

PERSONAL BRANDING THROUGH FASHION BLOGGING

Yuanita Safitri

Marketing Communication Department, Faculty of Economics & Communication
Bina Nusantara University
Jln. K. H. Syahdan No. 9, Palmerah, DKI Jakarta 11480, Indonesia
yuanita.sds@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to analyze personal branding development from personal brand identity, personal brand positioning, and personal brand assessment. The object of this research was Diana Rikasari's blog "Hot Chocolate and Mint". She is one of prominent influence and fashion blogger from Indonesia. The research used the qualitative method with data collection by virtual observation from June until August 2016. Rikasari's personal branding showed on her blog was the fashionably smart woman who had entrepreneurship competence. This research finds out that Diana Rikasari success to make her personal identity by her blog profile and blog posting. Her positioning is clear as Indonesian modern woman. The personal brand assessment can be seen through the achievements and feedbacks on her blog post, both positive or negative.

Keywords: *personal branding, fashion blogging, personal identity*

INTRODUCTION

Fashion is a part of nonverbal communication that shows expression of an individual. According to Martin and Nakayama (2010), non-verbal communication is the act of communicating using forms of communication beyond speech. These include facial expression, personal space, gestures, eye contact, paralanguage, use of time, and conversational silence. We send a lot of nonverbal messages without realizing that these messages are meaningful to others. One form of nonverbal communication is through fashion. We will know about images that are given by those who are wearing these attributes. It is also one way to express someone's feeling, such as what kind of clothes and color that one wears. The debate about the definition of fashion is still widely appearing (Cumming & Cunnington 2010; Eicher, 2010; Steele 2010). Fashion is defined by Entwistle (2015) as social arrangement regarding anything (object or idea) that has currency and is popular that will be worn widely. Crewe (2013) has signified fashion as a whole array of different registers; a garment, a body, a shop, a catwalk, an idea, a photograph, a memory, a moving image on a screen or a street, as a blog or an application on our phone. From that discussion, we can conclude that fashion is the important part of nonverbal communication.

One of the forms to share self-image, feeling, and personal style to the internet audience is through the blog. Blogs are Internet sites where individuals post their thoughts, ideas, and inspirations online in an unedited and spontaneous style (Crewe, 2013). Fashion blogs are made by individual who personally curated their post in order to express their personal style to larger audiences. Nowadays, the society is driven by self-image, fashion has a highlight, importance and democratic presence (Bruzzi *et al.*, 2013; Hermanaviciute *et al.*, 2016). With the help of technology, digital and web-based fashion have been developed to fashion films, fashion blogging, and online fashion publishing since the very beginning of the 21st century (Bruzzi *et al.*, 2013; Hermanaviciute *et al.*, 2016).

Fashion blogging is considered as one of the most commercially successful and publicly visible forms of digital cultural production (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Rocamora (2011) has divided fashion blogs into corporate and independent blogs. The former includes a broad range of genres. The examples of the blogs that focused on street fashion are Face Hunter and The Sartorialist, the celebrities are Coco's Tea Party and Red Carpet Fashion Awards, and the particular type of commodity like shoes are Sea of Shoes and Shoe Blog. Rocamora (2011) has also pointed out that they are usually run by one individual only, as opposed to corporate blogs, which are the voice of a fashion institution whether it be a magazine like vogue.co.uk/blog, a brand like paulsmith.co.uk/paul-smith-blog, or a store like topshop.com/webapp/wcs.

Through fashion blog, everyone can build their personal branding. Similar to product branding, individual needs to do some actions to be seen in the marketplace (Khedher, 2014). The Independent Fashion Bloggers (IFB) Coalition advocate is crafting a personal brand "to set yourself apart from the competition and highlight what makes you special" (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Nothing that blogs, in particular, are assumed to be "an extension, or representation, of [yourself]". IFB positions the self-branding as "the most important way to proactively control your career development and how the market perceives you" (Duffy & Hund, 2015).

The concept of personal branding is first popularized by Peters (1997) in his article "The Brand Called You" that has become increasingly important in the digital age. The process is just the same with product branding which focusing on individual's strengths and uniqueness (Kaputa, 2005; Schwabel 2009; Shepherd 2005; Labrecque, *et al.*, 2011). Khedher (2014) has described the personal branding as the process of establishing a unique personal identity, developing an active communication of one's brand identity to a specific target market, and evaluating its impact on one's image and reputation that fulfill personal and professional objectives. This process involves three phases just like other brands. The first phase is to establish a brand identity, the second phase is to develop the brand's positioning by actively communicating it to the marketplace, and the third phase is to evaluate a brand's image. However, personal branding entails some unique challenges, which mainly stem from complexities inherent in the online environment (Labrecque, *et al.*, 2011).

In an online context, personal brand identity relies on self-presentation as identities which created in computer-mediated environments that are using social networking profiles, blogs, and personal Web pages (Labrecque, *et al.*, 2011). Personal branding once is considered as a tactic only for celebrities (Rein, Kotler, and Shields 2006; Labrecque, *et al.*, 2011). But nowadays, personal branding is not only for celebrities. Everybody has the same opportunity to use it for their personal purposes. If people can use personal branding correctly, they have the chance to transform themselves into brand worthy (Rein *et al.*, 2006). With the rise of internet and social media, personal branding becomes like everyday commodity for society.

In Indonesia, fashion bloggers have started blogging since 2007. Diana Rikasari is one of the pioneers in Indonesian fashion blogging. Rikasari has a very colorful and fun style. Luvaas (2013) has described her style as quirky, unique take on the contemporary international style, an Indonesianization of global couture that filters and translates on behalf of an Indonesian readership. Rikasari has started writing a blog for Hot Chocolate and Mint since 2007. She actively shares her personal style, thoughts, and dreams through her blog. She posts at least once a week. Consistency in contents and timely posts are some of the key success of her blog. Not only consistency, but Rikasari also spoils her reader with high-quality photos. In the beginning, not a lot of people read her blog. However, Rikasari does not stop posting, until finally, she receives positive responses from her readers. Now, Rikasari has won several blog awards and becomes the public speaker in various seminars and workshops. In 2011 and 2012, her blog ranked #1 from IndonesiaMatters.com as the most visited blog in Indonesia across all blog categories. With these achievements, Rikasari has been appointed to become Brand Ambassador of various local and international brands, ranging from

fashion, beauty, and telecommunication products as featured in various local and international media (Rikasari, 2016).

The following research questions are created to develop an adequate representation of Diana Rikasari's personal branding; (1) How is she establishing her brand identity? (2) How is she developing her brand positioning? (3) How is she evaluating her brand image? The objective of this paper is to analyze Rikasari's personal branding development from personal brand identity, personal brand positioning, and personal brand assessment. By studying the development of personal branding, one can use the result of this study to shape and control their target audience's perception of their personal brand. It will also give marks about one's reputation.

METHODS

The study is conducted within an interpretive framework with the qualitative method. Research from an interpretive perspective is based on the construction of meaning and seeks to create an understanding of the world in which we live (Creswell, 2007; Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). Yin (2010) has illustrated that one of the focus on qualitative research is contributing insights into existing concepts that may help to explain human social behavior.

Data are derived from virtual observations through Diana Rikasari's blog from June, 1st to August, 30th 2016. During this period, Rikasari has posted 71 blog posts. Data are also collected through online media which covered her blog. Hot Chocolate and Mint is selected because it is the pioneer of Indonesian fashion blogger and Rikasari is the perfect illustration of the successful personal branding through fashion blog.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Personal branding is a planned process in which people make efforts to market themselves (Khedher, 2014). Like any other branding (product or service), personal branding demands the person to make differentiation among the crowd. With personal branding, anyone can build their personal image and compete with anyone else. The first step of personal branding is developing the personal identity. As a fashion blogger, Rikasari builds her personal identity through her blog profile. It is shown in how she described herself.

Diana Rikasari is an award-winning blogger, entrepreneur, and author. Shy, often a wallflower, but a hyperactive shy wallflower. She shares a high interest towards entrepreneurship, branding, marketing & market research... (Rikasari, 2016)

She uses 'Award-winning blogger', 'entrepreneur', and 'author' to make a statement about herself so that people can see the differences between her and other bloggers. What she did is in line with the assumption in personal branding that someone needs to differentiate themselves from everybody else. However, they have to meet the target market's expectations (Parmentier, *et al.*, 2012). Rikasari also adds the following statements on her blog profile:

She loves paying attention to advertisements, marketing campaigns, and the way people sell. A business girl, she thinks she is. And a marketing geek. On another note, Diana is definitely passionate about fashion. Not necessarily a *fashionista*, however, just someone who appreciates art and sees art within clothes, shoes, bags and

accessories. She breaks boundaries when dressing up, clashing anything she feels like clashing. Because clashing is her way of challenging the obvious. And she loves that (Rikasari, 2016).

Even though she is known as a fashion blogger, interestingly she does not mention fashion at the first place. Hence, she prefers to call herself as a business woman. However, she underlines that she is passionate about fashion. The above statement shows that personal brand identity established by Rikasari is a modern woman who loves entrepreneurship, marketing, and fashion.

As a form of communication, color, font, photo, and design on the blog will exhibit blogger's personality. Rikasari is trying to give certain images through her blog design, such as fun, fashionable, active, and quirky. The color and font that is used in Rikasari's blog header also show that she is fun, girly (from the pink color in the loved figure on the right side), and has a quirky taste (from her profile picture). She also adds My Fashion daily section with hashtag #OOTD (Outfit of the Day) to grab audience attention about her fashion style. Rikasari does not only focus on her style and daily activity, but also she makes branding for her house, her book #88 Love Life, and her shoe line, UP. She makes hashtag #bidibidibongbong as a metaphor of her home. To gain engagement with her followers, she also links her social media, Instagram and Youtube with her blog. Rikasari's blog header can be seen in Figure 1.

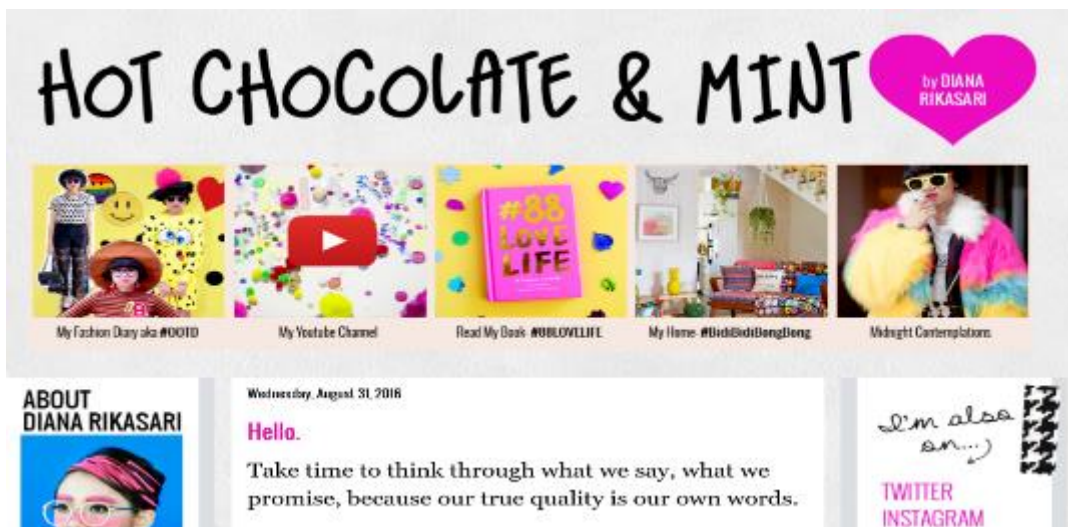


Figure 1 Screenshot of Diana Rikasari Blog Header
(Source: dianarikasari.blogspot.co.id, 2016)

Aside from the profile, personal identity is also demonstrated through her posts. One of Rikasari's blog strengths is the ability of storytelling, both through writing and pictures. She knows how to give emotions on every post she made. As exemplified on the blog post "About Failure" below:

"When we fail, we might immediately want to give up. But we usually get back up and say, "I'll give it another go". And we fail again, but this time, we say to ourselves, "this is it, I quit." But the next morning, our body is recharged, and our heart is no longer hurt, so we smile and say, "I think I'll try again." And eventually, we learn to fail and fail again, and realize that it was the failure all along that kept us going" (Rikasari, 2016).

Figure 2 reveals how Rikasari provides her personality as a lover to her blog readers.



Figure 2 Screenshot of Blog Post by Diana Rikasari
(Source: dianarikasari.blogspot.co.id, 2016)

Rikasari also develops her identity as a grateful person and humbled for every success that she had. For instance, when an online magazine writes about her profile, she makes this post in her blog. It can be seen in Figure 3.

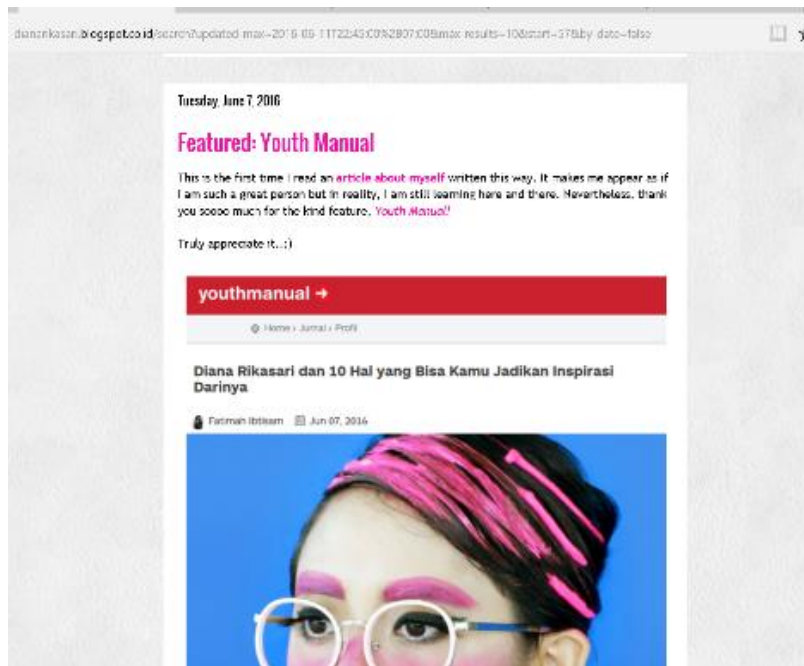


Figure 3 Screenshot of Blog post by Diana Rikasari
(Source: dianarikasari.blogspot.co.id, 2016)

Every post that she makes display positivity. Through her blog, she puts herself as a figure of the modern woman who escalates Indonesian women's image. The way she curated her blog also

constructs the image of Indonesian fashion reputation in the world. Baulch has mentioned that fashion for Indonesian, was a field that takes place elsewhere (Luvaas, 2013). Fashion blogs have provided a new potential backdoor to that industry, a way into the world that has previously afforded them almost no possibility of entry. Such blogs redefine the meaning of expert in fashion. They reject the implicit hierarchy between insider and outsider (Luvaas, 2013).

Khedher (2014) has stated that brand positioning refers to the active marketing communications efforts of one's brand identity to a specific target market. It is important to understand the target market of our personal branding so that we can make specific work on it. In personal branding, brand positioning occurs through self-presentation (Labresque *et al.*, 2011), nonverbal cues (appearance, manner), verbal disclosures (information about the self), and actions (performance, citizenship) that shape others' perceptions of one's competence, character, and ability to meet the cultural standards (Roberts, 2005). It means that brand positioning on fashion blogging occurs on how they curated and maintained the post. Fashion blogger needs to understand their locality and know how to associate with the world globally.

Rikasari positions herself as a smart woman who has high selling power. Hot Chocolate and Mint blog success bring her to the world of entrepreneurship. This is consistent with the positioning that she makes, being a prominent entrepreneur. Currently, Rikasari owns a shoe brand called UP, writes a book called # 88 Love Life in collaboration with Dinda Puspita, and becomes a graphic designer. The book is a collection of quotes from her blog since 2007. In August 2016, Rikasari also launched a clothing line called Schmiley Mo. The consistency makes her positioning messages are clear to the audience.

Luvaas (2013) has described Rikasari's positioning as an exemplary representation of dressing, expressing, even being, in an Indonesia undergoing massive and rapid social change. Luvaas has pointed out that she has offered herself up as a model of the modern Indonesian woman, one that is cute and unthreatening, while still forcefully entrepreneurial. The blog is Diana's workshop of self-construction and her public working out of personal identity (Luvaas, 2013). Figure 4 and Figure 5 show Rikasari's personal style that is presented in her blog.

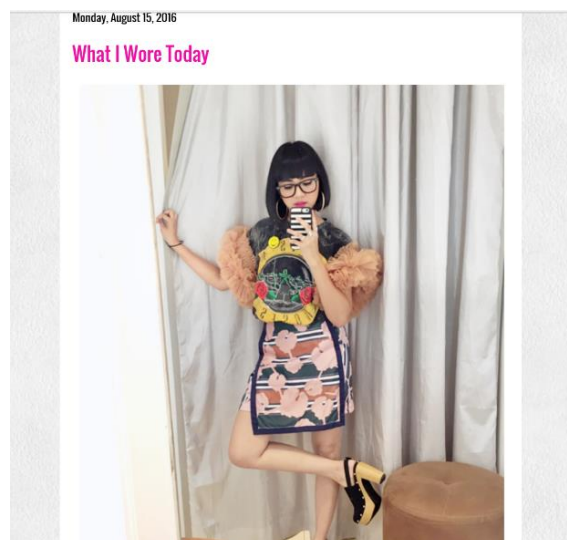


Figure 4 Rikasari's Personal Style
(Source: dianarikasari.blogspot.co.id)

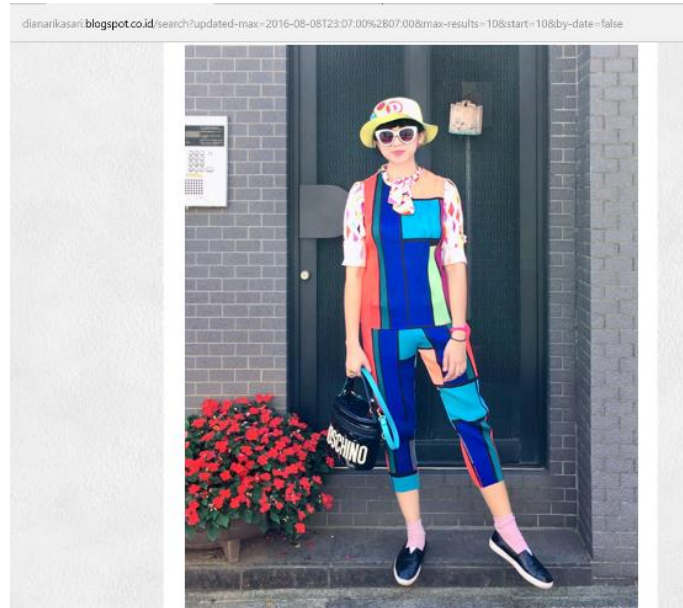


Figure 5 Rikasari's Personal Style
(Source: dianarikasari.blogspot.co.id)

The third stage of personal branding is personal brand assessment. It is important to get to know feedbacks from the target audience. Feedback is essential because it is a sign whether the branding efforts have achieved the branding and personal goals (Khedher, 2014). Clearly, Rikasari inform readers about her achievements from her blog's profile, as mentioned below:

Being active in the blogosphere since 2007, Diana has won several blog awards and becomes the public speaker in various seminars and workshops. In 2011 and 2012, this blog ranked #1 in IndonesiaMatters.com for being the most visited blog in Indonesia across all blog categories. With these achievements, Diana has been appointed to become Brand Ambassador of various local and international brands, ranging from fashion to beauty to telecommunication products, as featured in various local and international media. Moving forward, Diana is now a prominent player in the retail industry through her shoe line that aims to be a leading brand in the women footwear market. The name is UP that is aiming to cheer you up. Through UP, Diana has been acknowledged as one of Indonesia's 100 Most Influential Youth, Women, Netizen (YWN) by The Marketeers&Markplus Inc., Inspiring Women of The Year by Wardah Cosmetics, and also won the International Young Creative Entrepreneur (IYCE) Award by British Council. Diana Rikasari is officially registered as the youngest to make it into the prestigious 50 Tokoh FTUI list by Universitas Indonesia for her significant contribution in the Arts and Culture sector in Indonesia. As for her regional milestone, Diana has recently been awarded as Top Fashion Influencer by Influence Asia. With her never-ending passion for creating, Diana is now popularly known as the author of the #1 mega-bestselling book in two countries (Indonesia & Malaysia) titled #88LOVELIFE which consists of her daily thoughts on love and life. This book has recently won the Best Book of 2015 Award for the Non-Fiction category by MPH, Malaysia." (Rikasari, 2016).

Her achievement and popularity is nothing without hard work. Perhaps, she is the most famous Indonesian fashion blogger at the moment. Rikasari's ability in mixing outfit and always accentuate the positive posts are the strength of her position as a modern fashionable woman. Through

her blog, readers can see her passion and creativity. Her fashion taste is colorful, unique, and not reliant on the trend that makes her positioning is more noticeable. Her blog brings her featured in popular Indonesian and International magazines, newspapers, and television programs.

Personal brand assessment is also done by analyzing incoming feedback on blog posts Hot Chocolate and Mint. Most comments post with the positive tone that means they agree with the post given. For example, when she posted about her new fashion online, SchmileyMo, her readers seems happy about that:

“Selamat ya Die! (Congratulation, Die) Proud of you. I believe that SchmileyMo will grow bigger as you never give up! Semangat! (Good Luck)”

“Congratulations kak! I really love all the collections and wish I can buy one :D”

“This makes my heart so happy!” (Rikasari, 2016)

In terms of fashion style, most of her readers like the way Rikasari dress herself. This is shown in the comment section of her blog. Although there are also some negative comments, for instance with the statement like odd or weird. However, when she finds something too much in the comment section or direct email, she will reply with a firm tone and satire, through her posts or quotes. Figure 6 shows when Rikasari receives negative comments because she has rejected an offer of endorsement from a cosmetic surgery clinic.

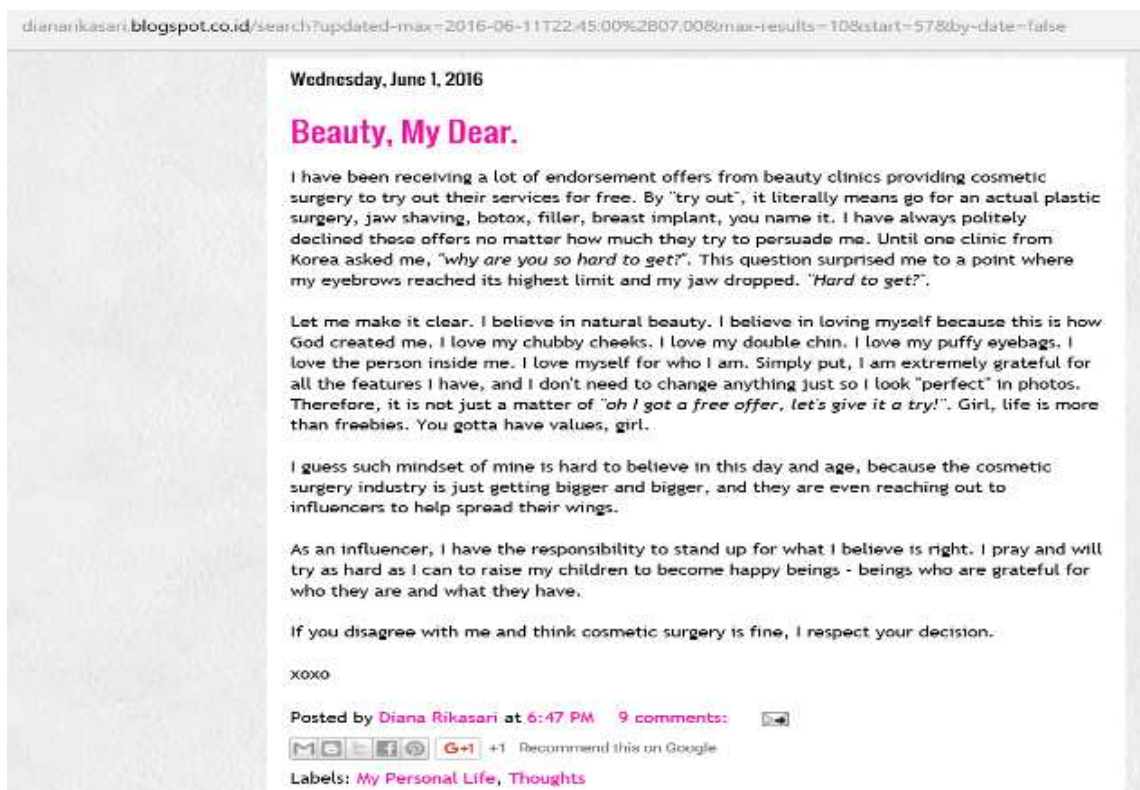


Figure 6 Screenshot of Blog Post by Diana Rikasari (2016)

Diana Rikasari becomes a positive phenomenon in fashion blogging culture in Indonesia. With the practice of personal branding through her blog, she gains recognition in the area of fashion

and entrepreneurship, both national and international. Her unique characteristics expressed every blog post make a high standard for Indonesian fashion blogging.

Personal branding is a quite new concept in communication, however, when one understand on how to use this concept wisely, it will affect our personal and professional life. In communication perspective, personal branding falls within the cultural context. We can see someone's culture and perspective through their personal branding. This study shows the development of Rikasari's personal branding that makes readers appreciate about her culture and the way she sees the world. According to this result, people engaged in personal branding need to aware of how personal branding can affect one's life. There are some limitations of this study; they are the time limitation and the methods of the study. This study is only conducted between June - August 2016 with virtual observation. For further research, the study can conduct in the longer period with various methodological approaches.

CONCLUSIONS

Hot Chocolate and Mint's contents demonstrate the positivity, both photos and writing. The readers of Diana Rikasari's blog instantly can feel her passion and creativity. Personal branding that Diana Rikasari exhibit on her blog are the fashionable, smart woman who has entrepreneurship competence. She makes her personal identity by her profile and her blog posting. Her positioning is clear as Indonesian modern woman. The personal brand assessment can be seen through the achievements and feedbacks on her blog post, either positive or negative.

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