by Effendy (2003), the power of social media lies in its ability to rapidly influence large groups, particularly in molding public opinion.

By 2025, the global number of social media accounts had reached 5.24 billion, reflecting an approximate increase of 4% from 5.04 billion in 2024 (Yohatan, 2025). This statistic underscores that social media has progressed beyond a mere information-sharing platform; it now serves as a strategic instrument for enhancing self-image, reputation, and fostering public trust. In this context, political figures frequently leverage social media for branding purposes.

The process through which individuals utilize social media to cultivate their self-image is referred to as personal branding. This concept involves an individual's efforts to consistently showcase specific identities and values to gain recognition and trust from audiences. For politicians, effective personal branding is essential for establishing leadership legitimacy since public perceptions can be heavily influenced by the images projected in societal contexts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Rosadi et al., 2022).

One notable figure utilizing YouTube as a communication medium is Dedi Mulyadi. He regularly shares his community engagements and policy initiatives on his YouTube channel. According to vidIQ data from June 2025, Dedi Mulyadi's subscriber count rose from approximately 7.1 million to about 7.77 million within just one month, marking a growth rate of 9.44% (Setiawan, 2025). This substantial following indicates both the attractiveness of his content and YouTube's effectiveness as a personal branding tool.

A particular policy that has garnered significant attention is Panca Waluya—a character education initiative aimed at sending troubled children to military facilities. This policy has sparked both support and criticism among various sectors of society. Some national media outlets argue that military discipline may aid troubled children in becoming more disciplined and rule-abiding (Susandi, 2025). Conversely, several child protection organizations warn that such an approach may reinforce militaristic educational practices inconsistent with child protection principles (Hakim, 2025).

In the realm of digital political communication, the Panca Waluya policy serves not only as a character education initiative but also as a symbolic narrative expressed through visual and verbal elements on YouTube. These representations create specific meanings for viewers while simultaneously supporting Dedi Mulyadi's personal branding as a public figure. To explore this meaning-making process further, this study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic framework which interprets signs as part of a complex meaning system involving denotative, connotative, and mythical interpretations (Sobur, 2016).

Previous research has examined Dedi Mulyadi within cultural contexts and political communication via social media representation (Soffani & Nugroho, 2019; Yudhistira & Fathonah, 2023; Barokah et al., 2023). However, these studies have not specifically focused on analyzing Dedi Mulyadi's personal branding through semiotic analysis concerning the contentious portrayal of the Panca Waluya policy. Consequently, this study seeks to investigate how Dedi Mulyadi's personal branding is constructed through denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings related to the representation of the Panca Waluya policy found in his YouTube content.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Personal Branding

The idea of personal branding pertains to an individual's endeavor to establish and convey a distinctive, coherent, and attractive self-image to the public. Montoya and Van Dehey (2009) describe personal branding as a strategic approach for showcasing one's identity, principles, and expertise, enabling recognition, trust, and memorability among audiences. Thus, personal branding is not merely about manipulating one's image; rather, it serves as a genuine portrayal of an individual's character and skills that is consistently communicated over time.

Montoya (2002) highlights that the aim of personal branding is not to fabricate an artificial persona but to emphasize the authentic traits and values inherent in the individual. Consequently, the effectiveness of personal branding is significantly influenced by the alignment between the public image presented and the individual's true behavior. This alignment is essential for fostering audience trust.

Suri and Aini (2023) assert that three key components are involved in developing personal branding: the individual as the focal point of the brand, the value promise made to the public, and the relationship built with audiences. The individual acts as the foundation of personal branding since their resulting image cannot be separated from their personality, values, and life experiences. The value promise represents a symbolic assurance that shapes public expectations, while engagement with audiences bolsters both acceptance and credibility of the crafted image.

In relation to public figures and politics, personal branding serves a strategic function in establishing leadership legitimacy. Politicians who effectively cultivate their personal brand typically succeed in portraying a leadership persona that aligns with societal needs and values. Therefore, personal branding functions not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for enhancing public trust.

### **Social Media and YouTube as Media for Personal Branding**

The evolution of social media, a component of new media, is intricately linked to the progress of digital technology. Pierre Lévy notes that new media arose from the integration of digital computing technology, which facilitates interactivity, multimedia capabilities, and hypertextual connections (Barokah et al., 2023). In contrast to traditional media, social media offers users the chance to actively create, share, and interpret messages.

Social media has several key features: it allows for quick information sharing, encourages feedback, and supports two-way communication between senders and recipients. These attributes render social media an impactful medium for shaping both personal identities and reputations for individuals and organizations alike. Within this framework, social media acts not only as a source of information but also as a symbolic environment where meaning and identity are constructed.

YouTube stands out as a prominent audiovisual social media platform that excels in providing visual narratives complemented by nonverbal cues and storytelling techniques that foster emotional connections with viewers. Video content enables public figures to appear more relatable, genuine, and convincing compared to mere text-based formats. Consequently, YouTube is often utilized as a primary avenue for developing personal branding, especially among politicians aiming to cultivate a leadership persona closely tied to their communities.

### **Roland Barthes' Semiotics in Media Analysis**

Semiotics involves the examination of signs and the mechanisms through which meaning is created. Roland Barthes introduced a semiotic framework that interprets signs as complex systems of meaning. He posits that meaning extends beyond its denotative or literal interpretation, evolving into connotative meanings and myths (Sobur, 2016).

Denotative meaning pertains to the observable, direct interpretations, such as specific visual representations or spoken expressions. In contrast, connotative meaning stems from cultural contexts, encompassing the emotions and values linked to a sign. Myth constitutes a second-order system of meaning that serves to normalize certain ideologies, rendering them acceptable and viewed as common truths.

Within media studies, Barthes' semiotic analysis provides researchers with tools to reveal how visual and verbal elements not only communicate information but also shape specific ideologies and values. As such, Barthes' semiotic perspective is pertinent for examining how the Panca Waluya policy is depicted in YouTube content produced by Dedi Mulyadi and how these depictions aid in constructing the public persona's brand image.

## **METHOD**

This research utilizes a descriptive qualitative methodology grounded in a constructivist framework. This choice stems from the study's aim to explore the processes involved in meaning-making and the development of personal branding through both visual and verbal portrayals, rather than to quantitatively assess various phenomena. Within this constructivist lens, social reality is perceived as a product of meaning generated through individual or collective experiences, interactions, and interpretations.

The focus of this research is on video content available on YouTube that features Dedi Mulyadi in relation to the Panca Waluya policy. The data comprises selected scenes that illustrate interactions between Dedi Mulyadi and participants within the Panca Waluya program. From the total content reviewed, four key scenes were specifically chosen as analytical units. These scenes were selected purposefully for their embodiment of values such as obedience, compassion, firmness, and success—elements that are consistently woven into the narrative surrounding the Panca Waluya policy.

Data collection was executed through documentation studies and non-participant observation methods. The documentation study involved gathering and analyzing YouTube video materials associated with the Panca Waluya policy, while non-participant observation centered on methodically examining visual components, body language, dialogues, nonverbal cues, and contextual situations present in each chosen scene.

For data analysis, Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis technique was employed, which consists of three levels of meaning interpretation. Initially, denotative analysis was applied to discern the literal meanings conveyed by visual and verbal signs observable in gestures, attire, speech, and scene elements. Subsequently, connotative analysis aimed to uncover symbolic meanings linked to values, emotions, and cultural contexts associated with these signs. Finally, myth analysis was utilized to expose secondary systems of meaning that normalize specific ideologies related particularly to leadership imagery and Dedi Mulyadi's personal branding.

To validate the data effectively, this study implemented triangulation techniques by contrasting video analysis findings with pertinent literature sources including academic journals, theoretical texts, and national media coverage regarding the Panca Waluya policy. Through these methodological steps, this research aspires to offer an in-depth understanding of how representations of the Panca Waluya policy on YouTube influence Dedi Mulyadi's personal branding development.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The next section outlines the findings from the semiotic analysis of Dedi Mulyadi's YouTube content concerning the Panca Waluya policy. This analysis highlights four specific scenes that embody the values of obedience, compassion, firmness, and success as they relate to the development of Dedi Mulyadi's personal brand.

### 1. Representation of Obedience

The initial scene is illustrated in Figure 1, featuring Dedi Mulyadi at a military barracks accompanied by a group of children engaged in the Panca Waluya program. The children are dressed in basic uniforms and exhibit straight postures as they adhere to instructions. Dedi Mulyadi stands with them, occasionally providing verbal guidance without resorting to threatening language or intimidation.

On a denotative level, this scene portrays discipline training activities within a military context. Connotatively, the children's upright posture, organized formations, and compliance with commands symbolize discipline and order. Dedi Mulyadi emerges as an authoritative figure who garners respect without employing verbal hostility or coercion.

From a mythological standpoint, this depiction embodies the belief that obedience and military-style discipline serve as effective means for molding the character of troubled youth. The narrative constructed through this portrayal suggests that a military approach can help normalize children's behavior and reinstate socially accepted values. This representation aids in shaping Dedi Mulyadi's image as a leader who is both assertive and composed.



Figure 1. Representation of Obedience

### 2. Representation of Compassion

Figure 2 illustrates the second scene, showcasing a direct exchange between Dedi Mulyadi and one of the children involved in the program. In this interaction, Dedi Mulyadi is depicted speaking softly while placing a hand on the child's shoulder. Their dialogue encompasses guidance regarding future prospects and emphasizes the significance of altering one's behavior and mindset.

On a denotative level, this moment captures a discussion between a mentor and a mentee. Conversely, on a connotative level, the gentle touch and established eye contact convey messages of empathy and compassion. Dedi Mulyadi emerges not merely as an authoritative figure but also as someone attuned to the emotional states of the children.

At a mythological level, this scene conveys the idea that strength can be complemented by kindness. The narrative constructed through this portrayal suggests that an exemplary leader should embody both decisiveness and social empathy. This depiction reinforces Dedi Mulyadi's image as a paternalistic leader who maintains close ties with the community.



Figure 2. Representation of Compassion

### 3. Representation of Firmness

The third scene is illustrated in Figure 3, where Dedi Mulyadi delivers a resolute message to the program participants concerning the repercussions of rule violations. During this moment, he gestures with his index finger pointing downward while issuing a warning that underscores the significance of adhering to regulations.

On a denotative level, this scene portrays the act of issuing a disciplinary warning. Connotatively, both the hand gesture and vocal tone are interpreted as indicators of strength and authority. The warning itself is perceived as a mechanism of social regulation rather than an expression of violent threat.

At a mythological level, this portrayal normalizes the belief that firmness is an essential trait of an effective leader. This quality is viewed as a valuable attribute crucial for establishing order within society. Consequently, it reinforces Dedi Mulyadi's image as a leader who possesses the courage to adopt a strong position for the benefit of the community.



Figure 3. Representation of Firmness

### 4. Representation Success

The fourth scene depicted in Figure 4 displays the change in behavior among program participants after the Panca Waluya policy was enacted. The image captures children who appear more organized, smiling, and exhibiting respectful behavior towards their teachers. Additionally, Dedi Mulyadi is observed providing verbal encouragement as a means of recognizing these favorable developments.

From a literal standpoint, this scene signifies the ultimate results of the Panca Waluya initiative. On a deeper level, the positive expressions and cooperative interactions are seen as indicators of the program's success. Dedi Mulyadi is portrayed as a key individual who has effectively facilitated this beneficial change.

In a broader narrative context, this scene creates an impression that the Panca Waluya policy serves as an effective and successful remedy. The narrative of success bolsters the credibility of Dedi Mulyadi's leadership and enhances his reputation as a leader capable of fostering meaningful social progress.



**Figure 4.** Representation Success

To elucidate the phases of semiotic analysis utilized in this research, the investigator structured the analytical framework according to Roland Barthes' semiotic model, encompassing denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and myth. This framework was employed to chart the visual and verbal symbols associated with the representation of the Panca Waluya policy, ultimately uncovering how Dedi Mulyadi's personal branding is constructed. The order of these analytical phases is detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Flow of Semiotic Analysis on the Representation of the Panca Waluya Policy

No.	Scene	Analysis Stage	Analytical Focus	Example of Data (Visual & Verbal)	Resulting Meaning
1	Scene 1	Denotation	Visible visual and verbal signs	Military barracks setting, children standing in orderly lines, Dedi Mulyadi giving instructions	Discipline training activities
2	Scene 1	Connotation	Symbolic and emotional meaning	Upright posture, organized formations, Dedi Mulyadi standing alongside participants	Obedience and orderliness
3	Scene 1	Myth	Naturalized ideology	Military discipline as a solution for character building	A firm and authoritative leader
4	Scene 2	Denotation	Personal interaction	Dedi Mulyadi speaking directly, shoulder touch, eye contact	Mentoring conversation
5	Scene 2	Connotation	Meaning of empathy	Gentle gestures and calm tone of voice	Compassion and empathy
6	Scene 2	Myth	Leadership narrative	Firmness accompanied by compassion	A paternalistic leader
7	Scene 3	Denotation	Firm statement	Finger gesture and warning statement	Giving a warning
8	Scene 3	Connotation	Symbolic authority	Tone of voice and dominant gestures	Firmness and social control
9	Scene 3	Myth	Legitimization of power	Firmness as a leadership value	A courageous and responsible leader
10	Scene 4	Denotation	Program outcome	Children smiling and appearing more orderly	Behavioral change
11	Scene 4	Connotation	Meaning of success	Positive expressions and appreciation	Program success
12	Scene 4	Myth	Narrative of success	The policy effectively creates change	A successful and solution-oriented leader

## CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the portrayal of the Panca Waluya policy within YouTube content serves not only as a means of public communication but also as a symbolic tool for shaping political personal branding in the digital age. Utilizing Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the analysis uncovers that both visual and verbal elements present in the chosen scenes consistently convey layered meanings tied to themes such as obedience, compassion, firmness, and success. Collectively, these elements position Dedi Mulyadi as a leader

who embodies paternalism yet retains a humanistic approach, suggesting he is equipped to tackle youth social issues through character education focused on discipline.

The findings offer theoretical contributions to the fields of political communication and digital media by illustrating how representations on social media function at denotative, connotative, and mythological levels to influence perceptions of leadership legitimacy. This study builds upon previous research on personal branding by underscoring that representations of policy on YouTube are not just informative but also ideological and symbolic.

From a methodological standpoint, it validates the applicability of Barthes' semiotic theory for examining digital political communications, particularly in revealing how symbolic representation relates to the construction of leadership images.

On a practical level, this research underscores YouTube's strategic importance in enhancing public engagement and forming political narratives through emotionally impactful audiovisual content. The findings indicate that political figures are increasingly utilizing symbolic communication tactics to foster public trust and establish legitimacy within highly mediated digital landscapes.

However, this study does have certain limitations. Firstly, it concentrated solely on four specific scenes from YouTube content regarding the Panca Waluya policy, which constrains the broader applicability of its conclusions. Secondly, it primarily addressed symbolic representation without considering audience reception or interpretations of the content by the public. Lastly, it relied exclusively on qualitative semiotic analysis without incorporating other methodological perspectives like discourse analysis or quantitative measures from digital media analytics.

Future research should explore audience responses to political branding content on social media platforms, compare representations across various digital channels, or examine how algorithmic visibility impacts the establishment of political legitimacy in online contexts. Comparative analyses involving different political personas or policy portrayals may yield additional insights into the dynamics of symbolic political communication within modern media culture.

## **DECLARATIONS**

### **Author Contributions**

Ummy Hanifah: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing–Original Draft, Formal Analysis.

Mohammad Ismed: Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing–Review & Editing, Visualization.

Titiek Surya Ningsih: Validation, Formal Analysis, Writing–Review & Editing.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### **Data Availability**

This study utilized publicly accessible digital content obtained from the official YouTube channel of Dedi Mulyadi. Since the research relied exclusively on publicly available media content and did not involve direct interaction with human participants, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, the study maintained academic integrity by ensuring accurate representation, responsible interpretation, and proper citation of all analyzed materials.

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