

Constructing Personal Branding as Self-Representation: A Systematic Literature Review

Membangun Personal Branding sebagai Representasi Diri: Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis

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Abstract

Perkembangan pesat teknologi komunikasi digital telah mengubah secara fundamental cara individu membangun, menampilkan, dan mengelola identitasnya dalam masyarakat kontemporer. Namun, sebagian besar penelitian sebelumnya lebih menekankan personal branding sebagai strategi pemasaran daripada sebagai proses konstruksi identitas dan representasi diri, sehingga masih terdapat kesenjangan konseptual dalam memahami dimensi psikologis, sosial, dan simbolik dari personal branding. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis personal branding sebagai proses konstruksi identitas dan self-representation dalam konteks digital, serta mengidentifikasi pola konseptual, perkembangan tematik, dan implikasi profesionalnya. Metode penelitian menggunakan systematic literature review dengan pendekatan PRISMA terhadap artikel jurnal terindeks Scopus yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2010–2026. Sebanyak 738 artikel diidentifikasi pada tahap awal, dan setelah proses seleksi berdasarkan kriteria inklusi dan eksklusi, diperoleh 47 artikel yang dianalisis secara bibliometrik dan tematik menggunakan analisis co-occurrence, tren publikasi, dan dampak sitasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa personal branding merupakan proses multidimensional yang mengintegrasikan konstruksi identitas psikologis, komunikasi simbolik, dan interaksi sosial dalam lingkungan digital. Autentisitas, visibilitas digital, dan interaksi sosial muncul sebagai elemen kunci dalam membentuk kredibilitas, pengakuan profesional, dan peluang karier. Selain itu, platform digital berperan sebagai ruang utama konstruksi identitas yang memungkinkan individu secara aktif mengelola representasi diri dan membangun legitimasi profesional. Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa personal branding bukan sekadar strategi komunikasi, tetapi merupakan proses psikologis dan sosial yang berperan penting dalam pengembangan identitas profesional, peningkatan employability, dan mobilitas karier di era digital, serta memberikan kontribusi teoritis bagi integrasi perspektif psikologi identitas, komunikasi, dan branding dalam memahami representasi diri kontemporer.

Keyword identitas, representasi, personalbranding, digital, profesional

Abstract

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed how individuals construct, present, and manage their identities in contemporary society. However, most previous studies have emphasized personal branding primarily as a marketing strategy rather than as a process of identity construction and self-representation, resulting in a conceptual gap in understanding the psychological, social, and symbolic dimensions of personal branding. This study aims to analyze personal branding as a process of identity construction and self-representation in the digital context, as well as to identify conceptual patterns, thematic developments, and its professional implications. The research method employs a systematic literature review using the PRISMA approach on Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2010 and 2026. A total of 738 articles were identified in the initial stage, and after the selection process based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 47 articles were obtained and analyzed bibliometrically and thematically using co-occurrence analysis, publication trends, and citation impact. The findings indicate that personal branding is a multidimensional process that integrates psychological identity construction, symbolic communication, and social interaction within digital environments. Authenticity, digital visibility, and social interaction emerge as key elements in shaping credibility, professional recognition, and career opportunities. Furthermore, digital platforms function as primary spaces for identity construction, enabling individuals to actively manage their self-representation and build professional legitimacy. The implications of this study affirm that personal branding is not merely a communication strategy, but a psychological and social process that plays a crucial role in professional identity development, employability enhancement, and career mobility in the digital era, while also contributing theoretically to the integration of identity psychology, communication, and branding perspectives in understanding contemporary self-representation.

Keywords : identity, representation, personalbranding, digital, professional

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INTRUDUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed how individuals construct and present their identities in contemporary society (Moise & Anton, 2025). Digital platforms enable identity to become more visible, dynamic, and continuously negotiated across different contexts. Individuals are no longer confined to offline interactions in shaping who they are (Alves & Strehlau, 2025). Subject actively participates in ongoing processes of identity construction in mediated spaces. This transformation reflects a shift toward more flexible and fluid forms of self-representation. As a result, identity is increasingly shaped through interaction, visibility, and digital presence (Wang, 2025).

Personal branding has emerged as a central mechanism through which individuals strategically represent themselves to achieve professional, social, and symbolic recognition (Gherasim, 2025). It involves deliberate efforts to construct a consistent and appealing self-image. Individuals engage in selective self-presentation to influence how they are perceived. This process is not accidental but highly intentional and goal-oriented. Personal branding reflects an awareness of audience expectations and social norms (Ristianti et al., 2025).

In digital environments, identity is no longer merely internally experienced but actively curated through narratives, visual content, and symbolic associations (Rahman et al., 2025). Individuals construct meaning through images, captions, and digital interactions. These elements collectively shape how identity is interpreted by others (Pandey, 2025). The process involves both creativity and strategic decision-making. Identity becomes a form of communication that is constantly adjusted. Therefore, self-representation evolves alongside digital engagement (Sadrul Huda & Shupti, 2025).

This transformation is reinforced by the widespread use of social media, where individuals construct public-facing identities that reflect their values, competencies, and aspirations (Ouyang et al., 2025). Social media platforms function as spaces for continuous identity performance. Users engage in content creation to maintain relevance and visibility (Chen & Ahlstrom, 2025). The interactive nature of these platforms amplifies audience influence. Feedback mechanisms such as likes and comments shape identity presentation. Thus, identity becomes both personal and socially negotiated (Sawy et al., 2025).

Professional platforms such as LinkedIn further institutionalize personal branding by enabling individuals to build structured professional personas (Gonzales & Short, 2025). These platforms emphasize credibility, expertise, and professional achievements. Individuals curate their profiles to align with career goals (Wilke et al., 2025). This creates a standardized form of digital self-presentation. Professional identity becomes measurable and comparable (Griffiths, 2025). This highlights the role of personal branding as an

intentional and performative process of self-representation (Triviño et al., 2025).

As a result, identity formation has shifted from being socially determined to becoming increasingly individualized and strategic (Marques-Martins & Sixto García, 2025). Individuals exercise greater control over how they present themselves. This shift reflects broader societal changes toward individual agency (Ayele et al., 2025). Identity is no longer passively inherited but actively constructed. The process involves continuous reflection and adaptation. Therefore, identity becomes a project that individuals actively manage (Ashraf et al., 2025). Consequently, personal branding becomes essential for entrepreneurial success and market recognition (Suhud et al., 2025).

Personal branding also operates within influencer culture, where identity is carefully curated to build engagement and credibility (Matthews et al., 2026). Influencers construct identities that resonate with specific audiences. They strategically present aspects of their lives to create authenticity (Sherwood, 2025). This authenticity is often carefully managed rather than purely spontaneous. Audience trust becomes a key outcome of this process. As such, identity is shaped by both performance and perception (Balaji et al., 2025). Individuals actively construct identities that align with their career goals and professional aspirations (Miller & McGuigan, 2026).

In entrepreneurial contexts, personal branding becomes a tool for establishing trust and legitimacy (Trach & Sedliar, 2026). Entrepreneurs rely on their personal identity to represent their businesses. This creates a strong link between the individual and the brand. Customers often evaluate credibility based on personal image (Petersson McIntyre, 2026). The success of the business may depend on perceived authenticity. Thus, personal branding plays a critical role in entrepreneurial activities (Pasquinelli et al., 2026). AI-driven media and digital platforms enable individuals to create emotionally engaging personal narratives (Gárgoles & Hiljding, 2026). These narratives contribute to audience engagement and identity recognition. As a result, personal branding becomes a process of emotional and symbolic communication (Lascity, 2026).

This phenomenon reflects the broader commodification of identity, where personal characteristics and experiences function as symbolic and economic resources (Devi & Singh, 2026). Identity becomes something that can be marketed and exchanged. Individuals transform personal narratives into valuable assets. This process aligns with digital economic systems. Value is created through visibility and engagement. Consequently, identity operates within market-oriented frameworks (Bredikhina et al., 2026).

Personal branding further contributes to career development and professional differentiation (Li & Wu, 2026). Individuals use branding strategies to stand out in competitive environments (Sorour & Hammad, 2026). This involves highlighting unique skills and experiences. Personal

branding enhances recognition and professional positioning. It also supports long-term career sustainability.

In educational contexts, personal branding begins early as students develop digital portfolios and professional identities (Repollet & Landa, 2026). Students learn to present themselves strategically from the outset. Educational institutions encourage the development of professional profiles (Thoyib & Sofyan, 2026). This prepares individuals for future career demands. Digital portfolios serve as tools for showcasing competencies. As a result, personal branding becomes embedded in learning processes (Garland, 2026).

Personal branding supports employability by helping individuals communicate competencies effectively (Murgia & Rio Carral, 2026). Employers increasingly evaluate candidates based on digital presence (Yagüe-Perales et al., 2026). A strong personal brand can enhance job prospects. Individuals use branding to demonstrate value and potential. This creates new expectations in recruitment processes (Hwang & Han, 2026).

Despite its growing importance, personal branding is still predominantly understood as a strategic communication or marketing tool (Perry-Hazan & Sapir, 2026). This perspective emphasizes visibility and measurable outcomes. It prioritizes external performance over internal processes. Such an approach simplifies a complex phenomenon (Graham & Carlon, 2026). It overlooks deeper dimensions of identity construction. Therefore, existing interpretations remain limited (Meenakshy, 2026).

This dominant view reduces personal branding to external performance while neglecting internal identity dynamics (Steriopoulos et al., 2026). Individuals are seen as performers rather than meaning-makers. The psychological aspects of identity remain underexplored (Irshad, 2026). This creates an incomplete understanding of the phenomenon. Internal experiences are not sufficiently integrated (Firnando & Suhesty, 2024). As a result, theoretical explanations remain partial (Kealy-Morris, 2026).

Existing research is largely outcome-oriented, focusing on branding effectiveness and audience engagement (Ali, 2016). Studies often measure success through visibility and metrics (Huda et al., 2016). This limits exploration of underlying processes. The focus on outcomes overlooks how identity is constructed. It also neglects subjective meaning-making. Consequently, research lacks depth in conceptual analysis (Edwards, 2016).

This gap highlights the need to conceptualize personal branding as a holistic process. Such an approach must integrate multiple dimensions of identity. It should include psychological, communicative, and symbolic aspects. Understanding must go beyond surface-level performance. This study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of personal branding as a process of self-representation that integrates psychological, communicative, and symbolic dimensions. It seeks to identify key conceptual patterns within the literature. The study also examines how individuals

construct and negotiate identity. Furthermore, it aims to bridge internal and external perspectives. An integrative framework will be proposed. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of identity construction in contemporary digital contexts.

MENTHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) method to examine personal branding as a form of self-representation through a structured, transparent, and replicable procedure. The review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, encompassing identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. The literature search was conducted in the Scopus database using a structured query string: (“personal branding” OR “self branding”) AND (“self-presentation” OR “self representation” OR “identity construction” OR “digital identity”). This approach ensured comprehensive coverage of relevant studies while maintaining conceptual focus. Inclusion criteria consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2026 in English, focusing on personal branding, identity construction, and self-representation across psychological, social, and communication perspectives. Exclusion criteria removed non-peer-reviewed works and studies lacking relevance to identity processes, ensuring analytical rigor and conceptual alignment.

To enhance analytical depth, this study integrated bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer and Biblioshiny. VOSviewer was employed to construct and visualize keyword co-occurrence networks, enabling the identification of dominant themes and conceptual clusters within the literature. The analysis used co-occurrence as the unit of analysis, with author keywords as the primary data source. A minimum occurrence threshold of 5 keywords was applied to filter significant terms, and the association strength normalization method was used to generate network relationships. This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) method to comprehensively and systematically examine existing research on personal branding as a form of self-representation. This method was conducted through a structured procedure, including literature identification, selection based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, eligibility assessment, and conceptual synthesis of relevant studies. The inclusion criteria consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles addressing personal branding, digital identity, and identity construction from psychological, social, and communication perspectives, while exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate studies that were irrelevant or did not meet academic standards. The review process followed the principles of transparency, replicability, and objectivity to ensure that the analyzed literature possessed high scientific quality and conceptual relevance. Through the systematic literature review approach, this study aimed to integrate

existing findings, identify conceptual patterns, and provide a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of personal branding as a process of identity construction in contemporary digital contexts

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Details
Inclusion	1. Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2026. 2. Articles written in English. 3. Studies focusing on personal branding, self-representation, digital identity, or professional identity construction in contemporary contexts. 4. Research examining processes such as self-presentation, identity construction, symbolic communication, authenticity, visibility, and meaning-making in personal branding. 5. Studies exploring personal branding across various domains, including social media, professional platforms, entrepreneurship, political communication, education, and digital culture. 6. Empirical studies, theoretical papers, and systematic literature reviews that provide conceptual, psychological, social, or communication perspectives on personal branding.
Exclusion	1. Conference papers, book chapters, editorials and gray literature. 2. Studies focusing exclusively on corporate, product, or organizational branding without relevance to individual or personal branding. 3. Articles not addressing identity construction, self-representation, or personal branding processes. 4. Studies lacking theoretical, empirical, or conceptual relevance to personal branding as a form of self-representation. 5. Articles focusing solely on technical platform features without discussing identity, self-presentation, or branding processes.

The inclusion criteria for this study consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2026 and written in English, ensuring academic rigor and relevance to contemporary digital and social contexts. The selected studies focused on personal branding, self-representation, digital identity, and professional identity construction, particularly those examining processes such as self-presentation, identity construction, symbolic communication, authenticity, visibility, and meaning-making. Additionally, the review included studies exploring personal branding across diverse domains, including social media, professional platforms, entrepreneurship, political

communication, education, and digital culture. Both empirical and theoretical contributions, including systematic literature reviews, were considered, provided they offered conceptual, psychological, social, or communication perspectives on personal branding. Conversely, exclusion criteria eliminated conference papers, book chapters, editorials, and gray literature to maintain scholarly quality. Studies that focused exclusively on corporate or organizational branding without relevance to individual identity were also excluded, as were articles that did not address identity construction, self-representation, or personal branding processes.

Table 2. PRISMA flowchart – study selection process.

Phase	Step	Records (n)
Identification	Records identified from Scopus databases on personal branding, self-representation, digital identity, or professional identity .	738
	Records identified from thematic filters for mindfulness intervention.	-
	Records after applying the year filter (<2025)	-
	Records after filtering article type (only journals)	-
	Records after filtering language (only English)	-
Screening	Records screened	251
	Records excluded (not relevant based on abstract/title)	153
	Reports sought for retrieval	103
	Reports not retrieved (full texts not accessible)	-
Eligibility	Reports assessed for eligibility	103
	Reports excluded (based on full-text analysis)	50
Included	Studies included in the final review	47

The study selection process followed the PRISMA framework to ensure a transparent and systematic identification of relevant literature on personal branding as self-representation. Initially, 738 records were identified from the Scopus database using keywords related to personal branding, self-representation, and digital identity. After applying inclusion criteria, including publication year (2010–2026), journal article type, and English language, 251 records remained for the screening stage. These records were

reviewed based on titles and abstracts, resulting in the exclusion of 148 articles that did not align with the conceptual focus of personal branding and identity construction. A total of 103 full-text articles were then assessed for eligibility, of which 56 were excluded due to insufficient conceptual relevance, lack of focus on self-representation processes, or failure to meet the analytical criteria. Ultimately, 47 studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final systematic literature review.

Table 3. Summary of bibliometric data.

Description	Results
Timespan	2013–2026
Documents	47
Annual growth rate (%)	76.01
Average citations per document	124,96
Document contents	
Keywords Plus (EN)	209
Author's keywords (DE)	490
Authors and collaboration	
Authors	172
Co-Authors per Document	8.23
DOCUMENT TYPES	
Article	47

The bibliometric characteristics of the studies included in this systematic literature review on personal branding as self-representation. The analyzed publications span from 2013 to 2026, indicating that personal branding has emerged as a relatively recent but rapidly expanding research field. A total of 47 journal articles were included, with a notably high annual growth rate of 76.01%, reflecting increasing scholarly attention to personal branding, digital identity, and self-representation in contemporary professional and digital contexts. The average citation per document reached 124.96, suggesting that the included studies have substantial

academic influence and contribute significantly to theoretical and empirical discussions in this area. In terms of document content, the analysis identified 209 Keywords Plus and 490 author-defined keywords, indicating conceptual diversity and interdisciplinary engagement across communication, psychology, digital media, and professional identity research. Furthermore, the authorship analysis revealed 172 contributing authors, with an average of 8.23 co-authors per document, highlighting strong collaborative patterns and interdisciplinary cooperation among researchers.

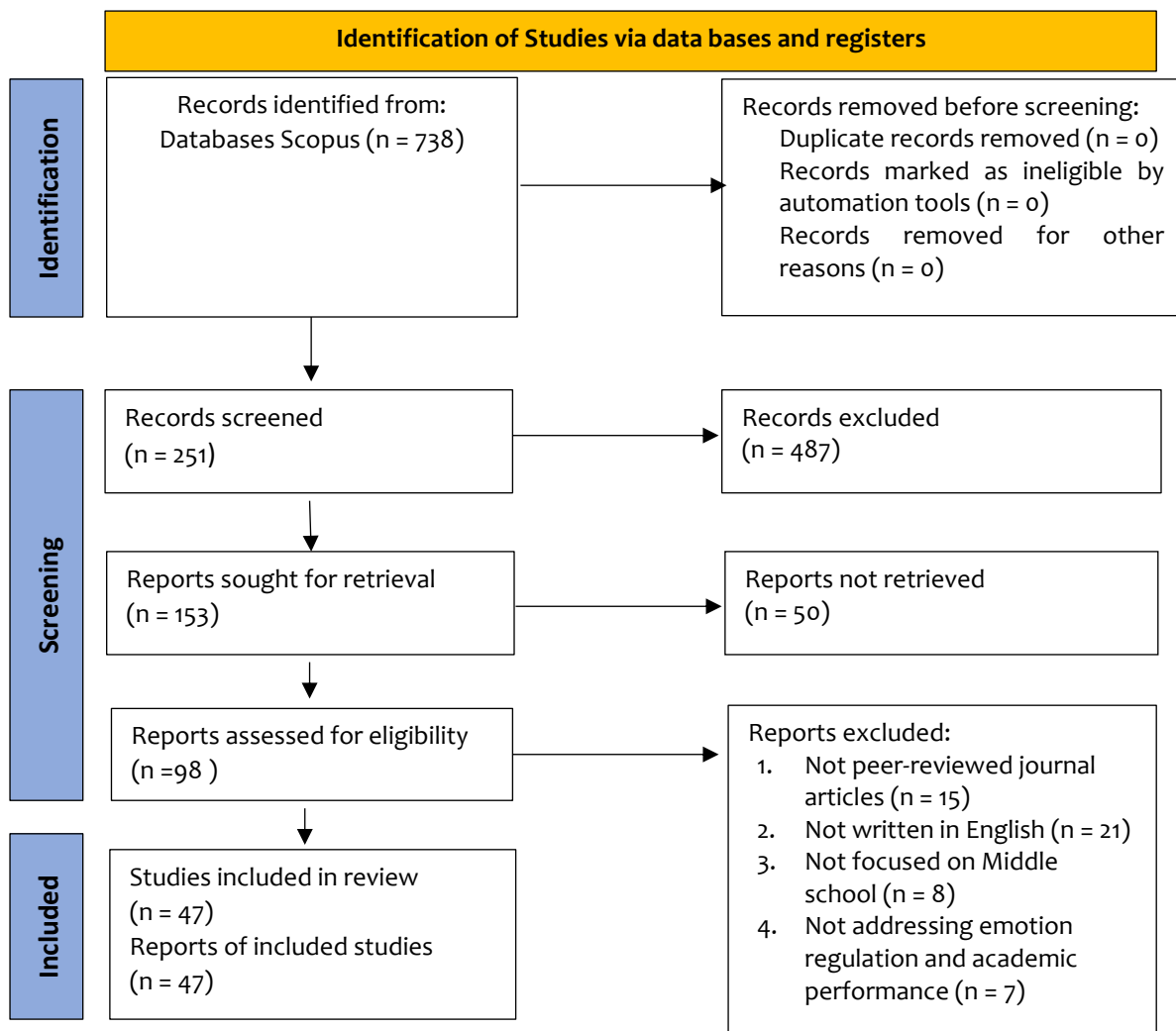


Figure 1. Article Selection

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The figure illustrates the annual scientific production related to personal branding and self-representation from 2012 to 2025, revealing a sustained upward trajectory in research output. While the early period between 2012 and 2014 shows relatively low publication counts, this phase reflects the initial conceptual formation of personal branding as an emerging research domain rather than merely limited academic interest. The noticeable increase beginning in 2015 and 2016 suggests not only growing recognition but also a shift toward the institutionalization of personal branding within interdisciplinary research, particularly in communication, digital media, and professional studies. The slight decline observed in 2017 does not indicate a weakening of the field but may reflect a transitional phase in which theoretical refinement and diversification of research

directions occurred. From 2018 onward, the consistent growth signals the consolidation of personal branding as a stable research area, supported by the expansion of digital platforms and the normalization of identity performance in online environments. The sharp increase in 2021 and the peak in 2025 indicate an acceleration of scholarly attention, likely driven by intensified digitalization and the growing importance of self-representation in professional and social contexts. However, this rapid growth also suggests a potential risk of conceptual fragmentation, as the expansion of publications may not always be accompanied by theoretical integration. Therefore, the upward trend reflects not only the increasing relevance of personal branding but also highlights the need for stronger conceptual consolidation to avoid dispersion across fragmented research perspectives.

Publication Trends

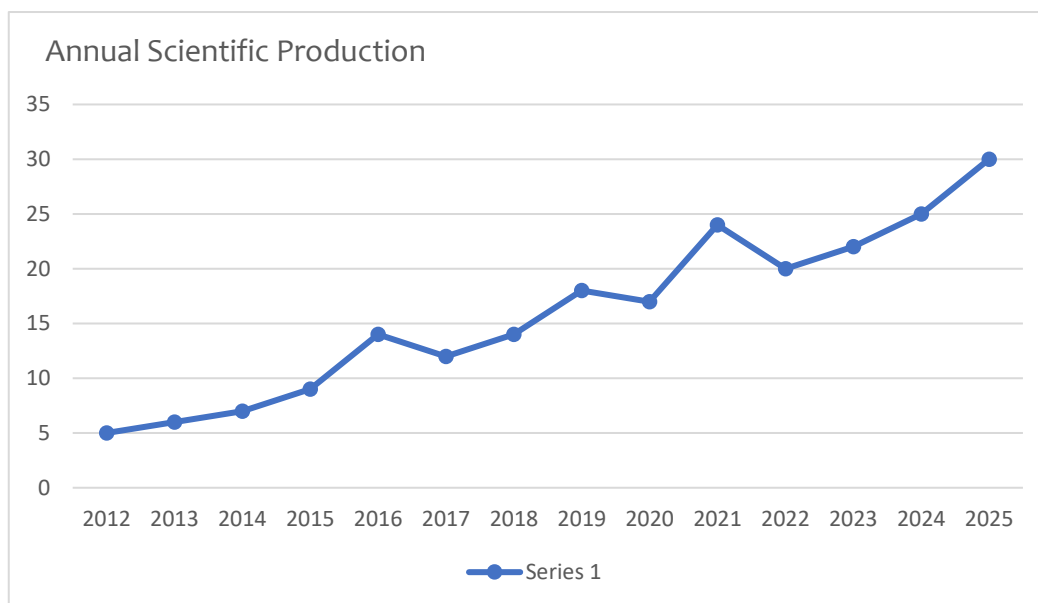


Figure 2. Annual scientific production graph.

The figure illustrates the annual scientific production related to personal branding and self-representation from 2012 to 2025, revealing a consistent upward trajectory in research output. While the relatively low number of publications between 2012 and 2014 suggests an emerging stage of the field, this phase also reflects the initial conceptual ambiguity surrounding personal branding as a research construct. The increase observed in 2015 and 2016 indicates not only growing academic interest but also the early institutionalization of personal branding within interdisciplinary domains such as communication, digital media, and professional studies. The slight decline in 2017 should not be interpreted as a reduction in relevance but rather as a possible period of theoretical adjustment, where research focus shifted toward refining conceptual

boundaries. The sustained growth from 2018 onward reflects the consolidation of personal branding as a recognized research area, closely linked to the expansion of digital platforms and the normalization of identity performance in online environments. The sharp increase in 2021 and the peak in 2025 suggest an acceleration driven by broader digital transformation and the increasing importance of self-representation in professional and social contexts. However, this rapid growth also raises concerns regarding conceptual fragmentation, as the proliferation of studies may not be accompanied by theoretical integration. Therefore, the observed trend not only demonstrates the rising relevance of personal branding but also highlights the need for stronger conceptual coherence and integrative frameworks within the field.

Citation Impact

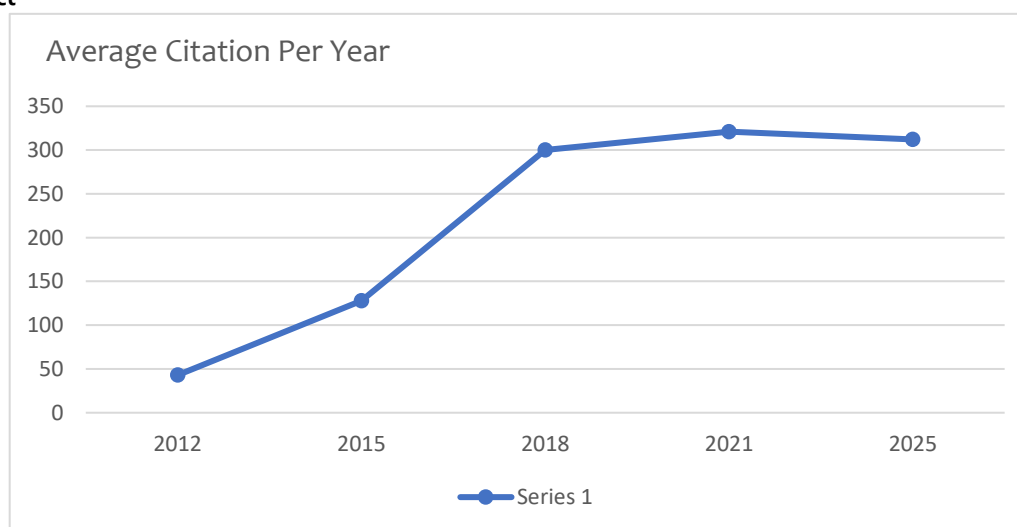


Figure 3. Average article citations per year.

The figure illustrates the trend of average citations per year for studies related to personal branding and self-representation between 2012 and 2025, indicating a substantial increase in scholarly impact over time. While the relatively low citation level in 2012 reflects the early stage of the field, it also suggests that personal branding had not yet achieved strong theoretical visibility or interdisciplinary integration. The sharp increase by 2015, where average citations rose significantly, signals not only growing academic engagement but also the emergence of influential foundational studies that began to shape the direction of the field. The rapid growth between 2015 and 2018, reaching approximately 300 citations, indicates a period of intellectual consolidation in which key concepts and frameworks gained widespread recognition and were repeatedly referenced

across studies. This pattern suggests a concentration of influence around a limited set of core publications, which may contribute to theoretical dominance but also risks narrowing conceptual diversity. The peak observed in 2021 further reinforces the centrality of personal branding within contemporary research, particularly in relation to digital identity and mediated self-representation. However, the slight decline in 2025, despite remaining at a high level, may indicate a maturation phase in which the field is stabilizing or diversifying into more specialized subtopics. Therefore, the citation trend not only reflects increasing academic impact but also reveals structural dynamics of the field, including phases of emergence, consolidation, and potential fragmentation that require further theoretical integration.

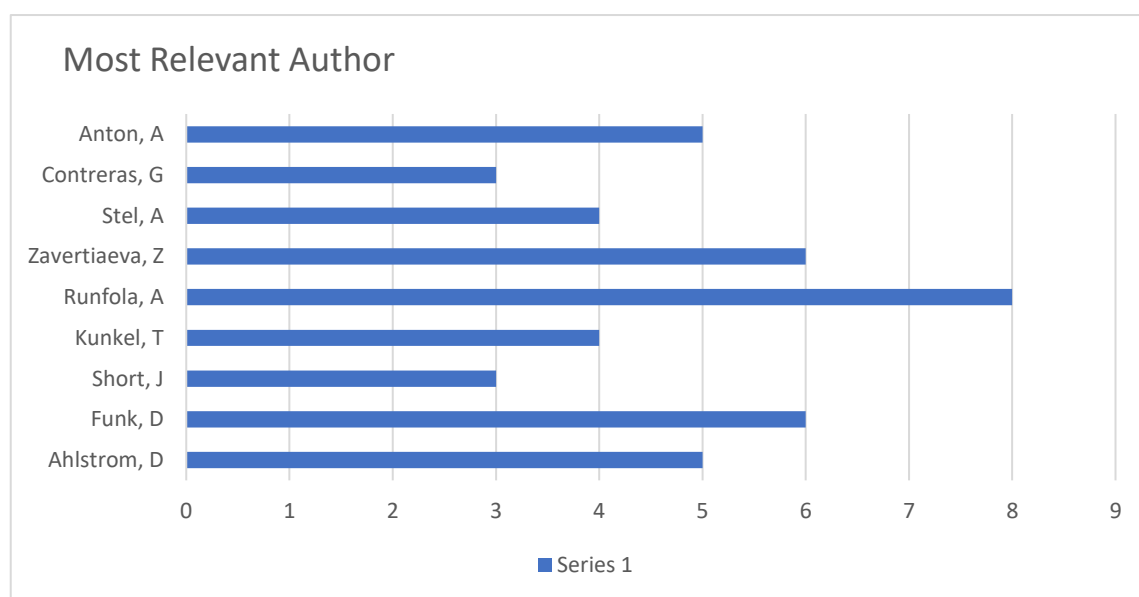


Figure 4. Most productive authors.

The figure presents the most relevant authors contributing to the research field of personal branding and self-representation, based on the number of publications included in this systematic literature review. While Runfola, A emerges as the most productive contributor with 8 publications, this dominance not only reflects individual productivity but also suggests the presence of key knowledge producers who significantly shape the conceptual direction of the field. Similarly, the strong contributions of Zavertiaeva, Z and Funk, D, each with 6 publications, indicate the formation of a relatively concentrated group of scholars whose work influences dominant perspectives on personal branding, particularly in digital and professional contexts. The contributions of Anton, A and Ahlstrom, D further highlight the interdisciplinary nature of the field, as their work integrates organizational, psychological, and identity-

based approaches. However, the distribution of publications also reveals a semi-concentrated authorship structure, where a limited number of scholars contribute disproportionately compared to the broader academic community. This pattern suggests that while the field is expanding, it may still rely on a relatively small group of influential authors, which can both strengthen theoretical coherence and risk intellectual centralization. At the same time, the presence of authors with moderate contributions indicates emerging participation and gradual diversification of research voices. Therefore, the authorship distribution not only demonstrates scholarly productivity but also reflects the evolving intellectual structure of the field, characterized by a balance between core contributors and expanding academic engagement, which may influence future theoretical development and innovation.

Density visualization

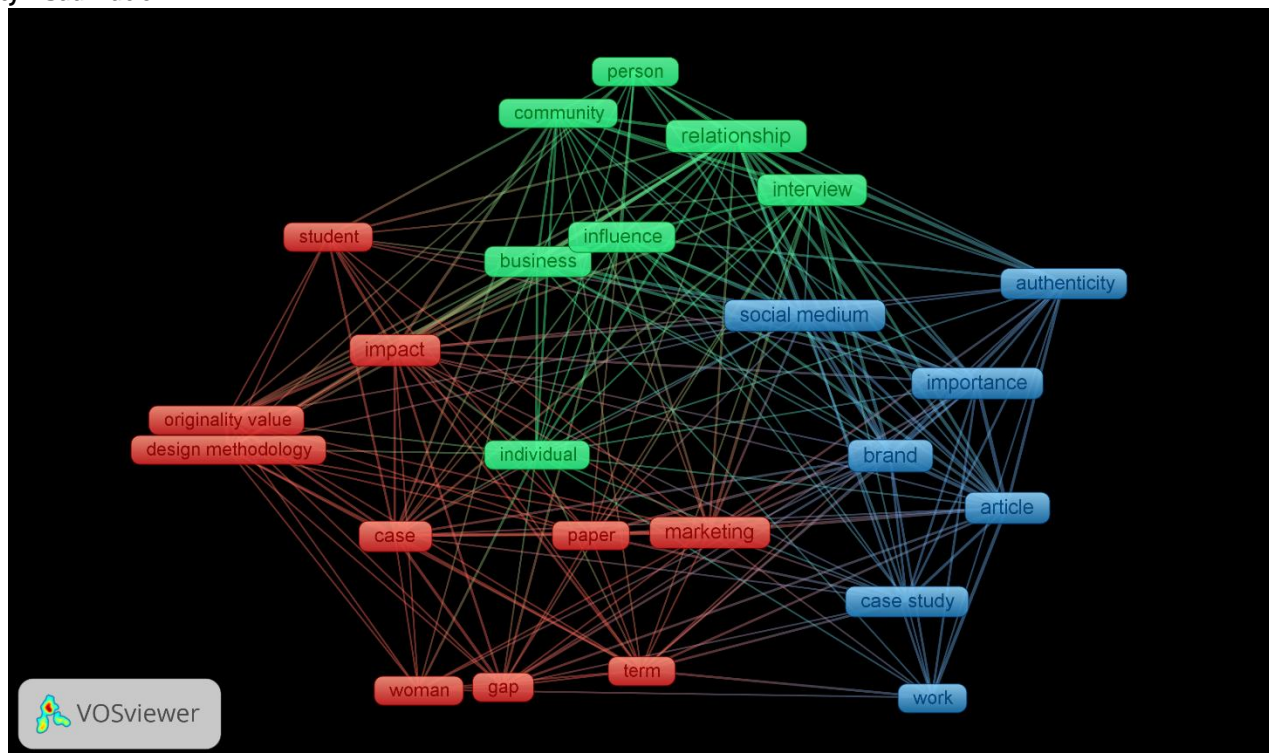


Figure 5. Co-occurrence network visualization.

Thematic evolution and research progression

Word cloud representation

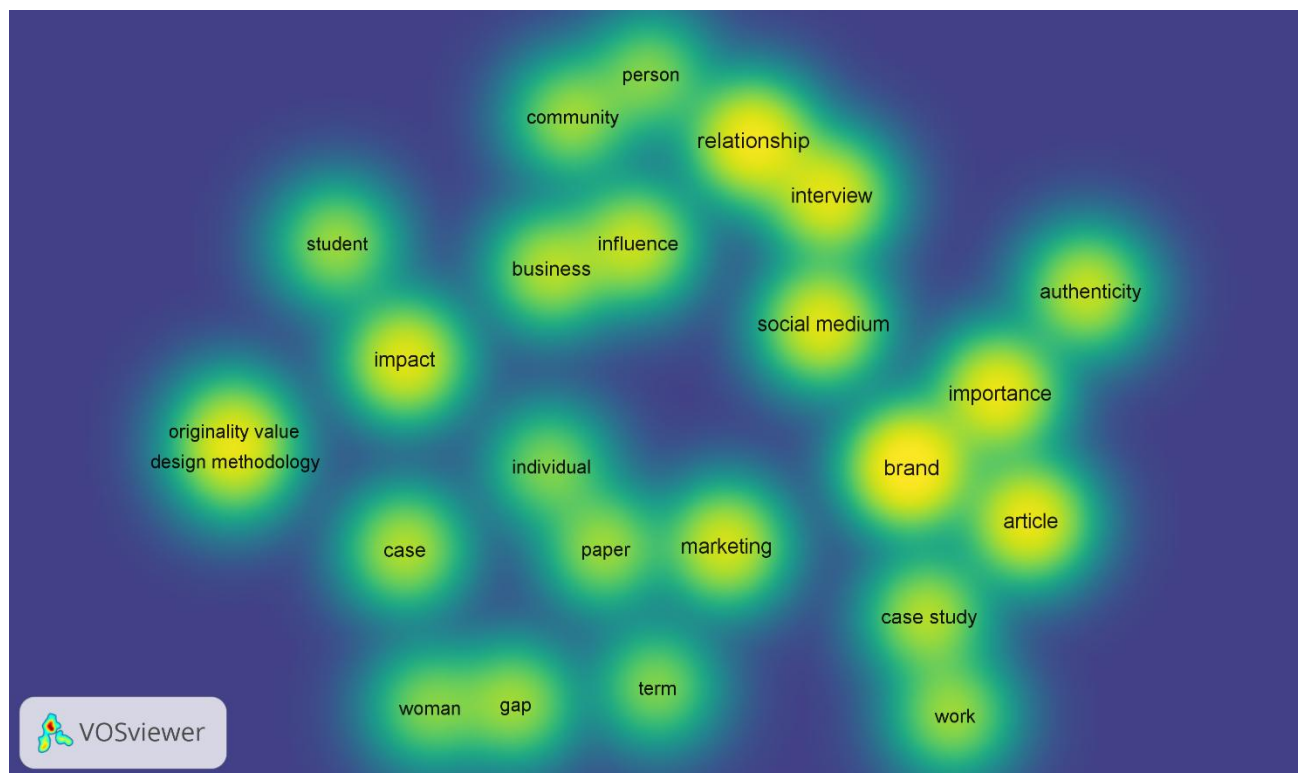


Figure 6. Co-occurrence density map

The network visualization generated using VOSviewer shows that research on personal branding and self-representation is divided into several interconnected but not

fully integrated clusters. The blue cluster, centered on keywords such as *brand*, *authenticity*, and *social medium*, represents the dominant perspective that views personal

emphasizes that personal initiative and internal organizational experiences play a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive themselves and communicate their professional identity (Pandey, 2025). This suggests that personal branding is not merely about presenting an image to others but also about developing a clear and meaningful understanding of oneself (Sadrul Huda & Shupti, 2025). Individuals must first construct an internal sense of identity before they can effectively communicate that identity externally (Chen & Ahlstrom, 2025).

Personal branding enables individuals to exercise agency over their identity construction. Rather than allowing their identity to be defined solely by organizational roles or institutional labels, individuals can actively shape how they are perceived (Sawy et al., 2025). This agency reflects a shift from institutional identity assignment to individual identity construction (Gonzales & Short, 2025). In traditional organizational structures, identity was largely defined by job titles, positions, and institutional affiliations. However, in contemporary professional environments, individuals increasingly assume responsibility for defining and communicating their own identity (Wilke et al., 2025). Personal branding allows individuals to transcend formal roles and construct a broader, more flexible professional identity that reflects their unique strengths and aspirations (Griffiths, 2025).

The growing importance of personal branding also reflects broader social and economic transformations. In knowledge-based and digital economies, individuals themselves become key sources of value creation (Triviño et al., 2025). Their skills, knowledge, and personal reputation function as forms of capital that influence career opportunities and professional mobility (Marques-Martins & Sixto García, 2025). As a result, individuals must actively manage their identity as a strategic resource (Ayele et al., 2025). Personal branding allows individuals to convert intangible attributes such as expertise, personality, and credibility into recognizable professional assets (Ashraf et al., 2025). This transformation reflects the increasing commodification of identity, where the self becomes both a social actor and a symbolic resource (Suhud et al., 2025).

In competitive professional environments, individuals increasingly perceive themselves as brands that must be strategically developed and maintained (Sherwood, 2025). Research by Thomas Kunkel and Daniel C. Funk demonstrates that professionals, particularly in highly visible fields, adopt branding principles to differentiate themselves and enhance their professional appeal (Matthews et al., 2026). This shift reflects the application of marketing logic to individual identity, where individuals develop a value proposition, target specific audiences, and communicate consistent messages about their professional identity (Balaji et al., 2025). This process transforms identity into a strategic construct designed to maximize recognition, credibility, and opportunity (Miller & McGuigan, 2026).

Personal branding also serves as a mechanism for aligning self-concept with social expectations. Individuals

must balance their authentic sense of self with the expectations of professional communities, employers, and audiences (Trach & Sedliar, 2026). This alignment requires individuals to carefully select which aspects of themselves to emphasize and which to minimize (Petersson McIntyre, 2026). Through this selective presentation, individuals construct an identity that is both personally meaningful and socially acceptable (Pasquinelli et al., 2026). This highlights the relational nature of personal branding, where identity is co-constructed through interactions between the individual and their audience (Gárgoles & Hiljding, 2026). Personal branding is therefore not solely an individual process but also a social negotiation (Lascity, 2026).

The role of narrative is central to this process of identity construction. Personal branding involves the creation of a coherent narrative that connects past experiences, present competencies, and future aspirations (Devi & Singh, 2026). This narrative provides continuity and meaning, allowing individuals to present themselves as purposeful and intentional actors. Narrative construction enables individuals to frame their experiences in ways that enhance their professional identity and communicate their value (Bredikhina et al., 2026). Through storytelling, individuals transform fragmented experiences into a unified professional identity that others can understand and recognize (Sorour & Hammad, 2026).

Authenticity plays a critical role in the effectiveness of personal branding. Audiences are more likely to trust and engage with individuals whose personal brand appears genuine and consistent (Repollet & Landa, 2026). Authenticity creates credibility, which is essential for building long-term professional relationships. However, authenticity itself is not a fixed or objective quality but a socially constructed perception (Thoyib & Sofyan, 2026). Individuals must strategically communicate authenticity through consistent behavior, transparent communication, and alignment between their values and actions (Wengel & Ma, 2026). This demonstrates that authenticity is not simply an inherent trait but also a performative aspect of personal branding (Garland, 2026).

Individuals must navigate tensions between authenticity and strategic self-presentation (Murgia & Rio Carral, 2026). Personal branding often involves presenting an idealized version of the self that highlights strengths while minimizing weaknesses (Yagüe-Perales et al., 2026). This selective presentation can create tension between the authentic self and the strategic self. Individuals must carefully manage this tension to maintain both credibility and professional appeal. This balancing act reflects the complexity of personal branding as both an expressive and strategic process (Hwang & Han, 2026).

Research on freelance professionals highlights how individuals actively construct their identity through discourse, narrative, and symbolic representation. Studies by (Perry-Hazan & Sapir, 2026) demonstrate that professionals construct their identity by framing themselves as competent, independent, and adaptable actors (Pasquinelli et al., 2026).

This identity construction allows them to navigate uncertain and competitive professional environments. Personal branding therefore functions as a psychological and social resource that enables individuals to establish legitimacy and professional authority (Gárgoles & Hiljding, 2026).

Personal branding also contributes to self-efficacy and professional confidence. By constructing a clear and coherent identity, individuals develop a stronger sense of professional direction and purpose (Kalizta et al., 2026). This clarity enhances their ability to communicate their strengths and pursue career opportunities (Lascity, 2026). Personal branding therefore supports both external recognition and internal psychological empowerment. Individuals who actively engage in personal branding are more likely to perceive themselves as capable and competent professionals (Devi & Singh, 2026).

Personal branding reflects broader cultural shifts toward individualization and self-management. Contemporary professional environments increasingly emphasize individual responsibility for career success (Bredikhina et al., 2026). Individuals are expected to actively manage their skills, reputation, and professional identity (Li & Wu, 2026). Personal branding becomes a key mechanism through which individuals fulfill these expectations. It allows individuals to demonstrate initiative, competence, and adaptability in dynamic professional environments (Sorour & Hammad, 2026).

The process of personal branding also involves continuous monitoring and adjustment. Individuals must evaluate how their identity is perceived and make adjustments to maintain relevance and alignment with their goals (Thoyib & Sofyan, 2026). This ongoing process reflects the dynamic nature of identity construction. Personal branding is not a one-time activity but a continuous process of self-representation and identity negotiation. Individuals must remain responsive to changes in professional environments, technological platforms, and audience expectations (Wengel & Ma, 2026).

Digital Platforms as Spaces for Personal Brand Construction

Digital platforms have fundamentally transformed the way individuals construct, communicate, and manage their personal brands (Murgia & Rio Carral, 2026). Unlike traditional offline environments, digital platforms provide continuous and accessible spaces where individuals can present themselves to diverse audiences across geographical and institutional boundaries (Yagüe-Perales et al., 2026). These platforms enable individuals to actively curate their identity by selecting specific information, images, achievements, and narratives that reflect their desired professional persona (Hwang & Han, 2026). Through profiles, posts, and interactions, individuals create structured representations of themselves that function as digital extensions of their professional identity (Perry-Hazan & Sapir, 2026). This process reflects a shift in identity construction, where digital visibility becomes an essential

component of professional existence (Graham & Carlon, 2026).

Digital platforms also provide individuals with unprecedented control over how their identity is presented and perceived (Meenakshy, 2026). Individuals can carefully select profile pictures, biographies, credentials, and content that align with their personal and professional goals. This level of control allows individuals to construct a deliberate and strategic identity rather than relying solely on institutional recognition or face-to-face interactions (Steriopoulos et al., 2026). As a result, identity becomes a curated digital artifact that can be continuously refined and optimized (Irshad, 2026). This curation process allows individuals to emphasize their strengths, expertise, and achievements while presenting a coherent and consistent professional image (Kouzoukas, 2026).

Visual representation plays a particularly important role in digital personal branding. Profile photos, visual aesthetics, and symbolic elements contribute significantly to how individuals are perceived by their audience (E Silva & Leandro, 2026). Research by Zavertiaeva et al. (2026) demonstrates that facial cues, visual professionalism, and profile presentation significantly influence perceived credibility and follower growth (Huda et al., 2016). Visual elements serve as powerful identity signals that communicate competence, professionalism, and trustworthiness. These visual cues often form the first impression that audiences develop, making visual presentation a critical component of digital identity construction (Tabei & Zarean, 2021).

In addition to visual representation, textual communication also plays a crucial role in shaping personal brands. Profile descriptions, posts, and professional summaries allow individuals to articulate their expertise, values, and career trajectory (Martín Martín et al., 2022). Through carefully constructed narratives, individuals communicate their professional identity and position themselves within specific professional communities (Azizi Bondarabady, 2022). These narratives help audiences understand who the individual is, what they represent, and what value they offer. Digital platforms therefore function as narrative spaces where identity is constructed through ongoing storytelling and communication (Malik, 2022).

Digital platforms also enable individuals to engage in impression management, a process through which individuals strategically influence how others perceive them (Hassan & Ara, 2022). Impression management involves selecting and presenting information that aligns with desired identity goals. Individuals may share professional achievements, insights, and experiences that reinforce their credibility and competence (Timol, 2023). This selective presentation allows individuals to construct a professional identity that aligns with audience expectations and professional norms (Mahamid, 2023). Impression management becomes particularly important in digital environments where audiences often rely solely on mediated

representations to form judgments (Al Sultan & Al-Thahab, 2023).

Entrepreneurs, freelancers, and job seekers particularly benefit from digital platforms as tools for personal brand construction (Moise & Anton, 2025). These individuals often rely on digital visibility to access opportunities, build networks, and establish professional legitimacy. Research by Alves and Strehlau (2025) shows that entrepreneurs frequently present themselves as extensions of their business identity, demonstrating the integration of personal and organizational branding (Wang, 2025). In such contexts, the individual becomes inseparable from the brand they represent. Their personal identity functions as a signal of credibility, expertise, and leadership (Gherasim, 2025).

Digital platforms also facilitate identity signaling, where individuals communicate specific attributes to influence audience perception. These signals may include educational background, professional affiliations, achievements, and endorsements (Ristianti et al., 2025). Such signals help audiences assess competence and credibility, particularly in environments where direct interaction is limited (Rahman et al., 2025). Identity signaling allows individuals to establish legitimacy and authority within their professional domain (Pandey, 2025). This process highlights the symbolic nature of digital identity, where meaning is communicated through carefully selected representations (Sadrul Huda & Shupti, 2025).

Another important feature of digital platforms is their ability to expand professional visibility. Digital platforms allow individuals to reach audiences beyond their immediate physical and organizational environment (Ouyang et al., 2025). This expanded visibility increases opportunities for recognition, collaboration, and career advancement (Chen & Ahlstrom, 2025). Individuals who effectively manage their digital presence are more likely to be discovered by employers, collaborators, and professional networks. Visibility therefore becomes a valuable form of professional capital that enhances career opportunities (Sawyer et al., 2025).

Digital platforms also create interactive environments where identity is co-constructed through social interaction (Gonzales & Short, 2025). Likes, comments, shares, and endorsements function as forms of social validation that reinforce or reshape personal brands. Audience feedback plays a significant role in influencing how individuals present themselves (Wilke et al., 2025). Individuals may adjust their identity presentation based on audience engagement and response. This interactive process demonstrates that personal branding is not solely an individual activity but also a relational and social process (Griffiths, 2025).

Digital platforms enable continuous identity negotiation. Individuals can update their profiles, share new achievements, and refine their identity as their career progresses (Triviño et al., 2025). This flexibility allows individuals to maintain relevance and adapt to changing professional environments. Personal branding becomes an ongoing process rather than a static representation

(Marques-Martins & Sixto García, 2025). Individuals continuously reinterpret and reconstruct their identity in response to new experiences and opportunities (Ayele et al., 2025).

Digital platforms also blur the boundaries between personal and professional identity. Individuals often present aspects of their personality, values, and lifestyle alongside their professional achievements (Ashraf et al., 2025). This integration creates a more holistic representation of identity that reflects both professional competence and personal authenticity (Suhud et al., 2025). Audiences increasingly expect professionals to demonstrate not only expertise but also personality and relatability. This trend reflects the humanization of professional identity in digital environments (Matthews et al., 2026).

The algorithmic structure of digital platforms also influences personal brand construction (Miller & McGuigan, 2026). Platform algorithms determine which content is visible and how widely it is distributed. Individuals must therefore strategically create content that aligns with platform dynamics to maintain visibility (Trach & Sedliar, 2026). This introduces a strategic dimension to personal branding, where individuals must consider both audience expectations and platform mechanisms. Identity construction becomes influenced not only by individual intention but also by technological infrastructure (Petersson McIntyre, 2026).

Digital platforms also facilitate network building, which plays a crucial role in personal brand development. Professional networks provide access to information, opportunities, and social support. Individuals who actively engage with their networks enhance their visibility and credibility (Pasquinelli et al., 2026). Network interactions reinforce personal identity by associating individuals with specific communities and professional domains. This demonstrates that identity is constructed not only through self-presentation but also through social association (Gárgoles & Hiljding, 2026).

Digital platforms enable individuals to construct identity across multiple contexts simultaneously. Individuals may present different aspects of their identity depending on the platform and audience (Lascity, 2026). This multi-contextual identity construction reflects the complexity of digital self-representation. Individuals must balance consistency with adaptability across different digital environments (Lascity, 2026).

Digital platforms also contribute to the democratization of personal branding. Individuals no longer need institutional authority or traditional media access to build professional visibility (Devi & Singh, 2026). Anyone with access to digital platforms can construct and communicate their identity (Bredikhina et al., 2026). This creates new opportunities for individuals to establish professional recognition independently. Digital platforms empower individuals to take control of their professional narrative and visibility (Sorour & Hammad, 2026).

Personal Branding as a Strategic Tool for Career Development and Professional Advancement

Personal branding has emerged as a critical strategic mechanism for career development and professional advancement in contemporary professional environments (Repollet & Landa, 2026). As labor markets become increasingly competitive, individuals must differentiate themselves not only through formal qualifications but also through how they communicate their identity, expertise, and value to others (Thoyib & Sofyan, 2026). Personal branding enables individuals to construct a recognizable and distinctive professional identity that enhances their attractiveness to employers, collaborators, and professional networks (Wengel & Ma, 2026). This strategic positioning allows individuals to present themselves as unique and valuable contributors, thereby increasing their chances of accessing career opportunities. In this context, personal branding functions as a proactive career management strategy rather than a passive outcome of professional experience (Garland, 2026).

One of the key functions of personal branding is its ability to enhance employability. Employability is no longer determined solely by technical competence but also by an individual's ability to communicate their skills and professional identity effectively (Murgia & Rio Carral, 2026). Personal branding enables individuals to articulate their competencies, achievements, and professional goals in ways that are meaningful and compelling to potential employers (Yagüe-Perales et al., 2026). By presenting a clear and coherent professional identity, individuals make it easier for employers to recognize their value and potential contribution (Hwang & Han, 2026). This clarity reduces uncertainty and enhances employer confidence in hiring decisions, thereby increasing employability (Perry-Hazan & Sapir, 2026).

Personal branding also plays a crucial role in helping individuals differentiate themselves in saturated labor markets (Graham & Carlon, 2026). Many professionals possess similar educational backgrounds and technical skills, making differentiation increasingly difficult (Steriopoulos et al., 2026). Personal branding allows individuals to emphasize their unique experiences, perspectives, and strengths. This differentiation creates a competitive advantage by making individuals more memorable and recognizable (Irshad, 2026). In highly competitive industries, being distinguishable can significantly influence hiring decisions, career advancement, and professional recognition. Personal branding therefore serves as a mechanism for establishing uniqueness in environments characterized by professional homogeneity (Kouzoukas, 2026).

Personal branding supports career readiness by encouraging individuals to develop self-awareness and professional clarity. The process of constructing a personal brand requires individuals to reflect on their strengths, values, and career aspirations (Zavertiaeva et al., 2026). This reflective process enhances individuals' understanding of their professional identity and direction. Greater self-

awareness enables individuals to make more informed career decisions and pursue opportunities that align with their goals. Personal branding therefore contributes not only to external visibility but also to internal career clarity and strategic direction (E Silva & Leandro, 2026).

Personal branding also enables individuals to communicate their professional value proposition effectively (Solomon, 2015). A value proposition refers to the unique combination of skills, experiences, and attributes that an individual offers. Research by (Mandler, 2016) emphasizes that branding principles traditionally applied to organizations can also be applied to individuals. Just as organizations develop brand identities to communicate their value, individuals can construct personal brands to communicate their professional strengths. This strategic communication enhances professional visibility and allows individuals to position themselves effectively within their professional field (Moise & Anton, 2025).

Professional visibility is an essential component of career advancement. Individuals who are more visible are more likely to be recognized for opportunities such as promotions, collaborations, and leadership roles (Alves & Strehlau, 2025). Personal branding enhances visibility by creating a consistent and recognizable professional identity. This visibility increases the likelihood that individuals will be considered for opportunities that align with their expertise (Wang, 2025). In many cases, career advancement is influenced not only by competence but also by recognition. Personal branding ensures that competence is visible and acknowledged (Ristianti et al., 2025).

Personal branding also facilitates access to professional networks, which are critical for career development (Rahman et al., 2025). Professional networks provide access to information, mentorship, collaboration, and career opportunities (Pandey, 2025). Individuals with strong personal brands are more likely to attract professional connections and build meaningful relationships (Sadrul Huda & Shupti, 2025). These relationships enhance career mobility and provide access to opportunities that may not be publicly advertised. Personal branding therefore contributes to the development of social capital, which is an essential resource for career advancement (Ouyang et al., 2025).

In addition, personal branding strengthens professional credibility. Credibility refers to the perception that an individual is competent, trustworthy, and reliable (Chen & Ahlstrom, 2025). A well-developed personal brand communicates professionalism, expertise, and consistency. This enhances trust among employers, colleagues, and professional networks (Sawy et al., 2025). Credibility is particularly important in environments where individuals must establish authority and influence (Gonzales & Short, 2025). Personal branding helps individuals establish and maintain professional credibility over time (Wilke et al., 2025).

Personal branding also contributes to career agency, which refers to an individual's ability to actively influence their career trajectory (Griffiths, 2025). Rather than passively relying on organizational structures, individuals can use

personal branding to create their own opportunities. This may include attracting clients, securing collaborations, or gaining professional recognition (Triviño et al., 2025). Career agency empowers individuals to take control of their professional development and navigate complex career environments more effectively (Marques-Martins & Sixto García, 2025). Personal branding therefore supports proactive career management (Ayele et al., 2025).

Personal branding enhances self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to achieve professional goals (Ashraf et al., 2025). The process of constructing and communicating a personal brand reinforces individuals' awareness of their strengths and accomplishments (Sherwood, 2025). This awareness increases confidence and motivation. Individuals who perceive themselves as competent and capable are more likely to pursue challenging opportunities and achieve career success. Personal branding therefore has both psychological and professional benefits (Matthews et al., 2026).

Personal branding also facilitates career mobility by enabling individuals to transition between roles, industries, and professional contexts (Miller & McGuigan, 2026). A strong personal brand provides continuity and coherence across different career stages (Trach & Sedliar, 2026). This continuity allows individuals to maintain professional recognition even as they change roles or organizations. Personal branding therefore enhances adaptability and flexibility in dynamic labor markets (Petersson McIntyre, 2026).

In entrepreneurial contexts, personal branding is particularly important because the individual often represents the business itself. Entrepreneurs rely on their personal identity to establish trust and credibility with clients, investors, and stakeholders (Pasquinelli et al., 2026). Their personal brand becomes a signal of quality, reliability, and expertise. This demonstrates that personal branding can directly influence business success as well as individual career outcomes (Gárgoles & Hiljding, 2026).

Personal branding also enhances leadership development. Leaders are often evaluated based on their ability to communicate vision, competence, and credibility (Lascity, 2026). A strong personal brand reinforces leadership identity and enhances influence. Individuals with well-developed personal brands are more likely to be perceived as leaders and role models within their professional communities (Devi & Singh, 2026). Personal branding therefore contributes to leadership emergence and development (Bredikhina et al., 2026).

Personal branding reflects broader changes in the nature of careers. Traditional career paths were often linear and organization-centered (Sorour & Hammad, 2026). However, contemporary careers are increasingly flexible, dynamic, and individual-driven (Repollet & Landa, 2026). Individuals must actively manage their professional identity and career trajectory. Personal branding provides a framework for navigating these complex career environments. It allows individuals to maintain coherence

and direction despite changing roles and contexts (Thoyib & Sofyan, 2026).

Personal Branding as a Social and Cultural Process

Personal branding should be understood not merely as an individual strategy but as a social and cultural process embedded within broader societal structures, institutional expectations, and technological environments (Wengel & Ma, 2026). Individuals do not construct their personal brands in isolation; rather, they do so within systems of meaning shaped by cultural norms, professional standards, and social expectations (Garland, 2026). These systems influence how professionalism, competence, authenticity, and success are defined and recognized. As a result, personal branding reflects both individual agency and social constraint (Murgia & Rio Carral, 2026). Individuals actively construct their identity, but they do so using culturally available symbols, narratives, and frameworks that determine what kinds of identities are valued and legitimate (Yagüe-Perales et al., 2026).

Cultural norms play a fundamental role in shaping personal branding practices. Every professional environment contains implicit expectations about how individuals should present themselves, communicate their expertise, and demonstrate credibility (Hwang & Han, 2026). These expectations influence the language, appearance, and behaviors individuals adopt in constructing their personal brands (Perry-Hazan & Sapir, 2026). For example, professionalism may be associated with competence, confidence, and consistency, while authenticity may be associated with transparency and relatability (Graham & Carlon, 2026). Individuals must align their self-presentation with these cultural expectations to gain social acceptance and professional recognition. This demonstrates that personal branding is not purely self-defined but socially negotiated (Meenakshy, 2026).

Personal branding is also shaped by professional communities and institutional environments. Organizations, industries, and professional networks establish norms that influence how individuals present themselves (Steriopoulos et al., 2026). These norms define what constitutes credibility, expertise, and authority within specific professional contexts (Irshad, 2026). Individuals who align their personal brand with these norms are more likely to be accepted and recognized as legitimate members of their professional community (Kealy-Morris, 2026). Conversely, individuals whose self-presentation deviates from professional expectations may face challenges in gaining recognition and trust. This highlights the importance of social conformity in personal brand construction (Kouzoukas, 2026).

Social interaction plays a critical role in reinforcing and validating personal brands. Personal branding is not complete until it is recognized and accepted by others (Zavertiaeva et al., 2026). Audiences, colleagues, and professional networks interpret and evaluate individuals' self-presentation. Their responses influence how personal brands are perceived and whether they are considered

credible or authentic (E Silva & Leandro, 2026). This process demonstrates that identity is co-constructed through interaction rather than solely created by the individual. Personal branding therefore functions as a relational process shaped by ongoing social feedback (Alves & Strehlau, 2025).

Research on freelance professionals highlights how social and economic conditions influence personal brand construction (Wang, 2025). Studies by Antonio Anton show that freelancers construct narratives that emphasize independence, competence, and resilience while simultaneously navigating uncertainty and precarity (Ristianti et al., 2025). These narratives allow freelancers to position themselves as capable and reliable professionals despite unstable working conditions (Rahman et al., 2025). Personal branding becomes a strategy for managing insecurity and establishing professional legitimacy in uncertain labor markets. This illustrates how personal branding reflects broader economic realities rather than purely individual choices (Pandey, 2025).

Gender norms also influence personal branding practices. Cultural expectations regarding gender shape how individuals present themselves and how their personal brands are interpreted (Sadrul Huda & Shupti, 2025). Certain traits, behaviors, and communication styles may be perceived differently depending on gender. This creates additional challenges and constraints for individuals as they construct their professional identity (Ouyang et al., 2025). Personal branding therefore reflects broader social structures, including gender hierarchies and inequalities. Individuals must navigate these structures as they construct their professional identity (Chen & Ahlstrom, 2025).

Digital culture further shapes personal branding by emphasizing visibility, engagement, and performance. Digital platforms encourage individuals to continuously present themselves, share updates, and maintain audience engagement (Sawy et al., 2025). This creates a culture of constant self-presentation in which individuals must remain visible to remain relevant. Visibility becomes a key indicator of professional success and influence (Gonzales & Short, 2025). Individuals who maintain strong digital visibility are more likely to access opportunities and recognition. This demonstrates how technological environments influence identity construction (Wilke et al., 2025).

Audience expectations also play a significant role in shaping personal brands. Individuals must consider how their audience perceives and evaluates their identity. Audience feedback, engagement, and recognition influence how individuals present themselves (Griffiths, 2025). Individuals may adjust their communication style, content, and identity presentation to align with audience preferences (Triviño et al., 2025). This demonstrates that personal branding is shaped not only by individual intention but also by audience interpretation and response (Marques-Martins & Sixto García, 2025).

Personal branding is also influenced by platform structures and technological systems. Digital platforms use algorithms that determine visibility, reach, and engagement

(Ayele et al., 2025). These algorithms influence which identities are seen and recognized. Individuals must therefore adapt their personal branding strategies to align with platform dynamics (Ashraf et al., 2025). This introduces a technological dimension to identity construction, where platform systems shape how identity is presented and perceived. Personal branding becomes partially shaped by technological infrastructure (Suhud et al., 2025).

Personal branding also reflects broader cultural values associated with individualism and self-expression. Contemporary societies increasingly emphasize individuality, uniqueness, and personal achievement. Individuals are encouraged to distinguish themselves and demonstrate their value (Matthews et al., 2026). Personal branding reflects these cultural values by encouraging individuals to construct and communicate a distinctive identity. This reflects a shift from collective identity toward individualized identity construction (Miller & McGuigan, 2026).

The rise of entrepreneurial culture has further reinforced the importance of personal branding. Individuals are increasingly expected to think and act like entrepreneurs, even within traditional employment contexts (Permatasari et al., 2024). Research by Miller and McGuigan (2026) highlights how branding principles have expanded beyond organizations to individuals. Individuals must actively promote themselves, communicate their value, and manage their professional identity (Trach & Sedliar, 2026). This reflects the integration of entrepreneurial logic into individual identity construction (Petersson McIntyre, 2026).

Personal branding also involves emotional and psychological labor. Individuals must continuously manage how they present themselves and how they are perceived (Pasquinelli et al., 2026). This requires ongoing effort, self-monitoring, and emotional regulation. Individuals must maintain consistency, confidence, and professionalism even in challenging situations (Gárgoles & Hiljding, 2026). This emotional labor highlights the effort involved in maintaining a personal brand. Personal branding is therefore not only a strategic activity but also an emotional and psychological process (Lascity, 2026).

Personal branding reflects broader neoliberal cultural trends that emphasize individual responsibility and self-management (Devi & Singh, 2026). Individuals are increasingly expected to manage their own career development, professional identity, and success (Bredikhina et al., 2026). Institutional support structures have become less stable, placing greater responsibility on individuals (Sorour & Hammad, 2026). Personal branding becomes a mechanism through which individuals manage this responsibility. It allows individuals to demonstrate competence, initiative, and adaptability (Repollet & Landa, 2026).

This process also reflects the commodification of identity, where personal attributes become economic resources (Thoyib & Sofyan, 2026). Individuals' skills, personality, and identity become forms of capital that influence career opportunities and professional success

(Wengel & Ma, 2026). Personal branding allows individuals to transform their identity into a valuable professional asset.

This demonstrates how identity becomes integrated into economic systems (Garland, 2026).

Table 4. Research gap

Research gap	Existing findings	Future research direction
Limited longitudinal evidence on the evolution of personal branding as a social identity process	Most studies examine personal branding using cross-sectional designs, focusing on how individuals present themselves at a single point in time without examining how personal branding evolves across career stages or changing social contexts	Conduct longitudinal and narrative-based studies to examine how personal branding develops, stabilizes, or transforms over time in response to career transitions, technological change, and shifting social expectations (Anton, 2019)
Underrepresentation of non-Western and collectivistic cultural contexts in personal branding research	Existing research predominantly focuses on Western individualistic societies, emphasizing autonomy, self-promotion, and entrepreneurial identity, while overlooking collectivistic values such as community, relational identity, and cultural norms	Expand cross-cultural comparative studies, particularly in Asian, African, and Global South contexts, to understand how cultural values influence personal branding practices and meanings (Khamis et al., 2017)
Limited examination of structural and platform-related influences on personal branding construction	Most studies emphasize individual agency, authenticity, and self-presentation strategies, but insufficiently address how platform algorithms, digital infrastructures, and economic precarity shape personal branding opportunities and constraints	Develop socio-technical and critical digital media frameworks that integrate individual, structural, and technological factors, including platform governance, algorithmic visibility, and digital labor conditions (Duffy & Pooley, 2017)
Lack of integration between identity theory and political economy perspectives in personal branding research	Existing literature often examines personal branding from psychological or communication perspectives, focusing on self-presentation and identity construction, while neglecting broader economic and neoliberal dynamics	Integrate interdisciplinary approaches combining identity theory, cultural studies, and political economy to examine personal branding as both a form of self-representation and a mechanism of self-commodification (Hearn, 2008)

CONCLUSION

personal branding is a multidimensional process involving psychological identity construction, symbolic communication, and social interaction within digital environments, where authenticity, visibility, and consistency of self-representation play a crucial role in establishing credibility and professional legitimacy. The findings emphasize that personal branding functions not only as a communication strategy but also as a mechanism for professional identity formation, influencing career opportunities and social recognition. The implication of this study highlights the importance of integrating identity psychology and digital communication perspectives to better understand contemporary self-representation, while also providing a conceptual foundation for individuals and institutions to develop authentic and sustainable professional identities.

This study has several limitations, including the reliance on a single database (Scopus), which may limit the comprehensiveness of the literature coverage, as well as the focus on English-language publications that may exclude relevant studies from non-English contexts and reduce cultural diversity in the analysis. In addition, the use of bibliometric and secondary data restricts the ability to capture in-depth individual experiences and contextual

nuances of personal branding practices, while the conceptual diversity found in the literature indicates a fragmented field that may affect consistency in interpretation.

Future research is recommended to adopt longitudinal designs to examine how personal branding evolves over time, particularly in response to dynamic digital environments, as well as cross-cultural approaches to explore variations in identity construction across different social contexts. Furthermore, future studies should incorporate mixed-method or qualitative approaches to capture deeper psychological and experiential dimensions, and develop more integrative theoretical frameworks that bridge psychological, communication, and socio-cultural perspectives to reduce fragmentation and advance the field.

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