

Personal Branding Construction in the Formation of Self-Identity of High-Achieving Students

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Abstract: The development of digital technology has transformed how young people, especially college students, communicate and form their identities on social media. However, not all individuals have the digital literacy competencies to manage it effectively. The purpose of this study is to analyze the construction of personal branding of high-achieving college students on social media and how digital literacy competencies participate in this process. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach, data collection using in-depth interviews with six high-achieving students. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The research results showed that participants used Instagram and LinkedIn in complementary ways, with Instagram being used to reach a wider audience through narrative and visuals, while LinkedIn served as a professional platform for showcasing academic achievements and networking. Audience interaction was seen as a crucial strategy for strengthening personal branding credibility and opening up opportunities for collaboration and professional relationships. Furthermore, digital literacy encompasses more than just technical skills, encompassing ethical awareness, critical thinking, and responsibility in managing digital information.

Keywords: Achieving college students, Construction, Digital literacy, Personal branding

Abstrak: Perkembangan teknologi digital telah mengubah cara remaja, khususnya mahasiswa, dalam berkomunikasi dan membentuk identitas diri di media sosial. Namun tidak semua individu memiliki kompetensi literasi digital yang memadai untuk mengelolanya secara efektif. Tujuan penelitian ini menganalisis konstruksi personal branding mahasiswa berprestasi di media sosial serta bagaimana kompetensi literasi digital berperan dalam proses tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, teknik pengumpulan data wawancara mendalam pada enam orang mahasiswa berprestasi. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan partisipan memanfaatkan Instagram dan LinkedIn secara komplementer, di mana Instagram digunakan untuk menjangkau audiens yang lebih luas secara naratif-visual, sedangkan LinkedIn difungsikan sebagai ruang profesional untuk menampilkan capaian akademik dan menjalin jejaring. Interaksi dengan audiens dipandang sebagai strategi penting dalam memperkuat kredibilitas personal branding, membuka peluang kerja sama dan relasi profesional. Selain itu, literasi digital bukan sekadar keterampilan teknis, tetapi juga mencakup kesadaran etis, kemampuan kritis, dan tanggung jawab dalam mengelola informasi digital.

Kata kunci: Konstruksi, Literasi digital, Mahasiswa berprestasi, Personal branding



Introduction

The development of digital technology in the last two decades has brought about significant changes in almost all aspects of human life, from communication patterns and access to information to the formation of social identity (Salsabilla *et al.*, 2025). This progress is marked not only by the presence of increasingly sophisticated communication devices, but also by a fundamental transformation in the way individuals interact and build social networks in the global space. Since the beginning of the 21st century, social media and mobile devices have revolutionized the way humans communicate, replacing traditional communication patterns with faster, instantaneous, and cross-geographical interactions (Farias-Gaytan *et al.*, 2022). The presence of high-speed internet, increasingly affordable mobile devices, and the ever-growing digital applications expand the scope of human activity from the physical to the virtual realm, thus creating new spaces for the production and distribution of information. This transformation not only impacts the practical aspects of daily life but also gives rise to cultural and social phenomena, where human identity and activity are increasingly attached to digital representations constructed in cyberspace.

One concrete manifestation of the development of digital technology is the emergence of social media as a primary interaction space. Social media has transformed communication from a one-way model to a more interactive, participatory, and dynamic one (Latif & Hariawan, 2021). Through social media, individuals can interact, share, and search for information quickly (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021), while also finding communities with similar interests and building lasting relationships (Pan *et al.*, 2017). Its function has now expanded, not only to maintain personal relationships, but also as a means of sharing information, self-expression, developing professional networks, and building self-image (Yulianto, 2025). With the ever-increasing number of users, social media has become a new public space that allows individuals to display their identities to a wide audience (Ananda *et al.*, 2024), while also acting as a medium for self-expression and self-image (Hamzah & Putri, 2022).

The concept of *personal branding* in the context of digital media is becoming increasingly important as a systematic effort to build self-image and reputation through specific communication strategies. Jacobson (2020) defines *personal branding* as the process of developing, managing, and presenting personal information into a comprehensive narrative so that an individual's identity is easily understood by the public. Parameswari *et al.* (2023) emphasize that *personal branding* is the process of forming, attracting, and maintaining public perception of a person's skills, achievements, personality, and values, whether intentionally or unintentionally, with the aim of projecting a positive image to build trust and loyalty. Similarly, Sharifzadeh *et al.* (2021) emphasize that *personal branding* functions to transform an individual's skills, values, and unique characteristics into a strong identity. Its primary function is to create an attractive perception and differentiate an individual from others (Salam, 2020). Furthermore, Saidah *et al.* (2022) add that *personal branding* is not only related to knowledge or physical appearance, but also produces a unique, consistent, and memorable impression on the audience.



Digital technology has a significant influence on shaping *personal branding* through various online platforms (Ahmad *et al.*, 2025). In the digital era, social media has become a primary platform for *personal branding practices* due to its broad reach, rapid information dissemination, and the ability to create two-way interactions with audiences. Platforms such as *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *Twitter* serve as arenas for showcasing desired values, skills, and personality traits (Riswan, 2025). *Personal branding* strategies can be realized through consistent posting, narratives or *storytelling*, and intense interaction with followers. Thus, social media serves not only as a medium for communication but also as a space for constructing and maintaining identity. This aligns with the view of Chen and Ren (2022) who assert that individuals in the digital era strive to present themselves to a global audience through social media, thereby strengthening the relevance of *personal branding* in the contemporary context.

However, the development of digital media also presents various risks. In addition to facilitating communication, new media is often used to spread fake news (hoaxes), negative content, and propaganda that has the potential to cause social division (Amaly & Armiah, 2021; Restianty, 2018). In this context, digital literacy is a crucial competency. Digital literacy is not only defined as technical skills in operating devices, but also includes critical abilities to access, evaluate, produce, and distribute information ethically (Junaedi *et al.*, 2023; Suriani, 2022). As technology advances, digital literacy has evolved from mere operational skills to the capacity to manage information wisely, think critically, and collaborate within the digital ecosystem (Ervianti *et al.*, 2023; Hussain & Phulpoto, 2024; Kadhim, 2024). In fact, digital literacy is seen as the key to creating healthy and civilized communication in the digital era (Rahman *et al.*, 2021).

Digital literacy competency has become a necessity in the midst of increasingly competitive global competition and is even seen as an essential life skill (Khan *et al.*, 2022). Digital literacy can be understood at three levels: digital competence at the first level, digital use at the second level, and digital transformation at the third level. Digital competence encompasses low-level to high-level thinking skills, ranging from basic operational skills to analytical abilities (Park *et al.*, 2020). It is important to understand that digital literacy does not replace media literacy, but rather builds on it to formulate a set of skills needed in a dynamic digital context (Pangrazio *et al.*, 2020). Thus, digital literacy not only equips individuals to use technology effectively but also encourages critical thinking skills, adapting to the development of new platforms, and participating responsibly in the digital ecosystem.

In the context of *personal branding*, digital literacy plays a crucial role in managing privacy, selecting credible content, and presenting identity authentically and ethically. Low digital literacy can pose risks such as false images, the spread of misinformation, and even reputational damage (Sukaemi *et al.*, 2023). Conversely, individuals with good digital literacy are able to manage information wisely, maintain credibility, and minimize the potential for online crime (Phippen *et al.*, 2021). In practice, each individual is required to actively find ways to display, market, and promote *a personal brand* that reflects their unique characteristics (Park *et al.*, 2020). Only those with high self-awareness can manage their thoughts and actions



consistently, thus forming a complete and trustworthy character in the digital space (Chen & Ren, 2022).

Several previous studies have examined *personal branding* on social media from various perspectives, such as marketing communications, public relations, and its impact on audiences. These studies generally position *personal branding* as a communication strategy to build a public image or enhance professional competitiveness. Meanwhile, digital literacy studies have focused more on the technical aspects and critical skills of individuals in utilizing digital technology, particularly related to preventing misinformation and increasing participation. However, research specifically highlighting the construction of *personal branding* from an individual perspective, particularly among high-achieving students with significant public exposure, remains relatively limited. Students generally tend to use social media for entertainment and social interaction, rather than for digital identity management or targeted *personal branding strategies* (Yulianto, 2025). Yet, digital literacy holds significant potential for developing students' intellectual abilities, including strategically and ethically managing self-image in the digital space (Suriani, 2022).

High-achieving students are often viewed as role models in their communities and are required to maintain their image, both academically and personally. In their daily lives, social media has become part of their lifestyle and a primary means of communication (Dary *et al.* , 2025). For students, social media also functions as a space for self-actualization, identity discovery, and a medium for gaining social recognition (Dayuoman, 2022). This condition requires students not only to have technical skills in using digital technology, but also digital literacy skills that enable them to navigate information, utilize knowledge to support learning, and maintain academic performance in a digital environment (Syabaruddin & Imamudin, 2022). The question of how high-achieving students manage their identity on social media through *personal branding*, and the extent to which digital literacy plays a role in this practice, is an important issue that has not been widely answered by previous research. In fact, the implementation of *personal branding* from college can have a significant impact on students' self-esteem as human resources with high competitiveness and value (Rafiuddin *et al.*, 2022). Thus, this study focuses on the construction of personal branding by high-achieving students on social media in their efforts to shape their self-identity, as well as its relationship to digital literacy skills. This approach is expected to enrich understanding of the dynamics of personal branding from the perspective of the actor, so that it is understood not merely as an external communication strategy but as a meaningful practice actively pursued by the individual.

Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the construction of *personal branding* on social media and its relationship to digital literacy. Fadli (2021) explains that qualitative research focuses on understanding social or human phenomena through verbal descriptions, presenting informants' perspectives in detail in a natural context. Meanwhile, a descriptive approach helps researchers describe and clarify the phenomena under study, making them easier for readers to understand (Manurung, 2022). Qualitative research also emphasizes the process and search for meaning, allowing for more



comprehensive data collection while opening up opportunities for new findings (Waruwu, 2024). Therefore, this approach was chosen because it is appropriate for exploring the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of high-achieving students contextually, and provides researchers with space to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives.

Data collection is a crucial stage in research because the quality and validity of the findings are greatly influenced by the methods used. Selecting the right technique will provide a strong foundation for analysis, ensuring that the research results can accurately address the problem. (Romdona *et al.*, 2025). In this study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six high-achieving students as participants. The initials of the names of the student informants are as follows.

Table 1.1. List of Informant Initials.

No.	NAME/INITIAL	AGE	Code
S			
1.	BA	21	P1
2.	TSP	21	P2
3.	TA	20	P3
4.	AAN	22	P4
5.	RA	21	P5
6.	LAH	21	P6

Source: Primary Data 2025.

The interview technique was chosen because it provides an in-depth overview of participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of *personal branding* on social media and the role of digital literacy (Fadila *et al.*, 2025). This method also allows researchers to explore aspects that might not emerge through other techniques, such as personal expressions, feelings, and individual reflections. The semi-structured nature of the method allows researchers the flexibility to adjust the direction of questions according to participant responses, resulting in richer, more contextual, and more in-depth data (Kase *et al.*, 2023). Prior to conducting the interviews, researchers conducted a literature review to strengthen the theoretical foundation and ensure the relevance of the research problem. Furthermore, interviews were conducted while maintaining research ethics, including building good relationships with participants to ensure a natural interaction and more authentic data (Kase *et al.*, 2023).

The data analysis in this study used the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of three main stages. First, data reduction, which is the process of selecting, simplifying, and focusing data by selecting relevant information and discarding data that does not support the research objectives (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). Second, data presentation, which is the stage of compiling the reduced information into a more systematic form to facilitate researchers in understanding the patterns, relationships, and meanings contained therein. This presentation can take the form of descriptive narratives, tables, graphs, or charts, but in qualitative research it is generally presented in narrative text. Third, conclusion drawing and verification, which are carried out continuously from the data collection process to the final analysis. At this stage, researchers attempt to capture meaning, organize findings, and ensure their validity through



repeated verification, for example by reviewing field notes, conducting critical reflection, comparing data sources, or discussing results with colleagues to reach intersubjective agreement (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the research results and discussion obtained from interviews with six research informants, namely high-achieving students, regarding the construction of *personal branding* on social media and its relationship to digital literacy. To facilitate understanding, the research findings are organized into three main sections. First, a general understanding of social media and *personal branding*, which describes how participants interpret social media and their views on the concept of *personal branding in the context of academic and personal life*. Second, *personal branding* practices on social media, which showcase the strategies, communication patterns, and forms of self-representation used by high-achieving students in building an image in the digital space. Third, digital literacy competencies in *personal branding*, which highlight the extent to which digital literacy skills play a role in managing online identities, including aspects of ethics, credibility, and critical thinking skills in utilizing social media. Thus, this discussion not only describes the *personal branding practices* of high-achieving students but also places them within a broader digital literacy framework. In this discussion, each participant will be represented by the letter "P".

General Understanding of Social Media and *Personal Branding*

This section discusses how high-achieving students interpret the existence of social media in their daily lives and its relationship to personal branding. Participants' basic understanding of these two concepts provides an important foundation for understanding how they construct their identities in the digital space. This demonstrates that students' initial understandings of digital platforms influence how they manage social media, whether as a means of communication, self-expression, or personal image enhancement. To explore how this construction begins, the following are presentations from informants regarding the origins and transformation of their social media use:

Informant 1 (P1), an outstanding student who is active in campus organizations, explained the shift in his goals in using social media as follows:

"I've been using social media for quite some time, since junior high. Initially, I thought it was just for entertainment, a break from reality. But as time went on, social media evolved, and now I use it not just for entertainment, but also to find and share information." (Interview P1).

Furthermore, Informant 2 (P2), who focuses on professional career development, provided a similar view regarding the function of the platform he uses:

"I created my account in junior high, but started actively using it in high school. I think the purpose of social media depends on the platform. I don't limit it to just entertainment or stress relief. Nowadays, social media can be a source of educational information, social interaction, and even self-image building." (Interview P2)

In line with this, Informant 3 (P3), who is known as a laboratory assistant, emphasized the educational aspect of his chosen platform:

"I've been actively using social media since high school. I initially used social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube just for entertainment,



*but now I focus on using them for educational and learning information."
(Interview P3)*

Based on the interview results, it can be seen that the majority of informants have been familiar with and using social media since their teenage years, especially at the junior high school to high school levels. Initially, social media was used more as a means of entertainment and stress relief, as expressed by P1 and P3. However, over time, the function of social media for them has expanded, no longer limited to entertainment, but also includes information seeking, knowledge sharing, social interaction, and even building self-image (P1, P2, P3). This indicates a shift in social media usage patterns from merely consumptive to more productive and strategic.

Today, social media has become an integral part of everyday life. It's not just a way to socialize, but also a space for developing one's identity. (Yulianto, 2025). Social media also allows students to access educational information and easily discuss academic issues (Nurudeen *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, social media plays a role in increasing personalized learning opportunities (Anderson, 2019). Thus, the experiences of informants Describes the dynamics of social media usage, which has evolved from an entertainment orientation to a crucial instrument in the formation of digital identity and *personal branding*. In an effort to understand how this construction is built, informants provide in-depth understanding of the essence of personal branding as follows:

P1 defines personal branding as a form of self-representation and competence that must be demonstrated in real terms in the digital space:

"In my opinion, personal branding means showcasing who we are, what we do, and what we stand for in the digital world. For me, building a personal brand on social media is important so that others know me and what competencies I have mastered." (Interview P1).

Meanwhile, P2 emphasizes the aspects of value consistency and strategic opportunities that emerge through a planned self-image:

"Personal branding is a way of consistently building a self-image on social media to showcase your identity, values, and what you stand for. Having a personal brand on social media is necessary because it can help us identify ourselves and create opportunities, such as networking." (Interview P2).

On the other hand, P3 sees personal branding as a means of social contribution and a powerful instrument for opening up collaborative networks:

"Personal branding is more about how we present ourselves, what values we bring, and how we contribute to society through social media. Building a personal brand on social media is necessary because it's very powerful, and it can open up opportunities for collaborations and relationships." (Interview with P3).

From the statements of the three informants, it is clear that high-achieving students have a reflective awareness that *personal branding* has two main functions. First, as an authentic self-representation to showcase one's identity, values, and competencies. Second, as a strategic instrument that can be utilized to expand networks, build trust, and open up opportunities for collaboration and future cooperation. As stated by Johnson (2017), *personal branding* statements always center on who you are, what you do, how you do it, and what is unique about you. This finding is in line with the view Sharifzadeh *et al.* (2021) who asserted that *personal branding* not only functions to transform skills and values into a strong identity but also



becomes social capital that can increase individual competitiveness. Furthermore, Franzia (2018) stated that *personal branding* is rooted in life values and has high relevance to one's true identity. This is emphasized by Park *et al.* (2020) who emphasized that each individual needs to actively find ways to display, market, and promote a unique *personal brand according to their distinctive characteristics*.

This interpretation indicates that high-achieving students are aware that *personal branding* is not merely an artificial image, but rather an authentic representation of the identity, values, and contributions they wish to present to the public. This finding aligns with the views of Jacobson (2020) and Sharifzadeh *et al.* (2021), who assert that *personal branding* is a systematic process of managing one's identity so that it can be clearly understood by the audience. Participants' awareness of the importance of consistency also demonstrates their maturity in managing their digital identities, so that *personal branding* not only serves to build a reputation but also reflects personal integrity before a wider audience.

Personal Branding Practices on Social Media

This section outlines the strategies and practical practices employed by high-achieving students in managing *their personal branding* through social media. The discussion focuses on communication patterns, the types of content they choose, and how they present themselves to maintain credibility and a positive image. The analysis in this section provides a concrete picture of how students implement their understanding of *personal branding* in their daily digital activities.

"I use Instagram and LinkedIn more often. On Instagram, I focus more on building my personal brand by uploading photos with captions. Usually, I post photos of academic seminars or educational activities, with the captions providing inspirational messages or self-reflections on the activity. On LinkedIn, I tend to repost and comment on professional content." (Interview P1).

"I use Instagram more often because it's the most familiar. I use LinkedIn to build my personal brand by posting about academic activities, inspirational moments, and educational content. For example, after attending a seminar, academic training, or social event, I like to share on LinkedIn." (Interview P2)

"Instagram, because I have a fairly large audience of around 2,000 people, I feel the need to build my personal brand there. LinkedIn is more professional. On Instagram, I most often upload academic-related photos, such as after attending seminars or speaking at webinars. I also sometimes share inspirational quotes. Unlike LinkedIn, I'm less active on sharing, mostly just reposting and commenting." (Interview P3)

Interview results indicate that the primary *platforms* used by participants to build *their personal branding* are *Instagram* and *LinkedIn*. From the perspectives of the three informants, there appears to be a differentiation in social media use based on the characteristics of each *platform*, *Instagram* is positioned as a popular platform with a broad audience reach, used to showcase personal identity, daily activities, and provide inspirational content (Ari, 2025). Furthermore, its digital features allow users to package photo and video uploads more attractively (Dika *et al.* , 2023). Conversely, *LinkedIn* is understood as a more formal platform



for showcasing academic achievements, professional experience, and expanding strategic networks. These findings support Petroni's (2019) study which explains that *Instagram* is generally used to build a visual and narrative self-image, while *LinkedIn* functions more as a medium for professional representation. Thus, high-achieving students utilize both *platforms* in a complementary manner: *Instagram* to build closeness with a wider audience, and *LinkedIn* to strengthen academic and professional credibility.

"The interactions I have usually involve responding to what they say, such as saying thank you. And from other interactions, I've received several collaboration offers, such as conferences in China, and even job openings." (Interview P4)

"I appreciate every positive feedback by responding to comments. I've had the opportunity to speak on and off campus, and I've received job offers through LinkedIn. This is where I realized the importance of personal branding." (Interview P5)

"If I like to reply to their messages or participate in comments, I also often hold Q&A sessions. That's probably how people get to know me, and I often get asked to be a speaker and get offers of collaborations" (Interview P6).

Interview results indicate that interaction with the audience is a crucial element in *the personal branding practices* of high-achieving students. Interaction on social media is understood not only as a form of two-way communication but also as a strategy to build credibility and strengthen self-image. *Personal branding* is essentially built through the activities, work, or profession undertaken by individuals to shape positive perceptions in society (Salsabilla *et al.*, 2025). In this context, high-achieving students view interaction with the audience as a means to build authentic relationships, which can then be transformed into social capital in the form of networks, professional opportunities, and public trust. This finding aligns with the views of Pan *et al.* (2017), who emphasized that ongoing interaction on social media can strengthen relationships and expand social networks. Furthermore, the implementation of *personal branding* from college is believed to have a significant influence on developing students as high-value human resources, especially for future career development (Rafiuddin *et al.*, 2022). Thus, the effectiveness of *personal branding* is determined not only by the quality of the content shared but also by the quality of the interactions undertaken, which play a direct role in opening access to academic and professional opportunities.

Digital Literacy Competence in Personal Branding

This section highlights the role of digital literacy in supporting or even limiting the efforts of high-achieving students to build *their personal branding*. Digital literacy competency is understood not only as technical skills in using social media, but also as critical skills in selecting information, maintaining privacy, and building an authentic and ethical identity. This discussion reveals the extent to which digital literacy serves as a crucial asset in building *personal branding* in the digital era.

"Digital literacy is a set of skills for operating digital information, verifying the truth of information, using technology intelligently and responsibly, maintaining privacy, behaving well in the digital world, and utilizing it for positive things" (Interview P4)



"Digital literacy is the ability to understand, use, and utilize digital technology effectively and responsibly" (Interview P5)

"Digital literacy is the ability to access, evaluate, understand, and use digital information appropriately and responsibly." (Interview P6)

These findings demonstrate that participants not only defined digital literacy as technical skills but also linked it to ethical, responsible, and useful aspects. Digital literacy encompasses an individual's ability to utilize, understand, and critically evaluate digital information (Junaedi *et al.*, 2023). Beyond basic computer skills, digital literacy demands the ability to navigate the digital world, critically assess content, and responsibly interact with online communities (Hussain & Phulpoto, 2024). Therefore, for high-achieving students, digital literacy is positioned as a key foundation for building a credible *personal brand*, as these skills enable them to manage information wisely, maintain the quality of interactions, and protect their reputations in the digital space.

"Digital literacy is important because the internet also carries many negative aspects, such as fraud and hoaxes. Moreover, to build our self-image, we must provide reliable information." (Interview P1).

"It's important for us to be wise in using social media. I ensure the information I share is credible by checking the source." (Interview P2).

"It's very important. We must first be sure the information is accurate before sharing it directly." (Interview P3).

These findings indicate that digital literacy for high-achieving students is not only understood as technical skills, but also as a form of moral responsibility in maintaining personal integrity in the digital space. Digital literacy is not simply the ability to use software or operate technology, but rather encompasses interrelated cognitive, sociological, and emotional skills necessary for individuals to play an appropriate role in the digital environment (Dewi *et al.*, 2021). Digital literacy helps students become intelligent and critical technology users, who are not only able to access various information sources but also skilled in selecting accurate and relevant information (Ridlwan *et al.*, 2025). Thus, digital literacy serves as a primary foundation in building a credible *personal brand*, as public trust in digital identity is greatly influenced by the quality and validity of the information shared.

"I see many people misrepresenting themselves on social media due to a lack of digital literacy, such as revealing private information that should be protected and posting low-quality content." (Interview P4).

"I once experienced a mistake in building a self-image when sharing his achievements using JJ (Jedag-jedug) and not considering the audience's response so he learned that personal branding needs to pay attention to the context, values, impact/views of others, and also minimize hate comments" (Interview P5).

"I've seen people immediately spread information without verifying its veracity. Then, I tried to verify and evaluate the information by doing further research, and it turned out to be a hoax" (Interview P6).

These findings demonstrate that *personal branding* is inseparable from digital literacy competencies, which include ethical awareness, critical thinking skills, and the ability to filter information and express oneself appropriately. This aligns with the opinion of Tinmaz *et al.*



(2022) who emphasized that digital literacy encompasses technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional dimensions, where the socio-emotional aspect plays a crucial role in maintaining self-image and the quality of interactions in the digital space. On the other hand, the development of new media brings not only opportunities but also risks, such as the emergence of *cybercrime*, the spread of hoaxes, and the rise of negative content on social media (Amaly & Armiah, 2021). Digital literacy is seen as one of the most effective solutions to prevent the negative impacts of intense and massive internet use (Luthfia *et al.*, 2021). Thus, digital literacy not only functions as a technical skill, but also as a self-protection strategy in maintaining reputation, building relationships, and strengthening *personal branding value* on social media.

"There are several things to consider when building a personal brand. Know yourself and what kind of content you want to post. Upload quality content. Think critically when selecting information. Avoid spreading hoaxes. Learn algorithms and understand good social media strategies." (Interview P1).

"In my opinion, the ability to sort out what is appropriate to share with the public and what is not, convey information ethically, use supporting technology optimally such as design, editing, visuals so that they are beautiful to look at, and think critically" (Interview P2).

"The most important skill is critical thinking because it can be needed in various situations, such as when receiving information, communicating digitally, discussing, sharing content, and evaluating reading content by cross-checking information." (Interview P3).

Interview results indicate that high-achieving students view digital literacy competencies as an important foundation for building *personal branding* on social media. This indicates that digital literacy, in the context of *personal branding*, is understood not only as technical skills but also encompasses ethical awareness, critical thinking skills, and adaptive strategies for managing digital identity. In fact, digital literacy is now viewed as an essential life skill (Khan *et al.*, 2022). The study also found that digital literacy enables students to explore and utilize information from the internet more wisely, while minimizing the potential for online crime. Thus, for high-achieving students, digital literacy is positioned as a holistic skill, which not only serves to maintain personal credibility but also optimize social media as a professional and academic space.

"I try to participate in digital literacy training. Then I get lecture material on digital literacy. Or I learn about it through content on social media." (Interview P4)

"I improve my digital literacy by learning from various sources, training, webinars, personal experiences that I use as learning materials, and self-reflection or evaluation of whether my personal branding goals have been achieved" (Interview P5).

"In my opinion, digital literacy skills can be improved by reading books, articles, educational videos or discussions" (Interview P6) .

Based on the interview results, it is clear that high-achieving students employ various strategies to improve their digital literacy competencies. As time goes by, the definition of literacy continues to evolve to adapt to essential 21st-century skills, such as problem-solving, collaboration, technological agility, creativity, and other *soft skills* (Jimola, 2023). This indicates that improving digital literacy is not linear or singular, but rather multidimensional,



utilizing a variety of learning resources, both formal, non-formal, and informal. Digital literacy is needed not only for learning purposes but also for self-development, communication, work, and collaboration (Taheri & Pennington, 2024). Amidst increasingly widespread information disclosure, digital literacy competencies are crucial for individuals to verify the accuracy and veracity of information before processing and utilizing it as needed. In this context, user experience in using digital media is an absolute factor (Rosalina *et al.*, 2021). Ultimately, this competency undoubtedly enables students to participate and navigate in the digital era (Hussain & Phulpoto, 2024). Thus, high-achieving students demonstrate a pattern of continuous improvement in digital literacy, which is not only oriented towards mastering technical skills, but is also directed towards supporting *personal branding* in a more strategic manner.

Conclusion

This study shows that high-achieving students build *personal branding* through a conscious and targeted strategy on social media, utilizing popular platforms like Instagram to showcase their identity more broadly, and LinkedIn as a formal space that emphasizes professionalism and academic achievements. This process is not only interpreted as a means of self-expression, but also as a strategic instrument for expanding networks, building trust, and creating academic and professional opportunities. The results also emphasize that the quality of interactions with audiences plays a crucial role in strengthening self-image, so that *personal branding* is not solely determined by visual or narrative content. Furthermore, digital literacy is understood as a key foundation in building a credible *personal brand*, encompassing technical skills, critical thinking, ethical awareness, and socio-emotional skills. Thus, high-achieving students view *personal branding* on social media as more than just a digital activity, but rather a holistic representation of competencies, values, and identities that can become social and professional capital in the future.

This research is still limited to the context of high-achieving students as participants, so for future research it is recommended to expand the object of study to student groups with different backgrounds, such as general students, organizational activists, and students pursuing careers in creative fields, in order to obtain a more diverse picture of *personal branding strategies*. In addition, future research can also use a mixed *methods approach* by adding a quantitative survey to measure the extent of the relationship between digital literacy, intensity of social media use, and the effectiveness of *personal branding*. Future research can also explore differences between platforms more specifically, for example comparing the role of Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok in building self-image, or review external factors such as social media algorithms and digital trends that influence the process of *personal branding construction*. Thus, further research is expected to be able to provide a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of the relationship between digital literacy and *personal branding* in the digital era.

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