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How Founder Personal Branding Strengthens Corporate Reputation: The Case of Nurhayati Subakat and Paragon Corp

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ABSTRACT

The growing demand for authenticity in corporate communication has shifted public relations from organization-centered messaging toward founder-driven narratives that emphasize personal values as strategic organizational assets. This study investigates how founder personal branding strengthens corporate reputation through the alignment of individual and organizational values, using Paragon Corp and its founder, Nurhayati Subakat, as a qualitative case study. Situated within the highly competitive and value-oriented halal cosmetics industry, the research examines how the founder's values of spirituality, humility, integrity, and care are embedded in the company's organizational culture and stakeholder engagement practices. The study adopts a qualitative case study design supported by document analysis, public communication materials, and secondary data. The analysis is guided by the Values-Driven Persona framework and Person–Organization Fit (P–O Fit) theory to explain how founder identity is transformed into organizational legitimacy and reputational capital. The findings demonstrate that the alignment between Nurhayati Subakat's personal values and the "Paragon Way" corporate culture creates a coherent organizational identity that enhances stakeholder trust, brand authenticity, and corporate credibility. This value alignment also functions as a reputational safeguard by reducing stakeholder skepticism and fostering long-term emotional commitment, particularly within collectivist cultural contexts. The study contributes to the literature on founder-led branding by proposing value alignment as a

fundamental mechanism linking founder personal branding with sustainable corporate reputation. Future research should validate this conceptual framework across different industries and cultural settings using quantitative and comparative approaches.

Keywords
Corporate Reputation
Founder Personal Branding
Paragon Corp
Person–Organization Fit
Value Alignment
Values-Driven Branding

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Introduction

The global public relations (PR) landscape has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade, shifting from organization-centered communication toward more personalized and human-centered engagement strategies. This paradigm shift has been driven by the increasing demand for authenticity, transparency, and emotional connection among stakeholders in the digital communication era. Consumers no longer evaluate organizations solely through corporate advertisements or institutional messaging but increasingly assess them through the values, behaviors, and credibility of their leaders. Social media platforms and digital ecosystems have amplified the visibility of founders, allowing their personal narratives to become integral components of organizational identity. Consequently, impersonal corporate communication is gradually being replaced by founder-led narratives that foster trust through authentic human experiences rather than carefully crafted promotional messages. This phenomenon is reinforced by the premise that in the digital era, public trust is more easily channeled through a founder's persona than through a company's visual logo alone [1].

Within the highly competitive global cosmetics industry, where product differentiation is becoming increasingly difficult, and consumer expectations continue to evolve, organizational reputation has emerged as one of the most valuable strategic assets. Companies are now expected not only to deliver high-quality products but also to demonstrate ethical values, social responsibility, and authentic leadership. In this context, the success of Wardah under Paragon Corp represents a distinctive case worthy of scholarly attention. Unlike many multinational cosmetic companies that primarily rely on product innovation and extensive marketing campaigns, Paragon Corp has consistently developed a corporate reputation that is closely associated with the personal character and moral values of its founder, Nurhayati Subakat. Her leadership philosophy, emphasizing spirituality, resilience, humility, and social responsibility, has gradually evolved from an individual characteristic into an organizational

identity that shapes stakeholder perceptions and strengthens public confidence. As a result, the company's long-term reputation is built not only through product excellence but is fundamentally anchored in the personal values of Nurhayati Subakat [2], [3]. The integration of the founder's spirituality, resilience, and humility is found to be a PR instrument that transcends mere technical marketing functions.

Although the strategic importance of founder visibility has been widely recognized in business practice, important theoretical limitations remain within the contemporary literature. Existing studies frequently conceptualize executive personal branding as a communication tactic that primarily supports promotional activities or executive visibility, while paying limited attention to its role as a strategic organizational resource. Consequently, the deeper mechanisms through which founders' personal values become institutionalized within organizational culture and subsequently influence corporate reputation remain insufficiently explored. This limitation suggests that executive personal branding is often only conceptualized as a superficial advertising supplement [4]. Theoretically, however, a founder's self-image should be understood as a valuable intangible asset capable of shaping organizational legitimacy, stakeholder trust, and sustainable corporate reputation over time [5]. Moreover, the consistency between a founder's personal identity and organizational values has been identified as an essential prerequisite for maintaining organizational authenticity and long-term strategic sustainability [6]. Therefore, a conceptual reconstruction of how personal values are transformed into institutional credibility is urgently needed to address the skepticism in the modern market [7], [8].

Through the case study of Paragon Corp, this article aims to develop a conceptual framework that explains how a founder's personal branding creates value alignment between individual identity and organizational culture, thereby strengthening corporate reputation in increasingly skeptical and values-driven markets. Rather than viewing founder branding merely as an individual communication strategy, this study positions it as a strategic mechanism through which organizational legitimacy, stakeholder trust, and brand authenticity are continuously constructed and reinforced. Specifically, this research seeks to formulate a new framework that explains the synchronization between individual identity and brand integrity in strengthening a company's position in an increasingly skeptical global market [9]. This research identifies the specific mechanisms through which founder values influence corporate PR strategy.

Literature Review

A. Strategic Personal Branding in Public Relations

The conceptualization of personal branding in modern public relations is no longer seen merely as an individual self-promotion effort but has been redefined as a strategic asset for

reputation-oriented organizations [10], [11]. The public identity of a leader is found to have a direct correlation with the overall corporate credibility assessment by stakeholders [4], [14]. By integrating personal attributes into institutional narratives, unique brand differentiation can be created in saturated markets where consumer trust is often placed in the integrity of the human figure behind the product [9], [15]. From a sociological perspective, Impression Management Theory is applied to analyze leadership as a measured strategic performance where the front-stage behavior of a leader, such as in the Paragon Corp phenomenon, is a conscious effort to build impressions aligned with audience moral expectations [12], [16].

The use of a leader's persona as a strategic PR instrument allows organizations to humanize business entities that are often perceived as rigid or transactional. This process of humanization is achieved through consistent self-presentation, where the values of honesty and care shown by leadership figures are transformed into social capital [5]. Consequently, strong executive personal branding serves as a proactive risk mitigation mechanism where individual credibility is projected to protect corporate reputation during market fluctuations or extreme global competition. Ultimately, the effectiveness of this management depends on the consistency between the backstage identity and the outward public appearance, as any gap between image and reality is identified as a major threat to organizational legitimacy [1].

B. Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit)

The concept of Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit) in strategic management and public relations is defined as the level of alignment between an individual's fundamental values, particularly the founder's, and the collective value system of the organization. This synchronization is positioned as a crucial variable determining corporate communication effectiveness, where the leader's personal identity reflects the broader company vision and mission [6]. In the context of Paragon Corp, the fit between the founder’s religious ethical principles and the company's Halal commitment is viewed as a manifestation of internal coherence that strengthens institutional legitimacy [2]. This alignment contributes significantly to forming perceptions of authenticity in an increasingly skeptical public sphere.

Brand authenticity is often evaluated by the extent to which the leader's actual behavior remains consistent with brand promises communicated through PR channels [5]. When a founder's values are organically integrated into the corporate culture, public suspicion of artificial imaging is minimized because the narrative is seen as an honest reflection of operational reality rather than mere commercial commodification [4]. Furthermore, a strong P-O Fit model creates a reputational shield that builds audience loyalty on deeper emotional foundations [4]. Conversely, a failure to achieve harmonic P-O Fit can trigger brand identity crises and permanent damage to stakeholder trust if a disconnection occurs between the leader's character and corporate policy [8].

C. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study integrates two foundational theoretical pillars to explain the mechanism of value transfer from individual leadership identity to corporate reputational capital. The first pillar, Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit) theory [6], [20], [22], explains the degree of congruence between a founder's personal value system and the organization's collective values, treating this alignment as the prerequisite condition for authentic brand communication. The second pillar, Impression Management Theory [12], [16], provides the sociological mechanism through which the founder's authentic persona is strategically projected to stakeholders through consistent public behavior, media narratives, and organizational storytelling.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the Values-Driven Persona model proposed in this study operates as a linear-feedback loop comprising four sequential stages: (1) Founder's Core Values (spirituality, integrity, care), which serve as the origin point of the entire communication system [5], [25]; (2) Values Internalization into Corporate Culture, where the founder's personal ethos is formally embedded into organizational policies, HR practices, and the "Paragon Way" corporate philosophy [2], [3]; (3) Strategic Personal Branding Communication, through which consistent public narratives, media appearances, and CSR activities amplify the founder's value-aligned persona to target audiences [4], [9], [11]; and (4) Corporate Reputational Capital, manifested as institutional trust, consumer loyalty, and reduced PR operational costs [1], [14]. A feedback loop from stage four to stage one ensures dynamic recalibration of the model in response to market changes and public scrutiny [13], [19].

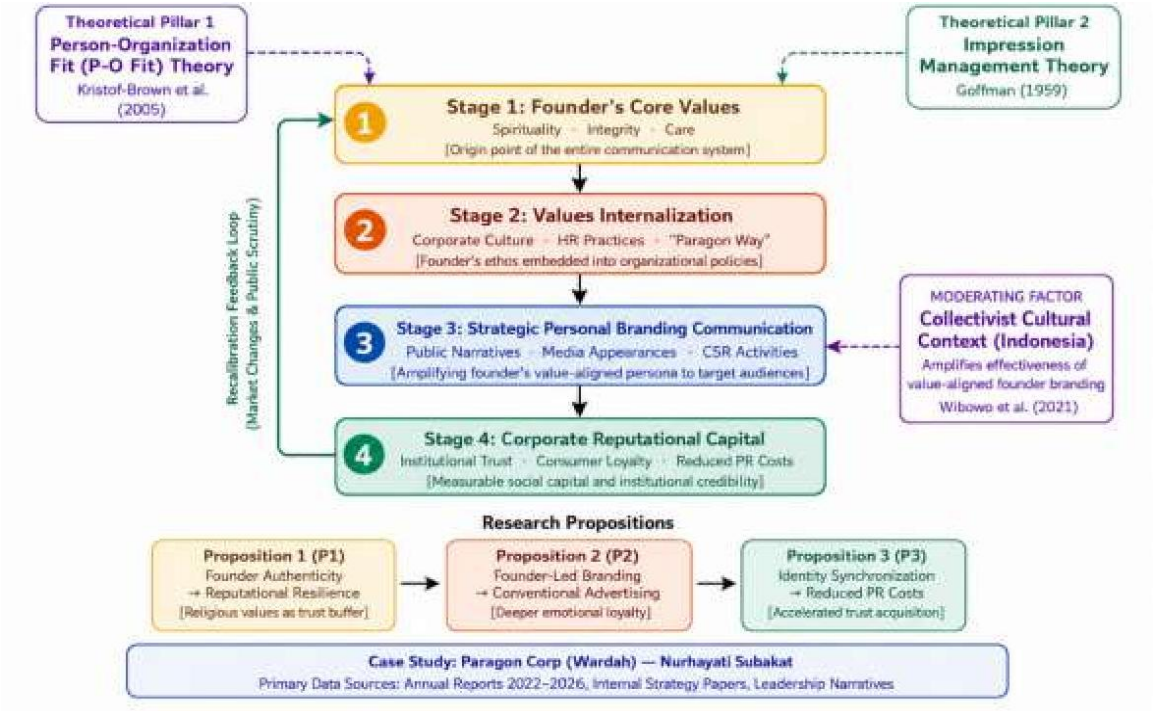


Fig. 1. Values-Driven Persona Model

This framework distinguishes itself from prior personal branding models [10], [15] by explicitly incorporating the cultural context variable, specifically the collectivist orientation of Indonesian society [8], [24] as a moderating factor that amplifies the effectiveness of value-aligned founder branding. In collectivist markets, the founder's role transcends commercial leadership, functioning as a moral exemplar whose personal reputation constitutes the primary reputational anchor of the entire organization [8], [23]. Consequently, this framework positions the founder's authenticity not merely as a marketing asset but as the structural foundation of institutional legitimacy and stakeholder trust [11], [25].

Material and Methods

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the integration of personal values into corporate branding strategies within Paragon Corp. The primary data sources consist of corporate annual reports, internal strategy papers, and public leadership narratives documented between 2022 and 2026 [4], [7]. To analyze the values-based leadership model, the study utilizes a content analysis technique focused on the consistency of the founder's personal identity and its manifestation in the Paragon Way organizational culture [2], [3]. This method allows for a deep exploration of how intangible assets, such as spirituality and humility, are transformed into measurable social capital and institutional credibility within the global halal cosmetics industry [5].

The framework for evaluating communication effectiveness is based on the Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit) theory and Impression Management Theory, focusing on the synchronization between the founder's persona and brand integrity [6]. Data triangulation is achieved by comparing official corporate communications with independent industry reports and public trust barometers to ensure the validity of the findings [1], [8]. Furthermore, the analysis observes the narrative consistency across various digital and conventional platforms to identify how founder-led branding serves as a reputational shield in volatile markets [4], [9]. This methodological structure is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which individual authenticity reinforces long-term corporate resilience.

Results and Discussions

A. The Values-Driven Persona Model and Authenticity

The mechanism of value transfer within this conceptual framework is understood through the Values-Driven Persona model, which identifies a continuous linear flow from a founder's fundamental values to the establishment of corporate trust. In this model, the internal values held by leadership are transformed into a strategic personal brand through consistent behavior and public discourse [4]. This internalization process serves as a primary anchor in building positive stakeholder perceptions, ensuring that corporate reputation is evaluated

based on human integrity rather than just functional product attributes. Furthermore, a leader's authenticity rooted in religious values, as proposed in Proposition 1 (P1), acts as a determining factor that significantly enhances reputational resilience during industry crises.

Public trust integrated with a leader's religious persona functions as a buffer against audience skepticism, as the leader's character is viewed as a moral guarantee for organizational transparency. In this context, reputational crises are managed not only through technical public relations mechanisms but are also mitigated through the trust capital accumulated by the leader's consistent inner values during stable periods. The efficiency of founder-led branding in building community loyalty, as stated in Proposition 2 (P2), surpasses paid advertising efficacy in value-sensitive markets like the global Halal industry. Human-driven communication possesses a more organic persuasive power for collectivist consumers, where the company leader represents the audience's moral aspirations [8].

Table 1. Summary of Key Research Findings from Primary Data Sources (Paragon Corp, 2022–2026)

Proposition	Key Finding	Primary Data Source	Strategic Implication
P1. Founder Authenticity → Reputational Resilience	Religious values, including divinity, humility, and care, embedded in the founder's persona serve as the primary driver of institutional trust and function as a reputational buffer against market skepticism [2], [5].	Paragon Annual Report 2025 [2]; Nurhayati Subakat Leadership Narratives [3]; Edelman Trust Barometer 2024 [1].	Companies should strategically communicate founder values through consistent leadership narratives and corporate social responsibility initiatives to build sustainable reputational capital [14], [19].
P2. Founder-Led Branding → Conventional Advertising	Human-centered communication is more effective than paid advertising in developing emotional loyalty among collectivist consumers, particularly within value-sensitive halal cosmetic markets [8], [23].	Paragon Internal Strategy Paper 2026 [7]; *The Iconomics* PR Persons Awards 2025 [8].	Public relations resources in collectivist markets should be redirected toward founder storytelling, authentic leadership communication, and community engagement rather than relying primarily on mass advertising [9], [24].
P3. Identity Synchronization → Reduced PR Costs	Alignment between the founder's personal values and corporate brand promises minimizes the need for repetitive reputation-verification campaigns while accelerating stakeholder trust formation [9], [25].	Paragon Annual Report 2025 [2]; Paragon Internal Strategy Paper 2026 [7].	Organizations should invest in founder–organization value alignment as a long-term strategy for reducing public relations costs while strengthening stakeholder relationship management [6], [13].

B. Identity Synchronization and PR Cost Management

The synchronization between the leadership figure and brand promises, formulated in Proposition 3 (P3), acts as a mechanism capable of substantially reducing public relations

communication costs. This efficiency is achieved because the leader acts as living proof who automatically validates corporate statements, minimizing the need for repetitive and expensive reputation verification campaigns [9]. In the dynamics of the 2026 beauty industry, which demands radical transparency, a leadership persona aligned with organizational values provides a competitive advantage by accelerating public trust acquisition without excessive financial expenditure [7]. Theoretically, this extends conventional PR theory by integrating spirituality and personal ethics into organizational communication frameworks [4].

For PR practitioners, extracting authentic leadership narratives is the key to ensuring that the resulting image is not perceived as manufactured. Rather than fabricating executive identities, practitioners are encouraged to conduct deep explorations of the leader's life history, philosophical values, and existing commitments [5]. This approach ensures that communication content, such as Paragon Corp's "Halal dari Awal" narrative, resonates with honesty because it is rooted in behavioral reality. Within the Indonesian cultural context, which values collectivism and role models, strengthening a leader's persona serves as a mechanism for deep social legitimacy, positioning the integration of local culture and leadership authenticity as a strategic imperative for global competitive advantage [7], [8].

C. Strategic Value Transfer and Cultural Context

The relevance of the founder-led branding model is significantly pronounced within the Indonesian cultural context, which honors exemplary values. Unlike Western societies that tend toward individualism and skepticism of authority, Indonesian audiences show a higher propensity to trust organizations led by a protector or educator figure who practices religious values [8]. Consequently, the reinforcement of a leader's persona in Indonesia functions not only as a marketing tool but as a social legitimacy-building mechanism. This model responds strategically to the global market dynamics of 2026 that demand radical transparency.

The effectiveness of this human-centric branding model is evaluated as a strategic response to market volatility. The reduction in PR communication costs is a secondary impact of identity consistency, where the leader validates the company's integrity without requiring massive advertising campaigns [9]. Therefore, the integration between local cultural contexts, leader authenticity, and modern PR strategies is positioned as an imperative for companies seeking to maintain competitive advantages. In the global beauty industry, which is increasingly driven by ethical values, the living proof provided by an authentic leader ensures long-term organizational sustainability [7].

Conclusion

The main findings of this conceptual article emphasize that the synchronization mechanism between a founder's personal values and corporate identity serves as a fundamental foundation for reputational sustainability in the modern cosmetics industry.

Through the analysis of Paragon Corp, it is observed that the integration of spiritual and ethical values into the organizational culture successfully transforms individual credibility into resilient corporate social capital. This integration ensures that the organization's reputation is not merely a surface-level construction but is deeply anchored in the authentic character of its leadership, providing a stable moral compass for the company's strategic direction.

The value transfer model proposed in this study provides a new understanding that, amidst increasing global market skepticism, using leadership as living proof of brand promises is more effective in building emotional loyalty compared to conventional advertising strategies. This human-centric approach allows the brand to bypass traditional barriers of consumer distrust by projecting a persona that embodies honesty and social responsibility. Ultimately, the synchronization of individual identity and brand integrity strengthens the company's position in an increasingly critical global market, establishing a framework where personal authenticity becomes the primary driver of institutional trust.

Limitations and Suggestions

Despite the theoretical contributions provided, limitations regarding the generalization of research results are acknowledged, as this study specifically focuses on leadership models within a collectivist cultural market. The effectiveness of the Values-Driven Persona framework may require further empirical testing in more individualistic cultural contexts or industrial sectors that do not have direct contact with end consumers. Furthermore, disparities in audience perceptions of religious values across different geographical regions are identified as potential variables that may influence the success of founder-led branding strategies on a global scale.

Future research is suggested to explore the challenges of maintaining branding consistency during future leadership successions. The risk of corporate identity disconnection is identified as significant if the successor does not share similar inner values with the founder. Strategically, strengthening the role of PR practitioners as managers of executive personas is imperative for maintaining moral legitimacy amidst demands for transparency. Therefore, developing value-based succession models and ensuring the alignment between leadership character and corporate policy are recommended as ethical responsibilities to sustain the organizational reputation.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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