



Self-Presentation of Generation Z's Interpretation on LinkedIn

Muhammad Fauzan Hazami, Siti Khumayah, Aghnia Dian Lestari*

Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, Indonesia

Email: muhammad.122100140@ugj.ac.id, siti.khumayah@ugj.ac.id,
aghnia.dianl@ugj.ac.id*

Keywords:	Abstract
generasi_z; linkedin; identitas_profesional; representasi_diri; personal_branding.	The development of professional social media has made Generation Z more active in building their own identity in the digital space, especially through LinkedIn as a career-focused platform. Some previous research has addressed personal branding and digital identity for Generation Z, but most still discuss social media in general and have not specifically examined how the meaning of professional identity is shaped and displayed on LinkedIn. This research aims to find out how Generation Z interprets LinkedIn as a medium for forming professional identities, how they present themselves, and what the meaning of the digital activities they do. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques and observations of LinkedIn accounts of users aged 18-28 years. The data was analyzed through the process of reduction, grouping, and interpretation of meaning based on virtual identity theory, personal branding, and symbolic interaction. The results of the study show that LinkedIn is understood as an important space to build a professional image through the management of profiles, experiences, and interactions that are in accordance with work norms. The identity displayed is the result of an adjustment between self-authenticity and the demands of professionalism in the digital world.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the last two decades has changed the way humans interact and build their social identity. Social media has become the main space for individuals to present themselves through various forms of visual and narrative representation (Nasrullah, 2012). This change marks a shift in communication from interpersonal to digital network-based that emphasizes performative aspects and self-visualization (Turkle, 2011). The digital landscape has created new opportunities for identity construction, where individuals can curate and control how they are perceived by others.

LinkedIn has different characteristics from other social media such as Instagram and TikTok because it is oriented towards professionalism and self-image formation in a career context (Okviosa & Irwansyah, 2022). Along with the development of digital culture, LinkedIn is also used as a means of personal branding and professional identity expression. In Indonesia, the number of LinkedIn users reaches around 36.8 million people, with 38% or around 13 million users coming from Generation Z (NapoleonCat, 2025).

This phenomenon is interesting when associated with Generation Z, which is a generation of *digital natives* who grow up in a digital environment and have a high proximity to technology. For Generation Z, online activities not only function as entertainment, but also as a means of forming authentic social and professional identities (Putri & Santoso,

2023). In the context of LinkedIn, Generation Z interprets this platform not only as a career development space, but also as a medium for forming a virtual identity that balances professionalism, personal expressiveness, and an ideal image in the digital world of work.

Changes in the dynamics of digital communication present challenges for Generation Z in presenting themselves authentically in cyberspace. LinkedIn, on the one hand, becomes a professional space to demonstrate competence and build networks, but on the other hand creates pressure to display an ideal self-image according to digital professionalism standards. Rahmawati & Wijaya (2024) stated that Generation Z uses LinkedIn as the main means of personal branding to increase career opportunities, although this practice is often accompanied by performative identity construction in order to conform to professional public expectations.

This phenomenon shows that there is a tension between the need to appear authentic and the demand to display an ideal self-image. Shawn (2025) explains that Generation Z tends to regulate and control the way they present themselves in the digital space to keep them looking positive. While this strategy is effective in building a professional image, it can lead to identity distortion, which is the difference between the true self and the identity displayed on professional social media such as LinkedIn.

Based on previous research, the *First* carried out by Shawn (2025) emphasized that Generation Z is a generation that is aware of the way they present themselves in the digital space, especially on professional platforms such as LinkedIn. Research *Second*, by Rahmawati & Wijaya (2024) Highlight the practice *Personal Branding* Generation Z on LinkedIn as part of the strategy to achieve a professional career. Research *third* by Rosana & Fauzi (2024) emphasizes that digital identity is formed through a process of symbolic communication and social negotiation, in which individuals seek to present an ideal image that conforms to public expectations in the digital space.

Research on Generation Z's virtual identities still has a lot of room to study, especially in terms of how they build and present themselves on professional platforms like LinkedIn. So far, there has not been much research that addresses interpretive and symbolic aspects, such as the use of symbols, visual language, and digital interaction in shaping professional credibility. This research aims to deepen understanding of how Generation Z constructs virtual identities on LinkedIn, both as self-expression and as a communication strategy that reflects the value, authenticity, and consistency of identity in the digital space.

This study aims to examine how Generation Z interprets LinkedIn as a medium for forming virtual identities. Using a qualitative approach, this study analyzes the experience of Generation Z in building and representing a self-image that is considered authentic through LinkedIn features, as well as uncovering the symbolic meaning of digital communication practices that reflect the relationship between professional and personal identities in virtual spaces.

This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of communication science, especially in the study of digital communication and new media. The findings of this research are expected to be able to enrich understanding of the process of constructing Generation Z's professional identity through career-oriented social media such as LinkedIn, as well as expand the application of virtual identity theory, personal branding, and symbolic interaction in the context of professional media.

Practically, this research is expected to provide an understanding for Generation Z in building a digital self-image that is balanced between authenticity and professionalism. The findings of this study can also be a reference for communication practitioners in understanding the communication patterns of Generation Z in the digital professional space, as well as a consideration for platform developers such as LinkedIn in adapting features to the professional needs of young users.

The limitations of this research problem are focused on how Generation Z interprets LinkedIn as a medium for forming virtual identities. This study only highlights the forms of self-representation displayed through profiles, uploads, and digital activities that reflect professional image, and examines the use of symbolic interactions, digital narratives, and self-visualization in communicating virtual identities on LinkedIn.

Social media is a form of digital communication innovation that allows two-way interaction to occur quickly, widely, and efficiently. Its presence has changed the paradigm of communication from one-way to participatory, where each individual has the opportunity to become both a producer and consumer of information (*Prosumer*). Erawati & Lestari (2019) Explaining that social media has a strategic role in building interpersonal and organizational communication, because of its interactive nature and easy access by various levels of society. In the context of promotion and self-representation, social media not only functions as a means of disseminating information, but also as a medium for image and reputation formation.

Social media serves as a symbolic space for individuals to form and display their identity virtually, especially among students. Through visual platforms such as Instagram, self-identity is constructed through uploads, interactions, and consciously chosen visual representations. According to Nurfalah et al., (2021) that social media allows students to build a self-image that reflects personal values, preferences, and goals, so that the identity displayed is not only natural, but the result of the selection process and management of self-representation in the digital space.

Social media plays an important role in the digital communication strategy of institutions, especially in public relations practices. According to Nuruzzaman et al., (2024) It shows that social media is used as the main channel to convey institutional information and build relationships with audiences in a planned manner. The use of platforms such as Instagram is carried out by adjusting messages and content based on audience characteristics, so that social media not only functions as a means of disseminating information, but also as a strategic space in the formation of an institution's image and reputation.

According to Erawati & Lestari (2019) The process of communication on social media is dynamic, because the message conveyed can quickly be replicated, transformed, and disseminated through mechanisms *Word of mouth* digital. This shows that the power of social media lies in its ability to create an organic communication network, where the credibility of messages is often built through trust between users, not just through institutional authority. Thus, social media can be understood as a space for social interaction that shapes users' behavior, values, and digital identities, as well as becoming a strategic medium in the context of personal and professional communication.

LinkedIn is one of the professional social media platforms that functions as a career networking space and personal branding development in the digital era. The platform allows

users to display professional profiles, portfolios, and career activities that are accessible to the general public. According to Rahmawati & Wijaya (2024) LinkedIn not only serves as a job search medium, but also as a strategic arena for Generation Z to build and communicate their professional identity digitally. Through features such as *headline*, *summary*, *endorsement*, and *post*, Users can construct a credible self-image that aligns with their career aspirations.

The practice of personal branding in the virtual world is not always carried out individually, but involves various parties who play a role in the production and management of content on digital accounts. According to Nurhanifah et al., (2025) This process shows that self-image formation on social media is the result of structured work that includes planning, production, and distribution of content collaboratively, especially in the context of professional digital communication.

According to Rahmawati & Wijaya (2024) Generation Z uses LinkedIn to display a combination of competence and personality, so that their profile not only reflects professional abilities, but also values, communication style, and personal identity that they want to show the public. This practice shows that personal branding on LinkedIn is performative, where users consciously design self-representations that are expected to attract the attention of recruiters, colleagues, and the professional community. Therefore, LinkedIn is an important space in the study of digital communication because it illustrates how the boundary between professionalism and self-expression is increasingly blurred in modern work culture, especially among Generation Z who are very connected to the digital world.

In the digital media landscape, Generation Z means that professional platforms like LinkedIn are no longer just passive job search tools. According to (Rahmawati & Wijaya, 2024), Generation Z has a high qualification for social media that is able to project personal branding criteria consistently and authentically. This platform acts as a performative space for them to build an industry reputation and assert their value proposition from an early age. These sociological and psychological needs are what drive them to actively cultivate virtual identities to mature the transition from the academic phase to the real world of work.

The concept of virtual identity does not only refer to views (Nasrullah, 2012), but it can also be understood through thought (Meylina et al., 2024) which affirms that identity in the digital space is formed not only through narrative or text, but also through visual representations that are symbolically constructed. Previous research has shown that visual elements such as colors, shapes, and symbols play an important role in building certain imagery and meanings that reflect brand identity in the digital space.

This view is in line with the concept of virtual identity on social media, where the user's self-representation is not only displayed through text, but also through visual aspects such as profile photos, upload content, and personal designs of social media pages. The identity displayed is representative, because it contains a specific message that is intended to be conveyed to a digital audience. Thus, the theory put forward by (Meylina et al., 2024) broadening the understanding of virtual identity as a form of symbolic communication that not only focuses on narrative, but also on self-visualization in digital space.

Self-identity on professional social media such as LinkedIn is generally formed through the practice of personal branding. Raharjo (2020) Explains that personal branding is a process of building perception and self-image so that it is positively known by the public.

Each individual is seen as "*Brand*" that needs to be communicated consistently, valued, and authentically. This practice not only aims to increase public recognition, but also plays a role in building trust and credibility in the professional realm. Generation Z, as a group that grew up in a digital environment, showed a high tendency in managing a professional image through LinkedIn. They take advantage of a variety of features, such as *headline*, Profile descriptions, upload activities, and recommendations, as visual and symbolic communication strategies to affirm professional identity. This view is in line with Okviosa & Irwansyah (2022) which states that LinkedIn functions as a space of self-representation, where professionalism is judged not only by job qualifications, but also by the ability of individuals to display a convincing self-image.

The concept of virtual identity is not only understood as an image displayed, but also as a result of social constructions that continue to change according to the context of digital interaction. Self-representation in cyberspace is often performative, as individuals adjust the way they present themselves to the expectations of the audience and the cultural norms of the platform used. Thus, virtual identities can be seen as the result of negotiations between *authentic self* and the ideal image desired in professional digital spaces such as LinkedIn. This understanding is important to explain how Generation Z displays their professional identity on social media that combines visual, symbolic, and social aspects in one complex digital ecosystem.

The theory of symbolic interaction was first proposed by George Herbert Mead who emphasized that humans are unique social creatures because they have the ability to use and interpret symbols based on consciousness (Mulyana, 2010:7). This theory views that social meaning and individual identity are formed through the process of interaction that takes place between human beings, in which the meaning is agreed upon and interpreted together. Herbert Blumer later developed this idea by explaining that human actions towards an object or situation are based on meanings that arise from social interactions, and that meaning can change through a process of interpretation carried out personally. Thus, the theory of symbolic interaction explains that a person's identity is constructed through symbols, communication, and social meaning that arise from interactions between individuals. In the context of this research, this theory is used to understand how Generation Z interprets digital symbols and builds their virtual identities through interaction and self-representation on the LinkedIn platform

Digital media allows individuals to display a version of themselves that they can control, edit, and adjust to their desired image. Nasrullah (2020) emphasized that digital space provides opportunities for individuals to present *the "other self"*, which is an ideal or representative version of themselves to their social aspirations. Identities on professional social media such as LinkedIn are formed through a performative process, where users display their self-image by taking into account the expectations of the professional public and digital work culture. Kurniawan (2025) also highlights that self-construction in digital media is inseparable from the search for social legitimacy, which is how individuals obtain validation through digital interactions such as comments, *endorsements*, or *connection requests*. In other words, self-construction in digital media is a continuous social practice, in which users become not only consumers of information, but also producers of meaning and image of themselves.

A review of previous research shows that personal branding and digital identity have been widely discussed in the context of social media use by Generation Z, but the approach used still leaves analytical limitations. Rahmawati & Wijaya (2024) interprets personal branding on LinkedIn as a strategic practice that relies on authenticity, consistency, and differentiation as formulated by Rampersad, but this study tends to position digital identity as something functional and instrumental, without dissecting the process of forming virtual identities and the symbolic meaning behind the professional representation of Generation Z. Rosana & Fauzi (2024) and Shawn (2025) make theoretical contributions through the discussion of social identity, virtual identity, and self-presentation, but are still at the conceptual level and have not presented empirical data that reflects the concrete experiences of Generation Z in digital professional spaces such as LinkedIn

Research Viçlar (2019) emphasizing that Generation Z uses social media as a means of personal branding, but the general scope of social media makes the peculiarities of LinkedIn as a professional arena with certain norms and expectations not discussed in depth. Research Lailiyah (2018) It shows the relationship between online and offline identities through the perspective of symbolic interaction and self-presentation, but the generational context and professional orientation have not been the main focus of the analysis. This condition shows that previous studies still tend to separate the discussion of personal branding and virtual identity or discuss it in general, thus opening up research space to empirically examine how Generation Z constructs virtual identities and mobilizes them as a personal branding strategy in the professional context of LinkedIn.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, which aims to understand in depth how Generation Z interprets LinkedIn as a medium for the formation of virtual identities. This approach was chosen because it is relevant to explore the subjective meanings and personal experiences that arise from social interactions in the digital space (Creswell, 2014) & (Miles et al., 2014). Through this method, the researcher seeks to interpret the phenomenon of self-representation and identity construction based on the perspective of the informants, not just from numerical data or statistical generalizations.

The object of this research is Generation Z who actively use LinkedIn as a professional media. The research focuses on how individuals construct, display, and negotiate self-identity through profiles, uploads, and digital interactions on the platform (Muntaha & Saifudin, 2025). The informants consisted of men and women aged 18 to 28 who used LinkedIn to expand their career networks and strengthen their digital self-image (Sitompul et al., 2023). This identity formation process affirms the role of social media as the dominant context in the construction of Generation Z's identity (Scotland, 2025).

The data of this study includes primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through *in-depth interviews* and non-participatory observations of informants' digital activities on LinkedIn. Interviews are conducted online via Discord and offline in person to gain a broader understanding of the informant's experience. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through a literature review involving books, scientific journals, and articles relevant to the topic of digital communication and identity formation on professional social media.

The data collection process is carried out in stages, starting from the determination of informants, the implementation of interviews, to the documentation of observation results. All data obtained were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis through four main stages, namely data collection, data reduction, theme categorization, and interpretation of results. The analysis was carried out simultaneously from the data collection process to the drawing of conclusions, so that the researcher could understand the meaning that emerged from the informant's experience in depth and contextual (Miles et al., 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generational Interpretation of LinkedIn as a Media for Virtual Identity Formation

Generation Z interprets LinkedIn as a space for the formation of a virtual identity that is oriented towards professionalism and career. LinkedIn is understood as a platform that is fundamentally different from other social media because it demands more structured and strategic self-image management. One of the informants revealed that *he "feels free enough to present himself professionally on LinkedIn, but still within the confines of industry norms,"* which shows that freedom of expression on LinkedIn is not absolute, but rather framed by the expectations of the world of work and certain professional standards.

The interpretation of LinkedIn also has to do with the separation between personal identity and professional identity. Informants view the identities displayed on LinkedIn as a selective representation of themselves, rather than a complete picture of everyday life. An informant explained that his identity on LinkedIn was *"The professional version of me, although it doesn't fully reflect the personal side, but I still display core values such as integrity and a passion for learning."* This statement shows that LinkedIn is interpreted as a space to highlight certain qualities that are considered professionally relevant, while the personal aspect tends to be set aside.

LinkedIn is interpreted as a symbol of readiness and seriousness to enter the professional world. Generation Z views the existence and management of LinkedIn accounts as part of the process of building self-legitimacy in the realm of work. This is reflected in the informant's view that on LinkedIn he must be *"more formal and strategic in interacting than other social media,"* as the platform demands a credible self-image that is acceptable to a professional audience. As such, LinkedIn is not only understood as a digital medium, but also as a social space that shapes the way Generation Z defines and displays their virtual identities.

Generation Z Self-Representation in LinkedIn Use

Generation Z's self-representation on LinkedIn is realized through selective and strategic profile management. The informant realizes that elements such as *headline*, Self-description, and profile photos play an important role in forming an initial impression as a professional individual. One of the informants explained that he chose the information that was displayed by emphasizing the most relevant and impactful aspects, such as *"Headlines that reflect my values, a concise but strong self-description, and work experience that shows progress and achievements"*. This statement suggests that LinkedIn profiles are not structured spontaneously, but rather curated to represent specific competencies and career directions.



Neysa Artanti Nurhariyadi ✓ She/Her

Final year Psychology undergraduate at Diponegoro University | People & Culture Intern at Sprint Asia | AIESEC & FPCI Diponegoro Alumni | Former Clinical Psychology Intern at Puskesmas Mijen & Sentra Handayani Jakarta

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Image 1. LinkedIn Profile Neysa Artanti Nurhariyadi

Source: Neysa Artanti Nurhariyadi's LinkedIn Account

Self-representation on LinkedIn is not only realized through profile management, but also through the promotion of experience, expertise, and achievements as a form of professional legitimacy. Generation Z tends to display projects, certifications, and organizational activities as concrete evidence of self-worth. An informant stated that he highlighted his expertise *through "the projects I've created and measurable achievements, because it helps build credibility"*. Another informant asserted that on LinkedIn he needs to present an image as an individual with certain skills, although in the real world those skills are still developing. This shows that self-representation on LinkedIn serves as a means of building a competent image in front of a professional audience. The LinkedIn profile documentation used in this study has been approved by the sources to be displayed as part of the scientific analysis and publication needs.

The form of self-representation of Generation Z is also reflected in their interaction patterns and activities on LinkedIn. Informants tend to adjust their communication style to keep it formal and in line with professional norms, especially because they realize that LinkedIn's audience includes both recruiters and the company. One of the informants revealed that on LinkedIn he had to *"using professional and proper language so that it can be glanced at"*, So be more careful in giving comments or uploads. These findings suggest that interaction activities on LinkedIn are not only a form of social participation, but also part of a self-representation strategy designed to maintain a consistent professional image.

Generation Z's digital activity on the LinkedIn platform is basically driven by specific sociological and psychological needs qualifications in the transition phase to the professional world. Rahmawati & Wijaya, (2024) Generation Z has a high dependence on social media which is able to project criteria *Persona Branding* consistently to improve their career opportunities. This need is no longer understood as a form of passive job search, but rather a performative action to mature a virtual identity from the academic phase to the world of work.

In its implementation, these qualifications of needs are manifested in real terms through the related visualization features provided by the platform:

The Need for Job Readiness Legitimacy (Visualization through the #Open to Work feature)

The use of green profile picture frames is driven by the need for informants to quickly gain recognition of job readiness. This visual symbol serves as a communication tool that emphasizes the value *proposition* while making it easier for recruiters to recognize their potential in the midst of fierce digital competition.



Neysa Artanti Nurhariyadi ✓ She/Her

Image 2. Features of #Open to Work

Source: Neysa Artanti Nurhariyadi's LinkedIn Account

The Need for Recognition of Authority in Unlocking Career Opportunities (Visualization through the #Hiring feature)

Generation Z uses this feature to share job openings from their company or organization, driven by the need to show that they are actively involved in the professional ecosystem. These visual activities help them build their self-image as individuals who have a wide network and contribute directly to opening up career opportunities for others, not just as passive job seekers.



Image 3. Features of #Hiring

Source: Neysa Artanti Nurhariyadi's LinkedIn Account

This phenomenon is in line with the findings Sembada et al., 2025) which states that LinkedIn's function for the younger generation has transformed into a hybrid space to show professional existence organically. Through the use of related visualizations, digital information curated by informants is no longer just cosmetic data, but an identity reality that is deliberately constructed to build industry credibility.

The Symbolic Meaning of Generation Z's Activities on LinkedIn in Building a Digital Self-Image

Generation Z's activities on LinkedIn are interpreted as a symbol of seriousness and commitment to professional self-development. Achievement uploads, profile updates, and participation in interactions are understood not as just routine activities, but as a signal of the existence and readiness of individuals in the world of work. One of the informants stated that he deliberately built a certain image to be perceived positively by others, mentioning that *"I deliberately build an image as an adaptive and collaborative professional so that others see me as a potential partner"*. This statement shows that activities on LinkedIn have a symbolic meaning as a means of shaping the professional perception of the audience.

Pengalaman



Image 4. *Experience Activities*

Source: Rheinaldi Raudatul Anbiya's LinkedIn Account

Activity on LinkedIn is not only understood as a symbol of seriousness, but also interpreted as an indicator of self-development and growth. Generation Z views consistency in updating profiles and displaying achievements as markers that the individual is constantly learning and developing. One informant emphasized the importance of consistency by stating that *"When narratives and actions are aligned, people are more likely to trust and make connections."* These findings show that repetitive and targeted activities on LinkedIn are interpreted as symbols of credibility and self-reliability in a professional context.



Image 5. Interaction Activities

Source: Neysa Artanti Nurhariyadi's LinkedIn Account

Activity on LinkedIn also carries a symbolic meaning related to professional pressures and expectations. Some informants revealed that there is pressure to appear ideal when comparing themselves to other profiles that look more impressive. However, this pressure is not always interpreted negatively. An informant said that he responded to it with "*focus on personal growth and not over-compare*", so that LinkedIn is seen as a space for motivation as well as self-reflection. Thus, Generation Z's activities on LinkedIn contain complex symbolic meanings, including efforts to build a professional image, maintain credibility, and manage pressure in the digital space.

Based on the results of the analysis, LinkedIn is understood by Generation Z as a space for the formation of professional identities in the digital world. LinkedIn is not seen as a space to showcase personal life, but as a medium to showcase skills, experience, and career direction. This interpretation is in line with the virtual identity theory of (Nasrullah, 2012), in particular *the concept of identity fluidity*, which explains that identity in the digital space can change according to the context of the platform used. Generation Z is adjusting the way they present themselves to fit LinkedIn's character as a professional media.

The identity built on LinkedIn is selective and does not display the whole side of yourself. Generation Z chooses certain information that is considered relevant to the world of work, such as experience, skills, and achievements. Personal aspects that are not related

to professional goals are less likely to be displayed. This practice shows that identity flexibility does not mean complete freedom, but rather the ability to conform to the norms and expectations of the audience that exist on LinkedIn (Dijck, 2013).

The study also shows that LinkedIn is not entirely an equal space for all users. Job titles, number of connections, and activity levels affect how much a person is seen and noticed. This condition is in accordance with the concept of renovated hierarchies of (Nasrullah, 2012), which explains that social hierarchies in the digital space remain, but in different forms. Generation Z is aware of these differences in positions and tries to adjust their self-representation strategies to still look professional and competent.

The information displayed on LinkedIn has a huge role in shaping the way others view someone professionally. Profiles, work experience, certificates, and uploads are considered to be a tangible picture of an individual's abilities. This finding is in accordance with the concept of information as reality in virtual identity theory (Nasrullah, 2012), which states that digital information does not only represent reality, but shapes reality itself. What is displayed on LinkedIn is often accepted as the reality of who a person is in a professional context.

Generation Z doesn't fully utilize LinkedIn to build an exaggerated self-image. The results of the study show that there is awareness to remain honest about their abilities. The information displayed is professionally packaged, but not completely detached from the real condition. This shows that the formation of a virtual identity on LinkedIn is a balancing process between the need to display a professional image and maintain authenticity.

The practice of using LinkedIn by Generation Z can also be understood as a form of personal branding, as explained by (Raharjo, 2020). Generation Z consciously sets the profile view, chooses the experiences that are highlighted, and maintains a fit between the image displayed and their career goals. Identity consistency is important so that the professional image built can be clearly understood by the audience, especially recruiters and potential colleagues.

The aspect of authenticity in personal branding is interpreted contextually (Banet Weiser, 2013). Authenticity is not interpreted as opening up the whole side of yourself, but rather showing the abilities and values that you really have. Generation Z strives to remain themselves, but within limits that fit LinkedIn's professional norms. Authenticity in this context is situational and tailored to professional goals (Duffy & Hund, 2020).

The value offered to the audience is the main focus in building a self-image on LinkedIn. Expertise, experience, and the ability to work together are displayed as values that distinguish individuals from other users. This approach reflects the concept of value proposition in personal branding, where individuals highlight advantages that can provide benefits to others. LinkedIn is used as a medium to show self-worth in a clear and targeted way

This discussion shows that the formation of Generation Z's virtual identity on LinkedIn does not happen spontaneously. Identity is built through the process of selecting information, adjusting to platform norms, and personal branding strategies that consider consistency, authenticity, and self-worth. LinkedIn serves as a digital space that shapes the way Generation Z understands and displays their professional identity.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that LinkedIn is interpreted by Generation Z as a strategic space in building a professional identity in the digital world. LinkedIn is not understood as a medium of free self-expression, but rather as a strategic platform to showcase skills, experience, and career direction. The identity that is built is selective and adjusted to the applicable professional norms, so not all aspects of themselves are displayed. This interpretation shows that Generation Z has a high awareness of the function of LinkedIn as a professional social space, not just a general social media. The formation of Generation Z identity on LinkedIn is done consciously and controlled. While the identities displayed are quite flexible, there are still digital rules and hierarchies that affect how a person looks and is judged. The information shared on LinkedIn has a profound effect on other people's views, so Generation Z creates profiles and communicates carefully. They not only want to look competent, but also try to be honest about their abilities so that the self-image they build is not manipulative. The practice of using LinkedIn by Generation Z also shows the conscious application of personal branding. Identity consistency, contextual authenticity meaning, and self-value prominence are important elements in building a professional image. LinkedIn is used as a means to show the excellence and value that can be offered to the world of work. Through this strategy, Generation Z seeks to build legitimacy and competitiveness in the increasingly competitive digital professional space. This study confirms that virtual identity on LinkedIn is the result of a negotiation process between identity flexibility, digital social structure, the construction of reality through information, and personal branding strategies. These findings show that professional social media functions as an active space for the formation of meaning and identity, and contributes to understanding how the younger generation builds and interprets professional identities in the digital age.

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