

Gen Z Construction in Developing Expertise Profiles on Social Media

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Abstract

The use of social media as a means of self-actualisation continues to grow, making it highly attractive for Gen Z to use as a medium for their Expertise Profiles. This research aims to explore how Gen Z utilises and constructs their personal social media to build an Expertise Profile. Gen Z uses social media, particularly Instagram and LinkedIn, simultaneously to digitally showcase their skills, achievements, and experiences. This study explores the process of virtual identity formation among Gen Z through observation and in-depth interviews with informants who actively use both platforms to meet their career needs. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collected through interviews, observations, and literature reviews. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, and the data obtained were analysed through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of this study indicate that consistency in self-presentation and the application of cross-platform linking strategies are key to building a strong, professional image.

Keywords

Virtual Identity; Personal Branding; Expertise Profile,

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1. INTRODUCTION

The use of social media as a means of self-actualisation continues to increase, making it compelling enough to attract Gen Z to use it as a medium for their Expertise Profiles. Many social media platforms are utilised by Gen Z for personal branding, including Instagram and LinkedIn. This increased use of social media platforms occurs because social media enables users to produce various forms of content, whether text, photos, videos, or audio (Wijaya & Ridanasti, 2024). These characteristics allow users to share information and present themselves freely on social media (Umayana et al., 2024)

Gen Z, as a generation that has grown and developed in the digital era, utilizes social media to build a professional identity in line with their expertise. According to Nurlaila et al. (Nurlaila et



al., 2024), Gen Z is highly up-to-date and fond of social media, especially to meet their daily needs. This trait makes Gen Z tend to be more active in the virtual world and create their identity virtually to interact with other users. Gen Z can share their achievements, portfolios, experiences, and creative ideas, thereby shaping the professional image they desire (Situmorang and Hayati, 2023).

Gen Z strives to construct their virtual identity as well as possible because they are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of personal branding. Building a strong personal brand can enhance one's credibility and trustworthiness in the public eye (Andina et al., 2022). Gen Z understands that what they present on social media affects public perception, career opportunities, and self-image. Moreover, Gen Z has already entered the workforce, requiring them to make the most of social media (Sumampouw 2022). Therefore, Gen Z constructs their virtual identities across various platforms to fulfil both their social and professional needs.

Essentially, identity is not fixed but can change and evolve over time. This phenomenon relates to Chris Barker's concept of self-identity construction (2004:172), which states that the construction of self-identity is the development of identity, whereby one shows who they are, what makes them similar, and what distinguishes them from others. Sabila et al. (2023) explain that identity construction may include identity formation, the creation of new identities, and the conscious development of identity through holistic self-assessment.

Identity is formed not only in the real world but also in virtual spaces. Virtual identity is a form of self-presentation developed through social media, where users are free to manage how they want to be seen by others (Kokswijk 2006). Meanwhile, Sakti and Yulianto (2019) explain that the virtual identity formed on social media does not only reflect self-definition (personal identity) but also involves the process of self-invention (creating one's identity). In this context, each individual can arrange and change certain aspects of themselves, whether in terms of their appearance, interests, abilities, lifestyle, or expertise.

The construction of Gen Z's virtual identity is closely related to building personal branding. According to Maharani and Mardiana (2024), personal branding is an individual's process of promoting themselves as a unique person with value that distinguishes them from others. In contrast, social media allows users to build a personal brand through information and impressions that are consistently communicated to the audience. Thus, Gen Z can utilise social media as a tool to build a strong and relevant personal brand aligned with their professional goals.

One way to build a strong self-image is to showcase one's skills or personal expertise. Novianti et al (2023) state that each individual possesses certain skills or abilities inherent to themselves. In this context, individuals showcase their expertise through social media to build an expertise profile to strengthen their image and professional identity. The profile is intended to demonstrate the competencies and skills of the individual, consistently displayed through content, interactions, and achievements shared on social media (Shearer 2024).

Currently, Gen Z often uses platforms like Instagram and LinkedIn to shape their virtual identity, especially in building an expert profile. Both platforms provide space for users to present their personal expertise virtually, although each platform has its own unique characteristics. Moreover, the use of Instagram today closely resembles LinkedIn, albeit with different nuances; previously, Gen Z used Instagram as a social networking platform, but now it is shifting towards a more professional platform. This shift in Instagram's function, resembling LinkedIn, demonstrates certain strategies employed by Gen Z in constructing their virtual identities through these two different platforms.

The differences in function and character between Instagram and LinkedIn raise questions about how Gen Z constructs their virtual identities to build an expertise profile on multiple social media platforms. To date, few studies have specifically examined the strategies Gen Z uses to construct their virtual identities concurrently on Instagram and LinkedIn. Among the research discussing Gen Z and social media was conducted by Debra Hidayat, Evan Utama Tjandra & Nani Herawati, titled "Gen Z Digital Leadership through Social Media." This article explores Gen Z's strategies for using social media as a space for digital leadership, collaboration, personal branding, and voice building that support their credibility and expertise online. (Debra et. al. 2023). Another study was conducted by Atika, I Made Sudana, Sita Nurmasitah, and Bayu Ariwibowo titled "The Analysis of Y and Z Generation's Soft Skill of Work Readiness in Using Social Media." This research aims to evaluate Gen Z's soft skills when using social media in the context of preparing themselves for the workforce, sharpening competencies such as self-presentation and professional communication, which are essential in forming a professional self-image. (Atika, et. al. 2023).

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the construction of Gen Z's virtual identity through Instagram and LinkedIn in building an expertise profile. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to thoroughly

understand how Gen Z uses strategies to construct their virtual identities through two different platforms. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and literature reviews. Meanwhile, informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques according to predetermined criteria, namely, Gen Z males and females aged 18-27 years, active users of Instagram and LinkedIn, possessing expertise in a particular field, and applying strategies to build a professional image.

Data analysis was conducted following the stages from Miles and Huberman, which include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions through an interactive, iterative, and continuous process (Thifalia & Susanti, 2021). After data analysis, the author conducted a validity test to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the research data (Nurfajriani et al. 2024). This method is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how Gen Z constructs their virtual identity through Instagram and LinkedIn to build their expertise profile.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from this study were supported by sufficient data. These research findings and results must provide answers or serve as hypotheses that were previously stated in the introduction.

Consistency of Virtual Identity through Instagram and LinkedIn

In the digital era, virtual identity has become the main focus for Gen Z as they continue to present their best selves on Instagram and LinkedIn. Gen Z presents themselves as well as possible to shape their desired personal branding. Meanwhile, Instagram and LinkedIn provide opportunities for users to express themselves freely by managing what is displayed on these platforms. As a result, Gen Z can create a new identity that is more ideal and closer to their authentic self. The formation of this identity is in line with the opinion of Sakti and Yulianto (2019), who state that social media becomes a free space for users to express themselves, allowing for the process of self-invention.

The process of self-identity creation for Gen Z is closely related to Jean Baudrillard's concept of Hyperreality (1994), which asserts that representations of reality are perceived as being more real than reality itself. In this context, every user strives to showcase their best selves on social media to create a positive impression in the digital space. However, the identity displayed does not fully reflect reality but rather a more perfected version—an identity that has been polished, curated, and carefully arranged. In practice, Gen Z meticulously prepares how they want

to be seen on Instagram and LinkedIn. These efforts are made so that they appear perfect and are seen as 'multi-talented' by their audiences.

This study shows that Gen Z always selects and curates content before uploading it to Instagram and LinkedIn, which can be explained through Jacob Von Kokswijck's (2006) concept of Virtual Identity, where individuals are free to decide how they want to be seen, thus shaping their identity in the digital space. Gen Z's virtual identity illustrates a diminished level of truth in the identities they build, as they tend to be selective and perfectionist, especially when presenting themselves on Instagram and LinkedIn.

Although Gen Z curates content and carefully prepares before presenting themselves on Instagram and LinkedIn, they tend to choose to show what has actually happened to them and then manage it with certain strategies so that it appears authentic and attractive in accordance with their desired image. This is part of the process of building a self-image, as expressed by Aulia et al. (2024), where each individual has the ability to create, control, and manage how they present themselves according to their own wishes.

The freedom of expression on social media encourages Gen Z to develop their own strategies for building strong personal brands. These strategies can be implemented by consistently managing and maintaining their appearance on Instagram and LinkedIn to appear attractive and convincing. Although Gen Z is aware that Instagram and LinkedIn have different audience characteristics, they take advantage of these differences to build a consistent and complementary virtual identity across platforms.

To maintain the consistency of their personal branding on social media, Gen Z tries to show how they want to be perceived in the digital space. In addition, they tend to pay close attention to several key elements that are useful for strengthening their virtual identity so that it remains aligned and continuous. In practice, Gen Z maintains the consistency of their personal branding starting from simple elements, such as the use of a display name on their social media accounts.

Researchers have found that a display name is a simple element and the first virtual identity appearance seen by other users. Meanwhile, Gen Z also stated that they have their own strategy for writing their display name by adding a brief mention of their expertise at the end of their name. Similarly, on LinkedIn, they construct their display name by including their full name, a separator, and their area of expertise on their Instagram profile.

In addition, Gen Z also shows that using a consistent photo profile is important for strengthening their virtual identity on Instagram and LinkedIn. For Gen Z, who are actively building personal brands, a photo profile is not just a picture of oneself but also the first visual representation that forms the initial impression for others. For Gen Z, their style of dress in their photo profile also affects the first impression that others have of them. Gen Z's efforts to maintain their appearance on social media are in line with the opinion of Fricila et al. (2022), who stated that each individual can manage situations and their self-presentation on social media according to their own criteria. This shows that Gen Z is increasingly aware of the importance of building a consistent and professional self-image on social media.

Gen Z also mentioned that using the bio feature professionally influences self-image, as this feature can be a tool for building personal branding. Gen Z's strategy for writing a professional bio is to include their occupation, field of expertise, work experience, and brief personal achievements. The strategy employed by Gen Z is in line with the view of Putri & Azeharie (2021), which states that social media planning is a series of strategies implemented to create a targeted outcome according to the chosen field.



Figure 1. Professional Instagram virtual identity

Source: Instagram @Najmatj



Figure 2. Professional LinkedIn virtual identity

Source: LinkedIn @NajmaTushobahJamal

The professional use of a bio can strengthen the audience's trust in a person's abilities. The bio feature is not only used as an initial identity 'greeting', but also becomes a strong self-branding tool that impacts the user's personal and professional life. If Gen Z utilises the bio feature appropriately and strategically in accordance with their abilities, it will create a certain branding that will later stick in the minds of other users, marking them as an expert in a particular field.

In addition to aligning their professional self-narrative on each platform, Gen Z also maintains consistency in the content uploaded on Instagram and LinkedIn. This consistency includes how they share their activities, experiences, and achievements so that these are in harmony on each platform. For Gen Z, visual consistency and the constructed narrative are important aspects of building a professional virtual identity on social media. They also strive as much as possible to ensure that what is showcased on Instagram and LinkedIn is in harmony and interconnected. Moreover, the visual aspect is considered to play a crucial role in creating a first impression, as audiences tend to judge their initial appearance before reading the description of the content.

The importance of first impressions in personal appearance is reinforced by the Halo Effect concept by Thorndike (1920), which explains how people make quick judgments when meeting someone for the first time. The Halo effect creates a first impression based on the most appealing factor observed by others without yet knowing a person's behavior, character, and the quality of a person in depth (Azkiya et al., 2025). As a result of forming this first impression, each individual tends to be cautious in accepting and responding to others' reactions toward them.

In this context, the halo effect is used to build a strong professional identity, where Gen Z strives to create a positive first impression by presenting themselves through the elements on the social media they use. The self-presentation carried out by Gen Z on Instagram and LinkedIn aligns with Widyawati's (2021) opinion, in which Gen Z showcases everything about themselves through their profile photos, language style, posts, and also the messages they wish to convey on the platforms they use. Ultimately, these elements are not just identifiers but serve as a brief representation of who they are and what they have to offer.

Cross-Platform Linking Strategy in Building an Expertise Profile

The rapid development of technology has made social media a new space for Gen Z to express themselves and shape their identities. Meanwhile, Gen Z is growing up in the digital era, which makes social media not just a means of entertainment but also a space for self-actualisation and

socialisation. The need to be recognised, appreciated, and acknowledged motivates Gen Z to continuously shape their virtual identity to reflect their expertise and values.

Gen Z's need for self-actualization aligns with Situmorang & Hayati (2023), who assert that every individual needs recognition from others that they are who they present themselves to be on social media. In this context, Gen Z craves validation from others. The fulfilment of this need can be seen in the way they present themselves in digital spaces. Essentially, Gen Z's efforts to present themselves optimally are aimed at gaining recognition, influence, and building a strong virtual identity (Situmorang & Hayati, 2023).

In addition to showing off their appearance and lifestyle, Gen Z is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of showcasing their skills and expertise to strengthen their professional identity. In essence, each individual has their own uniqueness and personal expertise that is inherent to them (Novianti et al., 2023). By highlighting their personal expertise, Gen Z can differentiate themselves from others and enhance their competitiveness in the digital space.

In practice, Gen Z uses Instagram and LinkedIn to showcase their expertise. Both platforms are highly effective in helping Gen Z land jobs, as each platform can highlight the professional side according to its own characteristics and advantages. Moreover, Gen Z has begun to realise the importance of Instagram and LinkedIn in building a professional personal brand. By maintaining consistency in their self-presentation on Instagram and LinkedIn, Gen Z can strengthen their professional identity on these platforms.

This phenomenon reflects a new reality in which Gen Z's presence on multiple platforms demands that they be not only active but also strategic in building interconnected identities across platforms. Simultaneously, this trend indicates that Gen Z is changing the way they manage their virtual identities, as being active on many social media channels necessitates a well-planned cross-platform strategy.

Researchers have noted that Gen Z applies Cross-Platform Linking on Instagram and LinkedIn to build their expertise profiles. Cross-Platform Linking is a strategy used by individuals to connect various social media accounts within a single platform. This effort is effective for building consistent personal branding, in line with Rampersad's (2008) concept that strong personal branding relies on the clarity of messaging and continuity of the identity presented. Therefore, it is important for Gen Z to maintain consistent self-presentation across the various platforms they use to build a professional image. In practice, Gen Z links their Instagram account to their LinkedIn profile and vice versa, adding their LinkedIn link to their Instagram bio. This strategy is believed to make it easier for anyone visiting their profile to learn more about them.

Researchers found that the implementation of Cross-Platform Linking can utilise a website technology called Linktree. According to Aristana et al. (2024), Linktree is a platform that allows users to merge various types of information, such as links and contact details, into a single link. Meanwhile, Linktree can combine a variety of social media links into one dedicated page, making it easier for others to access all the user's social media accounts. As stated, Linktree offers users quick and easy access to information without visiting multiple websites or platforms.

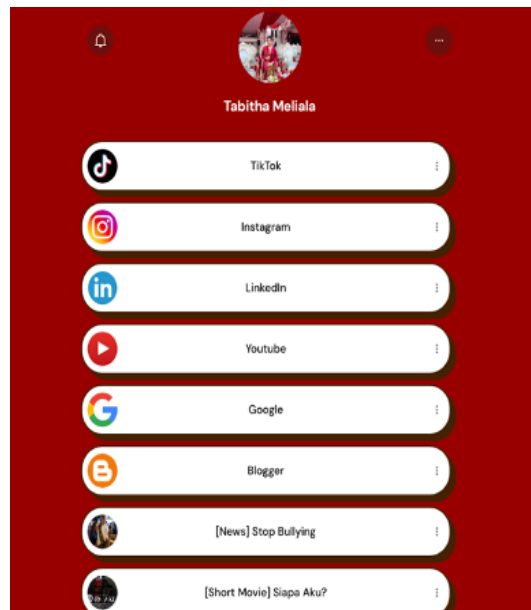


Figure 3. Linktree Website

Source: Instagram @Tabithameliala

Not only is it practical, Linktree has also proven effective in facilitating the practice of Cross-Platform Linking—a strategy that allows users to direct their audience to various social media platforms or digital portfolios using just one link. Gen Z points out that with a single 'click,' other users can immediately access their social media profiles and listed works via Linktree, eliminating the need to search for them one by one.

The implementation of Cross-Platform Linking helps Gen Z maintain consistency and alignment in their virtual identities across different platforms, such as Instagram and LinkedIn. By presenting a unified self-narrative across various social media platforms, Gen Z can increase audience trust in the professional image they are building, which can positively impact future career opportunities.

Expertise Profile as the Formation of a Professional Image

In today's digital era, an expertise profile is not only represented by formal documents such as a CV (curriculum vitae) and portfolio, but is also formed through one's digital footprint, which is spread across various social media platforms. This digital footprint encompasses activities that reflect a person's competence, personality, and skills on social media. In this context, building an expertise profile becomes part of virtual identity management, in which individuals consciously shape professional perceptions through their content, interactions, and self-presentation on social media (Kokswijk 2006)

Gen Z, as a generation that constantly leverages digital opportunities, makes social media a strategic space to build and showcase their personal expertise on these platforms. Meanwhile, the expertise profile plays an important role in presenting one's skills to create a professional image in the eyes of audiences such as recruiters, colleagues and companies. This phenomenon reflects what was conveyed by Purwanti (2023), where the professional image that is formed can open up job opportunities, strengthen reputation, and bring career success.

Through Instagram and LinkedIn, Gen Z curates their self-presentation to reflect their areas of expertise, experience, achievements, and values they wish to highlight. In practice, Gen Z presents themselves professionally on LinkedIn, while Instagram is increasingly being used like LinkedIn—as a space to build a professional image and showcase their skills.

Researchers found that Gen Z actively develops their Instagram and LinkedIn accounts to build personal branding, where they have strategies to manage the perception of recruiters by showcasing their achievements and experience on LinkedIn while displaying their true personality on Instagram and LinkedIn simultaneously. This strategy of managing audience perception aligns with the concept of Fricila et al. (2022), where individuals can practice impression management by adapting their situation and appearance according to their own criteria.

This finding is supported by statements from Human Resource practitioners who say that social media is now an essential tool in the recruitment process. Before conducting interviews, the HR reviews candidates' social media accounts to assess their

expertise. According to them, what is written in a CV and the results of interviews alone are still not effective enough in evaluating someone's competence and personality; therefore, an additional screening process through a candidate's social media is necessary. This screening process involves filtering the virtual identity of the applicant's social media.

According to Berkelaar (in Zain & Fakhriya, 2023), the screening process through social media is called cyber-vetting, in which a recruiter examines prospective employees by searching their digital footprints on social media. Meanwhile, cybervetting has become an opportunity for companies to dig deeper into the backgrounds of job candidates without having to meet them directly or speak with people in their surroundings. This process aimed to screen and identify candidates that matched the predetermined criteria.

The cybervetting process is an indirect assessment phase of job applicants through digital traces recorded on social media platforms. This process has several assessment indicators to determine whether applicants have the interests, abilities, and personalities that fit a company's job requirements. In practice, several features often used for evaluation on Instagram include the Bio, Highlight, Feeds, Reels, and Photos About features; while on LinkedIn, the focus generally lies on how candidates describe their experience. These findings strengthen the view that social media information displayed to the public can be collected and consolidated by HRD to assess how well a candidate's skills match the company's needs.

Zain & Fakhriya (2023) note that searching for information through social media has become a new source for recruiters during the selection process, as social media can help recruiters make their decisions. Furthermore, the cybervetting process allows for the discovery of additional value that job applicants possess. Zain and Fakhriya (2023) also state that even if the information obtained during the screening process is not relevant to the targeted position, this process can still influence whether a candidate is ultimately selected.

On the other hand, consistency in using multiple platforms to build personal branding is also a concern for Human Resources. This strategy can add value to Gen Z and increase their chances of being accepted into a company. In addition to helping HR conduct cross-platform social media screening, this consistency also reflects that the

individual is active and stays up-to-date in building their personal branding on social media, aligning with current trends.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings regarding the construction of virtual identities by Gen Z through Instagram and LinkedIn in building an expertise profile, this study shows that Gen Z strives to maintain consistency in their personal branding as displayed on Instagram and LinkedIn to effectively build an expert profile. This consistency can be seen through the alignment of communication style, photo profile, bio/profile description, and professional narrative conveyed through Instagram and LinkedIn. In addition, Gen Z adopts a Cross-Platform Linking strategy, which involves linking Instagram and LinkedIn profiles across platforms. The purpose of this strategy is to demonstrate digital activity across platforms, build an interconnected identity, and facilitate the digital screening process by HRD to provide a comprehensive picture of an individual's expertise.

The findings of this study also indicate that social media plays an important role as a tool for competency assessment by HRD when Gen Z applies for jobs in a company. An HRD does not only assess applicants based on their CV and the interview stage, but also considers what they display on Instagram and LinkedIn. Although social media is not the main source of evaluation in recruitment, it can provide added value for Gen Z, who can manage and develop their virtual identity well and appropriately. In this way, Instagram and LinkedIn serve as tools for personal self-expression and play an effective role in strengthening a professional image in the eyes of the public and recruiters.

Based on the findings of this research, the author suggests that Gen Z should continue to increase their awareness of building a professional virtual identity, as the identity they build has a long-term impact and is significant for their career success. Therefore, Gen Z needs to enhance their understanding of creating and developing their social media strategically in the midst of intense job competition.

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