

# Digital Branding Efforts In Increasing Brand Recognition Towards Millennials (A Study On Social Media Content Of Hero Supermarket)

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**Abstract:** This study described how digital branding efforts that have been done by HERO Supermarket to increase brand recognition toward millennials generation. This research used qualitative approach with interview and observation as primary data and journals as the secondary data. The study showed how to do digital branding to approach millennials by using social media that can generate engagement and exposure that impacts brand recognition. Few things must be considered to do digital branding; business objectives, target audience objectives, value, user journey, social media usage, contents, and engagements. All these things must together align with their value and integrated with offline activity.

**Index Terms:** digital branding, brand recognition, millennials, grocery retail, social media contents.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Some industries might be more attracting for the millennials. However, it might be different for retail industries such as grocery retail since not all millennials do grocery shopping regularly. When they must to do grocery shopping, they are most likely to have two options, doing all the transactions through e-commerce or offline. The rising popularity of e-commerce which offers efficiency as easy as snapping fingers towards its users affects the grocery retail industries with offline stores. In 2015, [1] stated that one-quarter of online respondents said they ordered grocery products online, and more than half (55%) were willing to do so in the future. It was also said that the growth of online grocery shopping was driven in part by the maturation of the digital natives—Millennials and Generation Z. Several things mentioned above become challenges for the grocery retail industries, including HERO Supermarket. Moreover, some millennials are still unaware of HERO Supermarket although HERO Supermarket is the pioneer of the grocery retail industry in Indonesia. Adapting with changes and the high competition either with e-commerce or similar grocery retails, HERO Supermarket finally decided to focus on millennials so that they would shop at HERO Supermarket. It is not easy for HERO Supermarket, which only has limited offline stores compared to its competitors, to attract the millennials and make some adjustment with the things related to millennials. Therefore, attracting the millennials requires steps that will be carried out through digital media. Based on that reason, researchers focused on digital branding efforts to instill brand recognition on millennials.

Brand awareness emerges because HERO Supermarket has been established for quite a long time and has been popular in public, so the step taken is brand recognition instead of brand awareness. However, people's expectation of HERO Supermarket is not according to what is expected by HERO Supermarket. So, because of that, HERO Supermarket desires to voice their brand to the millennials and brings their brand closer to them. HERO Supermarket has an apparent reason about this as millennials hold a crucial role on the upcoming economic condition, and this has also become the reason why the grocery retail industries target the millennials. This condition is also confirmed by The [1] and it is said, "millennials are at the beginning of their careers and are starting to form households, while the oldest members of Generation Z will soon be graduating college and joining the workforce. These generations will shape our economy for decades to come. Therefore, it is critical that retailers and manufacturers understand how these consumers are using technology and include digital touchpoints along the entire path to purchase." Since this research is focused on digital branding efforts, it will discuss digital branding more profound, such as value, user journey, social media, content, and engagements. The results of the research are also supported by several previous research, one of which was conducted by Douglas Holt regarding "Branding in The Age of Social Media," which stated that social media had transformed according to the culture of public nowadays. This statement had certainly undermined some branding techniques, where communities and influential crowd cultures become one. So, brands are considered successful when they enter into the culture and make crowd cultures as vehicles in their communication. Indirectly, this research argues that brands must follow existing trends. Previous research conducted by Faif Yusuf regarding "Optimizing Branding and Activation of Brands in Digital World" discussed that a brand can do brand activation through online or offline. Brands can also use social media as a platform to give different experiences. This previous research is very much in line with the research on HERO Supermarket as millennials prioritize trends and experience. Therefore, there must be integration between digital and offline. Researcher also hopes that this research could be useful to inspire public about the efforts of good digital branding to increase brand recognition on millennials and find out the obstacles that arise in the case of HERO Supermarket.

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## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used qualitative-descriptive methods. Qualitative research is called as naturalistic research method because the research is carried out in natural conditions; it is also known as the ethnographic method because at first this method was more widely used for researches in cultural anthropology [2]. Meanwhile, Bogdan and Taylor in [3] stated that descriptive data are written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. The method used in this research is descriptive. According to [2], this method helps researchers exploring and/or capturing the social situation that will be investigated, broadly and deeply. According to [3] the data is in the form of words and images, not numbers. Thus, the research report contains excerpts of data to illustrate the presentation of the report. The techniques of using primary data in this research are interviews and observations. According to Esterberg in [2], an interview is the meeting of two people to exchange information and ideas through question and answer, so that meaning can be constructed in a particular topic. The type of interview for this research was semi-structured interview. Interviews involved several parties, namely HERO Supermarket, several targeted millennials consumers, and digital branding experts outside of HERO Supermarket company. According to [4], observation is an activity that we do every time. Observation is one of activities to understand the environment. Observation can also be interpreted as direct observation without a mediator to look closely at the activities carried out by the object. The observation technique used by the researcher is non-participant observation. Secondary data used five previous research journals that consist of three international journals and two local journals and also several textbooks. For data analysis techniques, researcher used a reduction technique which includes summarizing, choosing the main things, focusing on the important things, and looking for themes and patterns. Thus, the reduced data will provide a clearer picture and make it easier for researcher to carry out further data collection and look for it if needed. In this research, researcher used triangulation technique. According to [3], the triangulation technique is to check the validity of data that utilizes something else. Denzin in [3] said that triangulation has four types as examination techniques that utilize the use of resources, methods, investigators, and theories. According to Patton in [3], triangulation with sources means comparing and checking the degree of trust in information obtained through time and different tools in qualitative research.

## 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

HERO Supermarkets must adapt to the digital trends that exist today as efforts to aim at the millennials. This effort is very important considering that millennials are a digital generation. Therefore, digital branding is needed to raise brand awareness, which according to [5] "Awareness refers to strength of a brand's presence in the consumer's mind" or as mentioned by [6] "consumers with more exposure may report more familiarity and are most likely able to identify the brand on sight, or when it is described". Based on interview results, millennials knew about the existence of HERO Supermarket, but with a wrong identity. Therefore, activities to instill brand recognition through social media contents are needed. According to [7], brand recognition is one of derivatives of brand awareness which is the ability of consumers to respond to a brand when given instructions. That is the reason why

HERO Supermarket finally decided to enter the digital world in 2018. It started at the end of March 2018 by collaborating with digital agency as an advisor HERO Supermarket requires a lot of preparation to do digital branding. It is not an easy thing to unite a brand with audience, and with an intense competition in current grocery retail industry which has declined because of eroded by e-commerce which according to the current generation is far more practical. This statement was also supported by The [1], a well-known research company, which said that more than 55% of respondents said they would buy daily necessities through online in the future, and the development of online grocery shopping was because of developments conducted by digital natives, millennials, and generation Z. However, [1] also said that this did not close the possibility that offline grocery shopping would die. There are still real things that consumers do not get when doing online grocery shopping, such as smelling the freshly baked bakery or choosing fruits. Those kinds of feeling do not exist online. Indirectly, those sensory activities in shopping bring positive feelings to customer. Therefore, HERO Supermarket can take this gap as an opportunity to communicate its brand through digital branding. In communicating with consumers, HERO Supermarket utilizes digital assets, catalogs, and magazines as its media. External communication conducted by HERO Supermarket aims to communicate messages to attract consumers. This is following with the notion of communication which was sparked by Laswell on [8] that communication is a process that explains who said it, what it said, with what channels, to whom and with what results. What was highlighted by Laswell also corresponds to [9]. Belch stated that communication consists of; source, message, channel, receiver, noise and response or feedback. Those things are also the focus of the HERO Supermarket case. Regarding channels, HERO Supermarket has several digital assets even though in the end they focus on just a few. Whereas catalog is a medium used by HERO Supermarkets to promote products and to provide food recipes in which the ingredients can be purchased at HERO Supermarket. So, it is not only for promotion but also for information. This catalog is published every two weeks, and people can take this catalog for free at HERO supermarket. Usually, the catalog is distributed to a certain housing complex. Therefore, HERO supermarket magazine is only for HERO Supermarket loyal customers. In communicating a brand, what is attached to a brand must appear at branding time. Part of the brand must be highlighted when the digital activity starts. The highlight is to represent the identity of the brand so that what people perceive about HERO Supermarket is as expected. This identity is also expected to be remembered by the community. This is following what was stated by [6] about the definition of brand, a brand acts as a promise to its prospects and consumers. It represents the actual product or service the consumer expects to receive, its quality but also the emotions evoked when consumers use the product or service. Currently, HERO Supermarket is trying to aim at millennials through existing digital assets. In this digital era, people's attention has shifted to digital especially millennials, the generation that is very productive nowadays. As discussed by [10], companies can do product branding on social media because of its wide and effective reach since most of their target audiences use social media. Until now, digital assets owned by HERO Supermarket are a website, ([www.herosupermarket.co.id](http://www.herosupermarket.co.id)), Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, and Pinterest accounts. The main digital branding

of HERO Supermarket is Instagram and Facebook. The reason for HERO Supermarket to focus more on Instagram is because Instagram is increasingly being used by millennials not only for posting photos but also to express and ask opinions as well as sharing information and daily activities. Instagram has become a reference for HERO Supermarket in making social media content. Facebook is also still being used mainly by their existing customers who are mostly baby boomers. For Twitter, because its users have started to decline in Indonesia, HERO Supermarket has also left this social media since 2017. As for YouTube, it is a medium for posting video content regarding events made by HERO Supermarkets or videos about "Loyal Customer" as posted on their YouTube channel. Videos about loyal customer are using KOL (Key Opinion Leader) by Chacha Raissa, millennials who have married. Chacha is also a KOL for a roadshow event held by HERO Supermarket. The content itself refers to the experience of shopping at HERO Supermarket. For Instagram and Facebook, there is no difference regarding the content. The content of HERO Supermarket's Facebook mirrors its Instagram because HERO Supermarket considers Instagram to be the most popular social media used by the millennials, so their Facebook only adjusts it. HERO Supermarket uses emotional content and informative content for their Instagram with the purpose to attract millennials. HERO Supermarket considers that these types of content suit the millennials the best. For instance, HERO Supermarket tries to communicate with millennials who like to cook with food content. Emotional content is the content that can trigger the audience from the emotional side such as excitement, personality, and others. According to this content, HERO Supermarket displays photos of food with a caption such as "create a twist by cooking deep fried duck with spices and herbs on this weekend, it's easy! Prepare 500gr of duck, marinated duck and fry the duck with medium heat oil. Simple yet delightful for a lovely family dinner!" Based on this caption, HERO Supermarket intends to communicate emotionally with millennials who like to cook for their families as well as showing that these ingredients can be bought at HERO Supermarket. The content created by HERO Supermarket is intended for soft-selling. For informative content, HERO Supermarket uses materials that can educate audiences about certain foods. For example, information about cheese that can prevent heart disease and stroke if consumed within the right amount

#### **Suggestion:**

Digital branding must be able to bridge the gap because value will come after the business objectives and target audience objectives are considered and balanced. This condition is following what the experts said, "we must first know about millennials, what their interests are and what do they like. If we are dealing with grocery retail, it mostly would be food, snacks, drinks or maybe chocolate and candies. Grocery retailers must be sensitive to trends and cooperate with the suppliers of these trending food products. Thus, they can create contents about these foods to drive the millennials to visit the store. If talking about old school supermarket, the average spending of parents is basic needs, food that will be processed at home. It must be an element of trend if we get something more millennials. As it was said by an informant who indirectly said that, "buying Samyang (Korean instant noodle)" is considering millennials that tend to like trendy things. Experts' statements are in line with what was said by [11], social media is very

much part of our personal lives in many cases, we need to be very cautious about how we use it commercially. Almost everything we have spoken about so far involves providing value via engagement and understanding the user's needs. Since millennials tend to follow trends, it is evident that HERO Supermarket must always be updated with the current trends. These trends can later be processed into interesting contents which will trigger millennials for the next stage. Following Rowland (2014) about digital branding, consumers' motivation to recognize a brand will not appear without any trigger. The stimulus from the content d will have an impact on the next stage, namely the user journey. Rowland (2014) discussed that the user journey stage has Google's zero moment of truth (ZMOT), which is the stage between stimulus and FMOT (First Moment of Truth). Stimulus is derived from external influences coming from trends and existing advertising. At this stage, it is explained that the audience conducts research before buying the product and how long it will take them to do this, FMOT is an advertising initiation step that encourages the target audience that is exposed by advertising to make a buying decision. For the buying decision, purchasing FMCG products is usually in supermarkets. This is also similar to AISAS theory by Dentsu. Attract and interest that can generate desire occur because of the existing stimulus or drive such as advertising or trends. This desire will progress to the next stage, namely Search. Getting into this stage requires a strong push because of the customers' high-involvement. Similar to FMOT, customers can search for products online. After searching, customers may be able to proceed to the next stage, which is Action. It is the stage of buying a product that has been searched before. After consuming or using the product, usually, customers do the next step, namely Share. Share can be done not only through online, but also offline through word-of-mouth. After considering trends, HERO Supermarket can explore experience aspect which could be done with tap-in or on-ground activity. For instance, working with a product brand in which they can display their products in the future. The displays are not only for sale but also for visual enjoyment. Every visitor who comes can take a photo and then share it to their social media. That hopefully can make the brand trending and invite millennials to come indirectly and feel the experience. This strategy is indirectly very beneficial because it can produce user-generated content and engagements from social media exposure. These user-generated contents are very profitable because HERO Supermarket gets content materials for "free". By doing on-ground activities that follow the existing trends in millennials, it can slowly change the perception of millennials on HERO Supermarket that is old school these were important things to attract the attention of millennials. This is also in line with [12] statement that "two-way communication and empowerment of the consumer are the reasons why digital branding requires authenticity, a clear value proposition, and increasingly complex user journey. Through social media, brands can not only 'broadcast' to the audience but also engage with the audience. Therefore, if it is still within the scope of traditional branding metrics such as awareness and recall - brands need something way more impactful than just making something only to be seen." Considering that HERO Supermarket takes an approach by utilizing emotional contents to attract millennials, this is contrary to what experts believe about what should be done to attract millennials. Emotional content is not suitable for millennials because they tend to prioritize experience and

news value. Also, Millennials tend to be updated and curious. So, the experts try to explain that millennials tend to prioritize news value which means the news has up-to-date/current value or something worthy to be shared or discussed. The experts also added that, compared to the conventional generation of the past, they are not curious and are used to what already exists, so it is more secure. The current generation needs information and experience, so they are willing to spend more to get experience, especially if that experience can be shared. For example, Indomie donuts in Australia that trended some time ago. Many millennials talked about it and wanted to try it until finally, someone sold it in Indonesia. Experts also believe that since brands are grocery retailers that have a store, experience can be offered in digital branding and on-ground activity, so the trends and experience can be obtained by the target audience. This is also supported by [13] that states that brands can do brand activation online or offline. Brands can also use social media to give different experiences. With the statement from the experts and supporting theories, it could be said that the journal made by [14] which said that social media has transformed according to the current public's culture undermines certain branding techniques because, on today's culture, communities and influential crowdcultures become one. A brand can be said successful when they enter into the culture and make crowdcultures as vehicles in their communication. Crowdcultures is digital natives who have the same thoughts. Moreover, crowdcultures is formed because of the social media developments that build the subculture in cyberspace. In avoiding errors that can hinder communication on digital branding, experts also said that digging about the target audience in depth is very necessary so that the content produced can be in accordance with the target audience. This can also have impact on a content that, in the end, becomes awareness or is about tips. In the case of grocery retail brands, call-to-action is necessary so that they come to our place, to get experience in the store.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

Several stages are needed to make digital branding efforts to increase brand recognition towards millennials. The first and foremost thing is to determine the business objectives and target audience objectives. After that, the value that connects those two things can be considered, which later all the digital branding efforts carried out must be based on that value. That value can be poured into the message to be conveyed to the millennials. It is very effective to use social media to attract millennials in the digital world. Social media allows two-way conversations and users can share information quickly. Those things have made social media become an opportunity to get a large exposure. This, of course, will affect brand recognition because the target audience is exposed. These things have to go together with a message that matches the value so targeting the target audience can be effective. The messages that have the values can be poured through social media content. The content must be more than just broadcast. It has to be engaged with the target audience, the millennials. Creating content can be done through several things both online and offline. Making offline activities that will later be able to tap into millennials trends can trigger user-generated contents to social media, which will be very profitable in terms of content, exposure and brand recognition. Therefore, digital branding activities must be integrated with offline activities.

The communication barrier, in this case, is the lack of depth in the research conducted on the target audience of HERO Supermarket regarding what the interest of the target audience is and what their buying behavior is. The message meant by the content produced is not well conveyed and the content becomes less provoking because of the lack of in-depth research where research is the most basic thing to find the meeting point of business goals and target audience. It can be inferred that the results of research are the main and fundamental thing in the effort of digital branding

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