



Personal Branding in the Digital Era: How Individuals Build and Manage Their Personal Brand on LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok

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Abstract

The management of personal brands on social media platforms has become an increasingly relevant professional competency in the contemporary digital context. This article examines how individuals build, manage, and sustain their personal brand on LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok. The study adopts a mixed methodological approach, combining a systematic literature review with qualitative evidence obtained through semi-structured interviews. The systematic review focused on open-access articles indexed in Scopus and the Web of Science, published between 2020 and 2025, and integrated studies addressing topics such as personal branding, self-branding, human branding, engagement on digital platforms, and identity management on social media. Additionally, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals from marketing, design, financial markets, and related fields, following a common interview guide covering professional identity, platform-specific strategy, management tools, evaluation metrics, perceived risks, and practical recommendations. The findings show that an effective personal brand rests on the alignment between a stable core identity and forms of expression adapted to the specificities of each platform. LinkedIn is used primarily to signal authority, competency, and employability; Instagram supports visual credibility, lifestyle expression, and the humanization of the professional profile; and TikTok offers organic reach and spontaneity, though it raises credibility and reputational risk concerns in certain professional contexts. Participants valued tangible outcomes such as job opportunities, partnerships, and qualified interactions over so-called vanity metrics, although follower growth remains relevant for profiles oriented towards public visibility. The article concludes that the digital personal brand should be understood as a strategic, continuous, and ethically responsible process that requires consistency, self-knowledge, adaptive communication, and thoughtful management of exposure across different platforms.

Keywords: personal brand, social media, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, digital identity, self-branding, personal brand equity, semi-structured interviews

Introduction

Social media has made personal branding a routine part of professional life. A headline on LinkedIn, a visual style on Instagram, and a video on TikTok may seem informal or spontaneous, but each one contributes to how an individual is recognized, evaluated, and remembered by their audience. The central question is no longer whether professionals have a personal brand, but rather with what awareness and consistency they manage it across the different platforms, each with its own cultures, audiences, and algorithms.

Recent research shows that personal branding remains a fragmented field, with terminology, methods, and contexts that vary significantly across studies (Scheidt et al., 2020). At the same time, the practical relevance of the topic has grown, as individuals increasingly rely on online visibility to support employability, networking, skills recognition, sales opportunities, and creative positioning. This creates the need for studies that combine up-to-date academic literature with empirical perspectives on how people effectively manage their digital identities.

This article improves upon the previous version of the study in two respects. First, it removes theoretical and bibliographic sources published before 2020 and relies exclusively on recent open-access journal articles identified through Scopus and/or the Web of Science. Second, it adds an empirical component based on ten semi-structured interviews conducted with professionals from different fields. This addition allows the literature to be compared with firsthand accounts of strategy, platform adaptation, content management, metrics, and risks.

The guiding research question is: how do individuals build, manage, and sustain their personal brand on LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok? Four sub-questions underpin it: how a consistent online personal brand manifests in practice; how platform differences shape the strategies used; how authenticity and credibility influence the process; and what professional outcomes and risks are associated with digital personal branding.

Conceptual Framework

Personal Branding and Personal Branding Equity

In recent literature, personal branding is treated as a strategic process through which individuals define, communicate, and sustain a recognizable professional identity (Riffi & Zohri, 2024). This modern approach mirrors the visionary concept of "Me Inc.," suggesting that individuals act as the CEOs of their own companies to differentiate themselves in a competitive, globalized world (Riffi & Zohri, 2024; Pham & Le, 2026). This process aligns with the "optimal distinctiveness theory," which

investigates the delicate psychological balance between the human need for social inclusion within groups and the equally compelling demand for professional distinction from them (Riffi & Zohri, 2024). Scholars highlight that personal branding research is multidisciplinary, encompassing questions of identity, visibility, reputation, career development, and stakeholder perception (Scheidt et al., 2020). It is defined as an active communication approach of one's identity to a specific target market, evaluating its impact on image and reputation to fulfill both personal and professional objectives (Riffi & Zohri, 2024). In the contemporary era of remote work and the "great resignation," personal branding has become an essential proactive behavior for knowledge workers to ensure their contributions remain visible and do not simply have to "speak for themselves" (Gorbatov et al., 2024).

The concept of Personal Brand Equity (PBE) is particularly useful for analyzing this process, representing the perceived value of a brand derived from attributes such as visibility, credibility, professional network, and reputation (Szántó et al., 2025; Pham & Le, 2026). This equity acts as a critical conversion point; research suggests that personal branding behaviors only translate into perceived employability when they are recognized and socially validated by an audience as reputational capital (Pham & Le, 2026). Indeed, PBE has been found to fully mediate the relationship between branding efforts and actual employability outcomes, meaning that signaling professional value is only effective when it creates the desired image in the minds of the target audience (Gorbatov et al., 2024; Pham & Le, 2026). Furthermore, personal branding is increasingly viewed as an integrative rather than additive strategy, where internal alignment between identity, strategy, and execution is more consequential for building equity than isolated acts of self-promotion (Pham & Le, 2026).

Digital environments transform professional identity into a visible and measurable set of signals, where every post or comment becomes a cue for audiences to infer expertise or credibility (Szántó et al., 2025). Across different digital platforms, these strategies take unique forms.

On Instagram, building a brand relies heavily on visual engagement and the "simplicity of sharing," where photos create immediate sensations (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021). Success is driven by consistency, authenticity, and genuineness (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021). Professional content creators often pursue "instagrammability," tailoring content to suit platform-specific algorithms and audience preferences through a four-stage process: Content Planning, Media Gathering, Editing, and Publishing (Miguel et al., 2024).

TikTok is regularly described as a "virtual playground." It allows students and professionals to pitch their strengths as a "trademark" to hiring managers through technical performance, creativity, and "mind-soothing" interaction (Khalili & Mustafa, 2023). On this platform, credibility is constructed primarily through perceived expertise, followed by reliability/honesty and physical attractiveness (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024). This credibility serves as a precursor to trust, which in

turn fosters follower loyalty and increases the effectiveness of professional recommendations (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024).

In these digital environments, signaling is moderated by a "privacy calculus," where individuals balance the desire for personalized career opportunities against concerns about information collection (Cloarec et al., 2024). Research indicates that high trust beliefs in a platform increase an individual's willingness to disclose the personal information necessary to build a strong digital brand, while high privacy concerns act as a significant impediment (Cloarec et al., 2024). Additionally, "happiness with the internet" serves as a driver for sharing, though this effect is regulated by the user's perception of risk (Cloarec et al., 2024).

Ultimately, managing a personal brand in the digital era requires a planned and purposeful approach to close the gap between desired identity and stakeholder perception (Bendisch et al., 2013, as cited in Riffi & Zohri, 2024). Personal branding has been shown to possess incremental validity in predicting employability over and above traditional human capital, making it a critical component of modern career growth and job security (Gorbatov et al., 2024).

Social Media as a Platform-Specific Branding Environment

A key finding in recent research is that social media platforms are not neutral channels. Each environment encourages different formats, rhythms, and forms of legitimacy, requiring individuals to engage in proactive professional behaviors to ensure their contributions remain visible, especially in an era of remote work where work no longer "speaks for itself" (Gorbatov et al., 2024). LinkedIn tends to reward professional relevance, expertise, and network-based credibility, functioning as an anchor where users are expected to showcase achievements and professional consistency (Riffi & Zohri, 2024; Gorbatov et al., 2024). This strategic image management is essential for modern career growth, particularly since approximately 70% of hiring managers use social media to screen candidates (Riffi & Zohri, 2024).

Furthermore, in labor markets where formal credentials may lack differentiation, a strong digital presence acts as a compensatory signaling mechanism to reduce uncertainty for recruiters (Pham & Le, 2026).

Instagram operates through visual storytelling, aesthetic consistency, and lifestyle-mediated credibility. Building a personal brand here involves what has been termed "imagification" of identity, where the ease of communicating through images attracts loyal audiences (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021). For professional content creators, success depends on "instagrammability"—tailoring content to platform algorithms and audience preferences through a rigorous four-stage process: Content Planning, Media Gathering, Editing, and Publishing (Miguel et al., 2024). While visual richness is paramount, long-term brand building on Instagram remains anchored in authenticity, consistency, and genuineness, which allow influencers to professionalize their profiles into viable "job markets" (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021). Even in audience-

focused strategies, a sense of "self-focus" often serves as the anchor point for all developed content (Miguel et al., 2024).

TikTok introduces a different logic based on a "message code" of entertainment, rapid trend cycles, and short-form video (Khalili & Mustaffa, 2023). Often described as a "virtual playground," the platform allows students and job seekers to pitch their strengths as a "trademark" to hiring managers through high levels of creativity and technical performance (Khalili & Mustaffa, 2023). On TikTok, influencer credibility is constructed primarily through perceived expertise, followed by reliability/honesty and, to a lesser extent, physical attractiveness (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024). This credibility acts as a precursor to trust, which fosters follower loyalty and strengthens the effectiveness of professional recommendations (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024). While the platform expands visibility through spontaneity, it requires careful alignment between a creator's performance and their stable self-identity (Khalili & Mustaffa, 2023).

Regardless of the platform, building a digital personal brand involves the personalization–privacy paradox (Cloarec et al., 2024). While users seek visibility to build Personal Brand Equity (PBE) (the perceived value of their brand derived from differentiation and recognition), they must also manage concerns regarding information collection (Pham & Le, 2026; Cloarec et al., 2024). An individual's willingness to disclose information and their posting frequency are influenced by their "internet happiness" and moderated by their trust beliefs in the platform (Cloarec et al., 2024). Ultimately, personal branding efforts only translate into perceived employability when they are socially validated by an audience and converted into reputational capital (Pham & Le, 2026; Gorbатов et al., 2024). Therefore, successful branding across these environments depends on maintaining a delicate balance between strategic self-disclosure and the purposeful alignment of one's identity with stakeholder perceptions (Riffi & Zohri, 2024; Cloarec et al., 2024).

Authenticity, Consistency and Digital Risk

Authenticity is one of the most repeated expectations in digital personal branding, but it should not be understood as the absence of strategy. A person with a powerful personal brand makes life decisions based on a thoughtful approach to personal growth, where the brand acts as an organic and genuine representation of their actual identity (Riffi & Zohri, 2024). This is reinforced by the fact that personal values and expressive clarity serve as the most dominant drivers of a personal brand, providing higher-quality signals to the labor market because they are difficult to fake and convey identity coherence (Pham & Le, 2026). Recent influencer and human-brand research suggests that authenticity depends on the perceived alignment between the person, the message, and the context. For Instagram influencers, authenticity and genuineness are the primary factors in building a loyal audience and a viable digital presence (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021). Similarly, creator originality on TikTok is built through maintaining self-identity while engaging in interactions based on

performance, appearance, and manners (Khalili & Mustaffa, 2023). On this platform, credibility is constructed primarily through perceived expertise, which serves as a precursor to trust and loyalty (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024).

Consistency is not merely identical repetition across platforms; instead, it refers to the maintenance of a stable core identity while adapting tone, content format, and rhythm to each specific environment.

Consistency in publications is what allows influencers to grow and transition from simple sharing to professionalizing their profiles into a "job market" (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021). Professional content creators often pursue "instagrammability," which requires tailoring content to platform-specific algorithms through a structured four-stage process: Content Planning, Media Gathering, Editing, and Publishing (Miguel et al., 2024). While a professional may use LinkedIn for analytical commentary, Instagram for visual humanization, and TikTok for accessible short-form content, the underlying values and expertise must remain recognizable. This is particularly critical because personal branding efforts only translate into perceived employability when they are socially validated as consistent reputational capital (Pham & Le, 2026). Most people do not manage their brand strategically or consistently because they are unaware they possess one, which limits their ability to build Personal Brand Equity (Riffi & Zohri, 2024). Furthermore, in the modern era of remote work, proactive professional behaviors are required because work no longer "speaks for itself"; individuals must ensure their contributions are visible to avoid professional invisibility (Gorbatov et al., 2024).

Inconsistent or exaggerated self-presentation creates significant reputational risk, especially in environments where content can be manipulated. Individuals must maintain control over their online communication strategy, as even innocuous actions can hinder job prospects, given that approximately 70% of hiring managers use social media to screen candidates (Marin & Nilă, 2021). The digital environment facilitates a "privacy calculus," where individuals must balance the desire for personalized career opportunities against the risks of data collection and information misuse (Cloarec et al., 2024).

High privacy concerns act as a significant impediment to the disclosure of information necessary for personal branding, while trust beliefs in a platform can increase participation (Cloarec et al., 2024). Professionals now pay special attention to the content they share to avoid hurting any social susceptibility, as negative impressions can have immediate impacts on both social and professional life (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021). Ultimately, successful branding depends on an integrative strategy where the internal alignment between identity, strategy, and execution is more consequential than isolated acts of self-promotion (Pham & Le, 2026).

Integrative Theoretical Frameworks and Thematic Challenges in Social Media Marketing Ethics

Social media marketing ethics often suffers from a "compartmentalization" where business profit and moral judgments are treated as separate, and sometimes conflicting, domains. According to Granstedt (2025), ethical decision-making should not be viewed as an afterthought but rather as the fundamental starting point that precedes considerations of sustainability or corporate social responsibility (CSR). This is particularly critical in the contemporary era of remote work, where professional contributions do not simply "speak for themselves," necessitating proactive and ethical signaling to maintain visibility (Gorbatov et al., 2024). To navigate this evolving landscape, a theoretical framework is needed that balances firm-internal factors such as organizational culture and internal norms with firm-external factors, including legislation like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and platform-specific algorithms (Cloarec et al., 2024). This systemic approach is essential because the fast-paced nature of social media puts unprecedented pressure on internal decision-making, requiring firms to interpret external changes correctly to adjust their internal practices.

The current body of research identifies five critical themes in social media marketing ethics: (I) advertising and customer–brand relationships; (II) the dark side of social media; (III) privacy; (IV) fake news; and (V) emerging research. In the realm of advertising, authenticity and genuineness are the primary factors for building loyal audiences, especially for influencers who must balance commercial orientation with perceived neutrality to maintain credibility (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021; Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024). The "dark side" of social media includes unintended negative consequences like psychological harm and the risk of content manipulation, which demands that content creators and firms consider the immediate impact of every digital action on their audience (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021).

Privacy is identified as the most pervasive concern, encapsulated in the "personalization–privacy paradox," where users desire customized interactions but remain guarded about their personal data (Cloarec et al., 2024). Research indicates that high trust beliefs in a platform can marginally increase a user's willingness to disclose information, while strong information collection concerns (InfCC) act as a significant impediment (Cloarec et al., 2024). This tension requires firms to move beyond mere compliance to foster genuine Personal Brand Equity, where signaled professional value is recognized and socially validated by stakeholders (Gorbatov et al., 2024; Pham & Le, 2026).

Addressing these ethical tensions also requires firms to manage external threats like fake news and disinformation, which are prevalent on platforms like TikTok and can cause substantial damage to a brand's reputation (Khalili & Mustaffa, 2023). Unlike other themes, fake news often involves customers taking an operative role in creating negative value, necessitating that firms consult "fact-checkers" and develop internal

norm systems to proactively defend their brand (Khalili & Mustaffa, 2023). Ultimately, achieving an ethically sustainable approach requires firms to develop internal competencies and platform-specific "soft skills" to balance marketing performance with long-term trust. This involves ensuring a harmony between the individual's identity, the public's perception, and an intentional effort to maintain ethical standards (Riffi & Zohri, 2024).

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitatively dominant mixed research design, structured around two complementary components. The first consisted of a systematic literature review, aimed at identifying and synthesizing recent academic knowledge on personal branding and social media. The second was based on ten semi-structured interviews with professionals from different fields, with the goal of collecting primary data on concrete personal brand management practices in the digital context. The articulation between both components strengthens the study by integrating recent, peer-reviewed academic evidence with empirical perspectives from active users of the platforms analyzed.

Literature Search and Selection

The bibliographic component followed a systematic search and selection logic, aimed at identifying and synthesizing recent academic knowledge on personal branding and social media. Searches were conducted in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, focusing exclusively on scientific journal articles published from 2020 onwards and available in open access. Search terms were constructed to cover the main designations associated with the phenomenon under study, combining expressions related to personal branding and social media, namely: "personal brand*", "self-branding", "human brand*", "personal brand equity", "social media", "LinkedIn", "Instagram" and "TikTok".

Inclusion criteria were: publication from 2020 onwards; open-access availability; journal article format; relevance to personal branding, self-branding, human branding, professional identity, or platform-based branding; and connection to LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, or social media strategy. Exclusion criteria were: publications prior to 2020; documents not available in open access; conference papers, book chapters, and editorials; studies focused exclusively on corporate brands without an individual or human brand dimension; and articles without a clear empirical or review methodology.

Empirical Component: Ten Semi-Structured Interviews

The empirical component was based on ten semi-structured interviews conducted with professionals from different sectors, including marketing, design, and financial markets. The use of a semi-structured format allowed the research team to compare

responses across participants while maintaining space for interviewees to explain their personal experiences, priorities, and concerns. The interview guide was organized into three main blocks: personal brand identity and objectives; platform-specific strategies on LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok; and tools, metrics, challenges, and recommendations.

The questions explored how participants define their personal brand, what objectives they pursue online, how they adapt their communication per platform, how they maintain consistency, what tools they use to manage content, how they evaluate success, and what risks they associate with digital exposure. This structure allowed the research to connect platform strategy, authenticity, metrics, and risk management within a single empirical framework.

Data Analysis

The literature was analyzed through thematic synthesis, identifying recurrent findings on platform logic, authenticity, professional outcomes, and digital risk. The interviews were analyzed through thematic coding. The main categories were defined from the research questions and refined through repeated readings of the interview interpretation document. The analysis focused on cross-participant patterns, preserving confidentiality and prioritizing the interpretation of shared trends.

Table 1. Recent open-access literature used in the revised article

Source	Focus	Method	Contribution to this article
Scheidt et al. (2020)	Personal branding as a research field	Systematic bibliographic review	Personal branding is multidisciplinary, fragmented, and linked to identity, reputation, career, and stakeholder perception.
Alcántara-Pilar et al. (2024)	Determinants of influencer credibility on TikTok	SOR; Commitment-Trust Theory and SEM	Influencer expertise is the primary driver of credibility, which functions as an essential precursor to trust, follower loyalty, and purchase intentions.
Pham & Le (2026)	Personal branding determinants and perceived employability	Quantitative survey; PLS-SEM	Personal branding is shown to enhance perceived employability primarily through the mediating role of personal brand equity, acting as a critical signaling mechanism in digital labor markets.
Marin & Nilă (2021)	LinkedIn in personal brand communication	Quantitative surveys	LinkedIn functions as a space of professional credibility where coherent profiles and relevant activity influence perception.

Rejeb et al. (2022)	Instagram as a research field	Bibliometric analysis	Instagram has become an important research object in social media, marketing, and communication studies.
Cortez et al. (2023)	Content and engagement on LinkedIn	Longitudinal VARX model	Different types of posts generate different forms of engagement, supporting the idea that content strategy per platform is relevant.
Sheak & Abdulrazak (2023)	TikTok and brand awareness	Survey and regression analysis	TikTok can support brand awareness, namely through entertainment, interaction, trends, and eWOM.
Miguel et al. (2024)	Self-branding on Instagram	Interviews and observation	Micro-influencers manage content through planning, production, editing, publishing, and audience engagement.
Lou & Zhou (2024)	Influencers as human brands	In-depth interviews	Human branding depends on authenticity, thematic sensitivity, fact-checking, and strategic privacy.
Szántó et al. (2025)	Personal Brand Equity	Mixed methods	Personal brand equity includes appeal, differentiation, and recognition, supported by visibility, credibility, reputation, and networks.
Riffi & Zohri (2024)	Chronological evolution of personal branding	Systematic historical review	A comprehensive historical timeline of the field and a synthesized framework linking identity, reputation, and professional success.
Khalili & Mustafa (2023)	TikTok features for students to develop professional originality	Qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews and thematic analysis	Key platform features, such as accessibility and interaction, as tools that transform professional identity into a visible “trademark” for employers.
Vasconcelos & Rua (2021)	Instagram strategies by influencers	Qualitative exploratory methodology based on semi-structured interviews	Consistency, authenticity, and audience engagement are key factors for enhancing profiles in social media as viable job markets.

Cloarec et al. (2024)	Personalization-privacy paradox	Quantitative experimental design	User happiness and trust beliefs significantly increase the willingness to disclose personal information, while privacy concerns act as a strong deterrent.
Gorbatov et al. (2024)	Personal branding's incremental validity for employability	Policy-capturing experiment; two-wave survey; time-lagged study	Personal branding predicts employability over and above human capital and intrapreneurship, with personal brand equity acting as a full mediator in this relationship.

Results and Discussion

Personal Brand Identity: Competence Mediated by Human Values

The interviews show that participants do not define their personal brand solely through performance or technical competence. Their responses combine professional capability with human attributes. The descriptors identified in the empirical material can be organized into three groups: rigor and strategy; humanization and integrity; and impact and attitude. Terms such as strategic, pedagogical, excellence, quality, and professional indicate the importance of competence. Terms such as authentic, genuine, reassuring, integrity, and trustworthy show that credibility also depends on perceived character. Terms such as creative, inspiring, ambitious, leadership, and impact reveal the importance of differentiation and aspiration. These findings align with the PBE framework proposed by Szántó et al. (2025), namely the interaction between credibility, visibility, differentiation, and reputation. However, the interviews add nuance: participants do not want to be perceived solely as technically competent, but as competent and approachable. In this sense, a strong personal brand is not built by choosing between competence and humanity; it depends on the ability to combine both in a coherent narrative.

Strategic Objectives: Authority, Networking, Sales, and Value Creation

Interview results indicate that personal branding serves different purposes depending on the professional context and career stage. Some participants use their digital presence to reinforce professional authority and expand academic, institutional, or sector-based collaboration. Others focus on networking and job opportunities, especially when they are still consolidating their career trajectory. A third group links personal branding to commercial outcomes, using visibility to support sales and trust. A fourth group emphasizes sharing value, knowledge, and useful content as the foundation of long-term credibility. This diversity of objectives matters because it prevents a single, universal approach. A job-seeking student, a creative professional seeking recognition, and a financial sector professional

managing their reputation do not face the same incentives or risks. Personal branding strategies should therefore begin with a clear definition of the audience, purpose, and desired outcome, not just with platform tactics.

LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok: Three Distinct Platform Logics

LinkedIn emerged in the interviews as the primary platform for professional authority. Participants associated it with formal, technical, and analytical communication. They use it to demonstrate competence, share market trends, explain professional experiences, and build networks. This finding supports the literature that treats LinkedIn as a space where content, engagement, and professional credibility are closely linked (Cortez et al., 2023; Marin & Nilă, 2021). In practice, LinkedIn is the platform where inconsistencies in career history, competency claims, or tone are most likely to damage credibility.

Instagram was described as a platform for humanization, visual credibility, and lifestyle. Participants use visual content, reels, and behind-the-scenes elements to create closeness without necessarily abandoning professional positioning. The empirical findings align with Miguel et al.'s (2024) analysis of self-branding on Instagram, which shows that content creation involves planning and aesthetic work. For personal brands, Instagram allows the person behind the competence to become visible, which can increase trust when the presentation remains aligned with the core professional identity.

TikTok was the most divisive platform in the interviews. Some participants evaluated it positively because it allows spontaneity, accessibility, and contact with younger audiences. Others rejected it strategically, especially in sectors where seriousness, security, and institutional credibility are central. The financial sector participant, for example, perceived TikTok as a reputational and data security risk. This finding complements Sheak and Abdulrazak (2023), who highlight TikTok's capacity for brand awareness through entertainment and trend-based interaction. In personal branding, the same potential can become a risk when entertainment undermines perceived competence.

Cross-Platform Consistency: Stable Essence, Adapted Expression

A strong theme in the interviews is that consistency does not mean posting the same content everywhere. Participants repeatedly distinguished between essence and tone. The essence comprises values, competence, purpose, and visual or narrative markers that make the personal brand recognizable. Tone changes depending on the platform. LinkedIn may be more formal and analytical; Instagram may be more visual and personal; TikTok may be more dynamic and spontaneous. The challenge is to adapt without fragmenting the identity.

This interpretation is consistent with recent literature on human brands, which emphasizes authenticity and strategic privacy over uncontrolled self-disclosure (Lou

& Zhou, 2024). The interviewees did not define authenticity as showing everything. Instead, they treated authenticity as coherence: saying what one can substantiate, showing a version of oneself that is selective but not false, and avoiding contradictions between public presentation and professional reality.

Management Practices: Between Planning and Spontaneity

The empirical data also reveal differences in how participants organize their content. Some follow a strategic and modular approach, using tools such as ClickUp, Notion, Meta Business Suite, and Google Calendar to plan editorial calendars, organize ideas, and manage posting rhythms. Others prefer organic, sporadic, or restricted posting, either because they do not see social media as a central professional tool, or because they associate high visibility with reputational and privacy risks.

This contrast shows that personal brand management depends on professional objectives and risk tolerance. For some individuals, a structured content calendar supports consistency and prevents irregular communication. For others, excessive planning may feel artificial or unnecessary. The most important question is not whether all professionals use the same tools, but whether the chosen process allows them to maintain coherence, quality, and control over their exposure.

Metrics and Professional Outcomes

Interview results indicate a preference for tangible outcomes over vanity metrics. Most participants evaluated success through generated conversations, job opportunities, partnerships, client interest, and networking quality. Followers and likes were considered useful indicators of reach, but not sufficient evidence of professional value. One participant was an exception, attributing greater importance to followers and likes as indicators of brand acceptance and reach.

This finding is relevant because it aligns personal branding with outcome-based evaluation. Digital visibility only becomes strategically meaningful when it supports a professional objective. This does not mean engagement metrics should be ignored. Instead, they should be interpreted as intermediate signals that need to be linked to deeper outcomes, such as reputation, trust, opportunities, and conversion.

Risks: Interpretation, Privacy, Plagiarism, AI, and Comparison Pressure

The interviews identified four main risk areas. The first is distorted interpretation: participants feared that opinions could be taken out of context or interpreted in ways that harm reputation. This concern is amplified by artificial intelligence, because synthetic manipulation and the rapid reproduction of content facilitate the alteration or misrepresentation of messages. The second risk is the balance between privacy and visibility. Some professionals prefer restricted profiles or limited disclosure as a form of reputation and security management.

The third risk concerns data security and plagiarism. Participants expressed concern about the possibility of their original ideas, information, or content being copied

without attribution. The fourth risk is comparison pressure, especially in highly visual environments where personal success is frequently represented through idealized images. These risks show that personal branding is not merely a communication practice; it is also a form of digital risk management.

Table 2. Interview results and analytical interpretation

Theme	Interview Evidence	Interpretation
Identity descriptors	Participants used terms associated with rigor, strategy, authenticity, trust, creativity, leadership, and impact.	Personal brand identity combines technical competence with human credibility.
Strategic objectives	Authority, networking, career opportunities, sales, and value sharing emerged as the main objectives.	Personal branding strategies should be aligned with career stage and sector.
LinkedIn	Formal, technical, and analytical tone; focus on authority, networking, and knowledge.	LinkedIn functions as the credibility anchor of the personal brand.
Instagram	Visual, close, aspirational, and behind-the-scenes communication.	Instagram humanizes the brand through lifestyle and visual coherence.
TikTok	Seen as spontaneous and useful for younger audiences, but also rejected in more conservative sectors.	TikTok offers reach but creates credibility and reputational risk.
Management tools	Some participants use ClickUp, Notion, Meta Business Suite, and Google Calendar; others post organically.	There is a continuum between planned and spontaneous brand management.
Metrics	Most participants value conversations, opportunities, and partnerships more than likes or followers.	Outcome metrics are more meaningful than vanity metrics for professional branding.
Risks	AI manipulation, decontextualization, privacy, plagiarism, and comparison pressure were highlighted.	Visibility requires strategic privacy and reputational risk management.

Practical Implications

The findings suggest five practical implications for professionals who are starting or improving their personal brand. First, they should define the purpose and audience before choosing content formats. Second, they should identify a stable core identity

based on competence, values, and differentiation. Third, they should adapt the tone per platform without losing coherence. Fourth, they should evaluate success through professional outcomes, not just visibility metrics. Fifth, they should carefully manage their exposure, particularly in relation to privacy, data security, content manipulation, and the pressure to perform an idealized identity.

For educational institutions, the findings also suggest that personal branding should be taught as a practical and ethical competency. Students and early-career professionals often understand that online reputation matters, but may lack concrete guidance on how to build it. Programs in marketing, communication, and management can contribute by integrating exercises in LinkedIn profile analysis, content planning, audience definition, privacy management, and metrics interpretation.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations. The literature review was deliberately restricted to open-access journal articles published from 2020 onwards and available through Scopus and/or the Web of Science. This improves currency and accessibility, but excludes older foundational sources and potentially relevant closed-access articles. The empirical component was based on ten semi-structured interviews, which is appropriate for qualitative exploration but does not support statistical generalization.

Future research should expand the interview sample, include more sectors, and compare different generations of professionals. Generation Z deserves particular attention because it developed identity and visibility practices in a more platform-native environment. Future studies should also examine how artificial intelligence alters personal branding, namely through synthetic content, automated reputation management, and the risk of decontextualization.

Conclusion

This revised article shows that personal branding in the digital era is a continuous process of identity management, platform adaptation, and reputational control. Recent open-access literature supports the idea that personal branding is no longer a marginal topic, but a relevant professional competency linked to visibility, credibility, differentiation, and career outcomes.

The ten semi-structured interviews add empirical depth to this conclusion. Participants described personal branding as the combination of professional authority and human authenticity. They treated LinkedIn as the primary platform for credibility, Instagram as a space for visual humanization, and TikTok as a high-potential but also high-risk platform. They also showed that success is increasingly measured through real opportunities, conversations, and partnerships, not just through likes.

Overall, an effective digital personal brand requires a stable core identity, strategic adaptation to each platform, authentic but selective self-presentation, and careful risk management. The strongest personal brands are not necessarily the most visible ones, but those that remain credible, coherent, and valuable across different audiences and digital contexts.

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