

## **Exploring Athlete Personal Branding: An Analysis of Audience Reception of Instagram Ads**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the interpretation of the Sepbol football Community about the personal branding of an athlete in Lay's Chip Cam Instagram ads. Personal branding is an interesting strategy for ad creators in promoting a product. Although the products advertised are often contradictory to the brand ambassador chosen. Like athletes that used to promote unhealthy foods. This study uses the theory of encoding-Decoding Stuart Hall, with the method of audience reception analysis and in-depth interviews as data collection techniques. The study found that the four community members who were informants in the study were in two different positions. Four people are in a hegemonic-dominant position, yet one person is in a negotiating position. The informant is in a negotiating position because his arguments regarding the use of athletes as brand ambassadors have a different dichotomy of functions.

**Keywords** - Audience Reception Analysis, Advertising, Athlete, Personal Branding

### **INTRODUCTION**

Personal branding of a strong athlete becomes its own attraction for advertisers. This can be a strength and strategy for advertisers in marketing their products. Personal branding can be packaged in such a way as a creative idea in making advertising, so it can be a persuasive tool for marketing a product. Petit and Zakon say advertising is the path, buying decisions are the ultimate goal (A. Lobodally, 2018). For this reason, various ways are used to persuade audiences. Even controversial ones.

Lay's Chip Cam Instagram ads use athletes in marketing its products. Lay's itself is a potato chip snack that is categorized as an unhealthy snack. The food and Drug Administration of the Republic of Indonesia states that potato chips should be limited in consumption because they are low in fiber and contain high salt / sodium and have low nutritional value (Natalina, Sucita; Ramona, 2023). Of course, this is contradictory to the life of an athlete or an athlete who needs to maintain nutritional intake. Nutritional intake of energy and protein that is fulfilled for an athlete will increase his physical fitness (VO2 Max)(Ghina, Miftah; Widawati; Lestari, 2023).

The use of athletes in unhealthy products is not new to the advertising industry. Previously several names such as Rio and Tokyo Olympic bronze medalist, Indian badminton PV. Sindhu was also used in a BBK commercial (Briyani by Kilo). While Sean Galeal has also been supported by the Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) brand.

Strong Personal Branding of athletes, it turns out, can shift unhealthy products into popular foods. Lay's Chip Cam Instagram ad uses David Beckham and Thierry Henry as the main actors in the ad. The two are pictured watching football together while eating Lay's. In fact, both stated that they were not willing to share Lay's with anyone.

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Fig. 1. Instagram Lay's Chip Cam Ads

(Source: Lay's Cam with David Beckham & Thierry Henry ads)

Montoya stated that the power of personal branding that a person has can indeed regulate one's perception of others. The power is described through telling one's experience to others naturally, so that others think that the perception is built by itself (Siswiyanto, 2019). Advertisers of Lay's products have 'borrowed' Beckham and Henry's strong personal branding to promote their products.

However, the real audience is not a passive individual who can simply accept the message carried by a communication product (A. & S. C. Lobodally, 2019). When messages meet with one's life experience and one's knowledge, this will result in such a wide variety of receptiveness. This is what the interest of researchers to show and ask each scene in the lay's Chip Cam Instagram ad to the audience.

Researchers chose the Sepbol community. This community is a community that does online discuss about the development of football. Discussions that occur, not only about football matches alone. This community is a community that is also rich in data on personal matters of athletes. Researchers selected informants in this study based on predetermined criteria, namely: active members of the community, aged 17-50 years and understand in depth about football.

Research on audience acceptance related to personal branding has been conducted by several researchers. Trianto, Mansur and Asse searched for the personal branding of political figure Ganjar Pranowo on YouTube. The selected audience generally expressed positive acceptance of Ganjar Pranowo's personal branding as governor of Central Java (Trianto, Restu; Mansur, Suraya; Asse, 2022). Similar results were also found by Bunga Agelina who interviewed audiences about personal branding built by Gen-Z President @rianfahardhi. Persona built by Rian Fahardhi as a young child who is critical and voicing things that are important is received positively by the audience (Angelina, 2024). Meanwhile, Kor in his research on the persona of a rhetorician stated that the persona of a rhetorician can 'sink' due to the audience's reception. (Kor, 2018).

To search for the athlete's personal branding packaged in advertisements and its acceptance by audiences, researchers have not been able to find it. This makes this study have a novelty that is good enough to fill the empty research gap. So that through this study, an argument will be presented from the use of personal branding athletes used by advertisers in marketing their products.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory used in this study is Encoding-Decoding theory. Encoding can be interpreted as an activity to translate the form into a medium that can be accepted by the communicant. While Decoding is an activity when receiving a message that is the opposite of Encoding, which is to perform an activity that interprets a message into a form, then the message can have a meaning for the recipient (Morissan, 2013). West & Tunner say that in Decoding, the audience relies on the basis of its reception, thoughts, and experiences in past (A. & S. C. Lobodally, 2019). This theory is used to encourage various interpretations of media texts when prescribing the production process, the meaning of which will never be certain. In this theory Hall assumes that Encoding-Decoding is a process for audiences to create and replicate a meaning in the process of receiving content consumed in mass media (Ida, 2014).

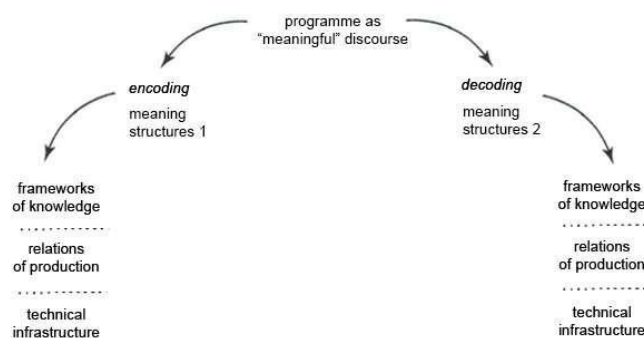


Fig. 2. Flow Chart of Encoding-Decoding Theory

(Hall, 2003)

According to Stuart Hall, Encoding-Decoding has three interpretations, namely Hegemony-dominance (dominant-hegemonic position), its negotiation (negotiation code), and opposition (opposite code). Encoding-Decoding theory is used in this study because the theory of Encoding-Decoding can be explained that the request is a process resulting from the information of an information from an individual or group and is carried out by the recipient of the order. The personal branding that appears in Lay's advertising is trusted by David Beckham and Thierry Henry. The message that appears next is informed, and delivered by the recipient. In this study the researcher or audience conducted is the football community Sepbol Community. Encoding-Decoding theory is usually used in qualitative research, especially research in the study of media and culture, Mass Communication. In media and Cultural Studies Research, Stuart Hall defines that cultural studies is a formation of ideas, images, and practices that provide a way to express, form knowledge, and act based on certain topics of social activity in society (Ida, 2014)

## METHODOLOGY

This research is using Qualitative research. One location-based activity that situates its research in the real world is qualitative research. A collection of material interpretation techniques that make the world visible include qualitative research. The world is changing because of these activities. In qualitative research, the world is interpreted using a naturalistic perspective. Accordingly, qualitative researchers examine things in their natural settings to understand occurrences in the context of the meanings society has assigned them (Creswell, 2015).

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The research method used in this study is audience reception analysis. The basic assumption of audience reception analysis is the concept of an active audience, which means that in audience reception analysis, people consume and produce meaning in the process of receiving the content they consume in the mass media (Ida, 2014).

According to Stuart Hall, this method is the study of the meaning, production, and experience of the audience in the relationship to interact with text in the media by looking at psychological and social factors so that everyone can interpret a message in different ways. The steps that must be done in this method are (Hall, 2003)

1. Determine the content of the message you want to study.
2. Collect the necessary data such as data from in-depth interviews, from informants with several different backgrounds and informants are asked to retell what they have seen, heard, and read, and asked to interpret the message from the informant.
3. Analyze and classify the results of interviews that have been conducted with informants into several categories, such as Dominant Hegemonic, Negotiated Reading or Oppositional Position.

Researchers used the technique of selecting informants purposive sampling. Another reason researchers use this technique is because purposive sampling can describe some of the features and processes of the research we are interested in, then purposive sampling also leads us to think critically about the parameters of the population we are researching and carefully select a sample of cases (Silverman, 2013).

In this study, informants were selected from the football community, Sepbol Community. The football community is running digitally (through Instagram to share information and using WhatsApp groups to communicate with fellow members) so this community does not have activities carried out together, nor a clear organizational structure. The criteria's that have been determined by the informant researcher are:

1. An active member of the football community
2. Age 17-50 years
3. Have an understanding of football

Researchers used two data collection techniques, namely primary data which means data that can be obtained from informants based on the results have been obtained from sampling to the subject of research. The instrument or tool used in qualitative research is the interview. Interviews are one way to perform information or data techniques that apply abilities and skills to complement the information needed as consideration of the next step. One of the main ways in qualitative research is the interview by emphasizing how important the interview is as a way to thoroughly understand the perspective of the participants, focusing on how they build meaning in a particular social context (Silverman, 2013). Then secondary data which means supporting and indirect data is given to the required data collectors as a way to supplement the data that researchers have obtained when interviewing informants (primary). Examples of secondary data that can be used are Diaries, and autobiographical documents, physical and non-physical literature, and databases (Creswell, 2014). In this case, the researchers obtained secondary data from electronic and physical literature such as websites, e-books, and books

## RESULTS

Researchers interviewed five informants who had been selected according to criteria. The five informants are:

1. The first informant's name was Andika. Male, and domiciled in Bogor. 33 years old with bachelor. First joined the football community, Sepbol Community at the end of the year when there was an opening of a WhatsApp group link.
2. The second informant's name was Bagus Prayogi. Male sex and domiciled in Tangerang. 21 years old with the last vocational education. First joined the football community, Sepbol Community in 2023.
3. The third informant's name was Muhammad Faris. Male, and domiciled in Jakarta. 18 years old with last high school education. First time joining the football community, Sepbol Community in 2023.
4. The fourth informant's name was Muhammad Wafi Athallah. Male, and domiciled in Jakarta. 19 years old with the last vocational education. First time joining the football community, Sepbol Community in 2024
5. The fifth informant's name was Muhammad Alif Akbar. Male sex and domiciled in Tanjung Pinang. 22 years old with last high school education. It first joined the football community, Sepbol Community, in 2024.

Regarding the Lays ad that used David Beckham and Thierry Henry, the five informants had mixed answers. Here are the statements of the five informants, when viewing the Instagram Lays Chip Cam ad.

"From my point of view yes, in real life, yes, they as athletes may have cheat days, so make snacks like that or maybe make sweet drinks or make other snacks that are high in calories or high in sugar but low in nutrients, it feels like they must eat in a week, maybe a box of chips or a pack like that, but for training, maybe they will get revenge again, so training is even harder, so I think these are all professional athletes, maybe they have cheat days, maybe they eat ice cream or spaghetti or eat snacks like that, so normal, normal mercy". (Informant 1, 15 July 2025)

"I think as a person who enjoys advertising, of course, if we look at Thierry Henry and David Beckham, they are former athletes, if we look at the perception of ordinary people, they are people who take care of their health, people who do not eat-fast food is the term. But sometimes they get bored too because they are also ordinary people, so it is only natural to occasionally eat fast food. So yeah, it's okay, no problem at all. But the problem is when the ad presents excessively but in my opinion the Lays ad is quite proportional and good enough ... it's legitimate and I think it's allowed because for example gym yes, they also have one day to cheat day to eat anything freely so not everything is a diet" (Informant 2, 5 Mei 2025).

"It's normal for them to snack while watching the game so they don't eat heavy food too and in the stadium they can't bring heavy food as well from what I know ... it doesn't allow for athletes who are still active, only they are already retired so I think it's okay for people who have retired from the professional league, right". (Informant 3, 7 Mei 2025)

"It doesn't matter because he's retired too so he's not a professional athlete anymore so it's his right to want to eat Lay's or not right ... there's no problem he's retired too unless he's a professional player like other athletes who are still active so he must maintain his diet, his sport, his life pattern as well.

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Now that he's retired, he's enjoying his life. The important thing is not to overdo the diet ... depending on the market, if the market is in a rich area of Europe, America may follow yes, but if the Asian region may not be yes because there are price factors and branding factors because Lays is from Europe also branding in the area there may indeed be strong but maybe if in Indonesia Lays is not too famous so yes the branding is not too strong in developing or poor countries, it is enough for developed countries like Europe". (Informant 4, 4 Mei 2025)

"I think it's quite an interesting scene because it can show Lays very close to football especially on the edge of this field ... yes, the scene is interesting because Thierry Henry asked David Beckham and the audience in the stands after being told to search, the camera immediately highlighted which people were carrying Lays, it was very interesting what else this might look like when filming was not taken repeatedly so yes, the meaning was that in the stadium it was used as an advertisement so that without acting the impression was pure walking like that".. (Informant 5, 9 Mei 2025).

If you consider the statements of each informant, it does show that the five informants have statements of support for the use of Beckham and Henry in lay's Chip Cam Instagram ads. However, the second informant gives arguments that also do not always indicate mere approval. According to the second informant, the use of Beckham and Henry as advertising actors was only because Lay's was an official sponsor or the UEFA Champions League. This makes it easy for Lay's to choose a brand ambassador to advertise their products. The second informant said:

"Their strategy in the stadium is to try to attract the fans of AC Milan and Inter Milan, or maybe the players. So yes, the right lays also ... Lays is also the official sponsor of UCL so yes, the right Lays also, because AC Milan is also a UCL participant as well". (Informant 2, 4 Mei 2025)

Then, the researchers mapped the five informants from the Sepbol Community. From what has been analyzed, researchers found that of the five informants there are many personal opinions based on the experience or background of the informant himself. It can be interpreted that the informant Decoding the message contained in the ad lay's based on experience as observers and football lovers. The meaning of the messages carried out by informants to lay's advertising and personal branding of former football athletes is quite diverse, here is a mapping table of each informant in the study studied by the researcher:

Informan's Posittition	Dominant- Hegemonic Position	Negotiated Code	Oppositional Code
Informan 1	✓		
Informan 2	✓		✓
Informan 3	✓		
Informan 4			
Informan 5	✓		

Table 1  
Position of Informants (Source: Processed by Researchers)

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In this study, researchers have interviewed triangulator who is an expert in the world of advertising for more than six years. The Triangulator is named Zulfiqar Jatikusuma. Zulfiqar until May 2025, still served as Merchant Acquisition in Jubelio. Prior to serving as Merchant Acquisition, Zulfiqar worked in the world of advertising by becoming Creative Director, Account Executive, and Marketing Communication at various companies.

In the first part, Zulfiqar commented on a statement from one of the informants who came from the Sepbol Community who said that the use of former athletes David Beckham and Thierry Henry was not a big problem in the context of Health. Zulfiqar agreed to the use of former football athletes to become Brand Ambassadors advertising instant food or junk food. According to him, former athletes have a nature that is no longer actively playing so it is not someone who needs health as tight as athletes who are still active. Zulfiqar also said that a former athlete is allowed to cheat in the context of consuming something, but according to him, cheating is only done at a special time or when they enjoy watching football.

Zulfiqar also added that eating diet foods continuously can cause stress, so according to him cheating day is needed to maintain health. Zulfiqar also commented on the response of one of the informants interviewed that lay's is the official sponsor of UCL which is the UCL itself is a football league that has been famous for a long time. According to him, if junk food like Lay's wants to sponsor UCL and even the World Cup, it is legitimate depending on who the target market is. Zulfiqar also added that lay's also sponsors the 2026 World Cup and targets the target demographic of the 20s and above which according to Zulfiqar at that age still likes to eat snacks. This study has verified all the answers to informants. Triangulator sees the use of personal branding from a public figure is a natural thing to increase the selling value of Lay's products while seeking awareness from football fans without looking at health reasons or other things.

### **DISCUSSION**

The four informants in this study can be categorized in the position of hegemony dominant. But one informant, namely the second informant, is in a negotiating position. Aside from being a football fan, the second informant also maintains a website that criticizes the world of football. This is what makes the argument it gives in two different poles. The second informant can give a statement both from the positive and negative sides.

The production process of an advertisement cannot be separated from the advertising manufacturer itself. Slap Global tries to decode or arrange messages according to the client brief obtained. The ad is a form of promotion from the UEFA Champions League or UCLA. The ad uses the term Chip Cam which takes from the Kiss Cam trend. A trend that takes the moment of unintentionally kissing on the sidelines.

The lay's Chip Cam Instagram ad is an accidental moment taken during a football match that shows someone eating Lay's. In the ad Beckham and Henry are accidentally captured on camera eating Lay's and asking Lay's to another viewer, when theirs runs out. Lay's used the moment to reach the audience that ate Lay's at a football game. This ad is part of the "No lay's, No Game " campaign (Kelly, 2024).

The use of Beckham and Henry in the ad, apparently realized by audiences who know for sure about football. This is as indicated by the second informant. The use of Beckham and Henry was a

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‘covert’ attempt to make Lay's a part of the football game. Beckham and Henry were chosen because of their personal branding but were not chosen because they are both snack lovers. The power of personal branding in advertising makes it a way to make smooth efforts to reach a buyer audience.

## CONCLUSION

This study is an acclamation of the importance of personal branding of someone's character. Such a strong Persona will be a powerful tool for advertisers in marketing their products. Audiences seem to be enchanted with a person's persona and what it uses. Advertisers hope that the use of a strong persona will make the audience ‘submit’ to the message carried by someone with strong personal branding.

But the reading of the message by the audience became a way of rising awareness and a strong public activity. Audiences who have a strong bond with a message will not completely melt with the message brought by someone with a strong persona. Audiences who have a high level of knowledge, turned out to have a nuanced acceptance-acceptance bargaining. Acceptance given is not unconditional acceptance. Strong arguments can show disapproval, approval or even rejection up to an attempt to think critically to offer to others.

Through this study, researchers see advertisers need to more carefully understand the audience that is not always ‘enchanted’ with the persona of a brand ambassador. Audiences will have a strong ability to choose and sort it out when the audience has a deep knowledge of a message.

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