

Building a Professional Image: Personal Branding for Lecturers through Instagram

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how lecturers build personal branding through the Instagram social media platform. In today's digital era, the presence of lecturers is not only limited to the classroom, but also expanded into the virtual realm that allows them to reach a wider audience. Instagram was chosen because of its visual and interactive nature, allowing lecturers to display their professional identity as well as their personal side that can strengthen their connection with the public. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, data was collected through observation of lecturers' Instagram activities, analysis of uploaded content, and in-depth interviews with several active lecturers who use social media. The results of the study show that visual elements, personal narratives, and message consistency are key to building an authentic and professional image. In addition, interaction with followers also plays an important role in shaping the audience's perception and trust in the lecturer figure. This study found that personal branding on Instagram has an impact on increasing academic visibility, expanding professional networks, and a more positive public perception of the teaching profession. However, this phenomenon is also accompanied by ethical challenges such as the boundaries between personal and professional life, pressure to maintain an ideal image, and the potential for information distortion. Therefore, digital literacy and ethical awareness are important factors in this branding practice. In conclusion, Instagram can be an effective medium for lecturers in building strategic personal branding, as long as it is done with authenticity, academic value, and social responsibility. This study contributes to the development of digital communication studies in the context of higher education, and offers practical recommendations for institutions and individuals in utilizing social media professionally and meaningfully.

Keywords: Personal branding, lecturer, social media, Instagram, digital communication, professional identity, digital literacy

DOI: 10.7176/NMMC/110-03

Publication date: November 30th 2025

Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of the professional and personal lives of global society, including academics. The development of digital technology encourages lecturers not only as teachers and researchers, but also as public figures who can build their self-image through digital platforms. Instagram, as a visual-based media, has become one of the popular channels for conveying values, competencies, and professional identities to the public. This shows that the academic world is now involved in the performative space of social media (Fitriana et al., 2022).

Transformation of lecturer identity in digital space.

In this context, the identity of lecturers is no longer built exclusively through direct interaction in the classroom or scientific publications, but also through the content they display on social media. The image of lecturers as educators, researchers, and public speakers is now displayed through visual narratives, captions, and digital interactions that reflect their scientific values and personality. This process reflects an identity transformation that is actively constructed through digital media (. Instagram and its relevance in building personal branding

Instagram has its own strengths in building personal branding because of its visual, interactive, and easily accessible characteristics. For lecturers, this platform can be a strategic means to expand influence, spread ideas, and build cross-border academic networks. Through the selection of visual aesthetics, message delivery style, and upload frequency, lecturers can represent themselves according to the image they want to display (Agung Setyawan et al., 2024)

Personal branding dalam ranah akademik

Personal branding is not only a common practice in the creative industry or business, but is now an important

element in the academic world. Lecturers who are able to build a strong personal branding tend to be able to reach a wider audience, obtain collaboration opportunities, and increase the visibility of their scientific work. In this framework, personal branding is not just self-promotion, but a strategy to convey academic values to the public in a relevant and interesting way ((Asran & Udasmoro, 2020). Constructivism paradigm as the basis for analysis This study is based on the constructivism paradigm which views that identity is not something that is fixed and objective, but is constructed socially and culturally through interaction, including in the digital space. The identity of lecturers as social actors in social media is formed through the choice of narratives, symbols, and representations that they consciously display (Code & Catharines, 2015). Thus, the constructivist approach allows for a deeper analysis of how lecturers shape their self-image on Instagram.

Challenges and opportunities for lecturers in building a digital image Although Instagram provides great opportunities for lecturers in building their self-image, there are also ethical and professional challenges that must be faced. For example, how to maintain a balance between academic and personal content, and how to maintain authenticity in a media culture that tends to emphasize aesthetics and popularity. Therefore, it is important to understand how lecturers interpret and manage their identities in this digital public space Urgency and contribution of the research(Code & Catharines, 2015) This research is important because there are still limited studies that specifically highlight the personal branding strategies of lecturers on social media, especially Instagram, in the Indonesian context. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the number of lecturers who are active on social media is increasing and they play a significant role in shaping public opinion and becoming academic role models in the digital space. This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of the professional identity of lecturers in the digital era (Jacobson, 2020).

Research objectives and study direction Using a constructivist approach, this study aims to explore how lecturers build personal branding through Instagram, how they construct their professional identity, and how interactions with the audience influence the image formed. The focus of the analysis is directed at visual narratives, captions, and digital interaction patterns that reflect the academic values that are intended to be highlighted. This study is also expected to open up a discussion space on the ethics, challenges, and opportunities of building lecturer identity in the contemporary digital communication landscape.

Literature Review

This study uses three main theories to frame the analysis of police image representation in digital space, namely Stuart Hall's representation theory, Ernest Bormann's symbolic convergence, and computer-mediated communication (CMC).

1. Stuart Hall Representation Theory

According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation is the process of producing meaning through language, symbols, and cultural systems. Hall views that meaning is not inherently inherent in objects or events, but is constructed through discursive practices governed by power and ideology. In the context of social media, representation can be understood as how institutions such as the police convey certain messages through visual symbols, texts, and narratives that aim to shape public perception. Hall emphasized that media not only conveys reality, but also shapes and reproduces social meaning through the process of encoding (message delivery by institutions) and decoding (meaning by the audience). In this study, the representation process is studied from the content uploaded by the official Polda Metro Jaya account and the reactions shown by netizens on social media X.

2. Symbolic convergence theory

Ernest G. Bormann (1985) through symbolic convergence theory explains how social groups create and share meaning through collective narratives called fantasy themes. These themes unite the group's perceptions, emotions, and values towards an event or institution. When online communities respond to an issue together—whether with support, criticism, or humor—they create symbolic convergence that reflects collective views. In this study, symbolic convergence is used to explore how a shared narrative about the image of the police is formed among netizens who respond to posts about online gambling cases. Netizens' responses in the form of comments, retweets, and memes are expressions of fantasy themes that form a shared reality in digital space.

3. Computer-Mediated Communication Theory (CMC)

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory explains how social interaction takes place through digital media. According to Walther (1992), communication in digital media has characteristics such as asynchronous, anonymous, and can expand the space for public participation. In the context of this research, CMC theory is useful for understanding how institutional accounts (such as Polda Metro Jaya) interact with the public in social

media X, and how the dynamics of this communication shape or change public perceptions of the institution. The characteristics of social media X allow for open, real-time, and participatory interactions, which significantly influence the process of forming the institutional image of labor.

Methodology

This study applies a qualitative approach with a netnography method to understand how lecturers form their personal branding through the Instagram platform. The netnography method is considered relevant because it provides an opportunity for researchers to study digital activities comprehensively, including interaction patterns, self-representation, and the underlying social context (Hidayat et al., 2024). The main objects in this study include the content of lecturers' Instagram uploads, such as images, narratives in captions, use of hashtags, and interactions with followers in the comments column. The data collection process was carried out observationally without direct involvement of researchers in account activities, and data analysis was carried out using thematic coding techniques to find consistent personal branding narrative patterns (Snelson, 2022). The constructivist framework was used to interpret the data, assuming that identity is a social construction formed through symbols and interactions that take place in digital space .

2.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative design with a constructivist approach to explore how lecturers build personal branding on Instagram as part of their professional identity construction. The constructivist approach was chosen because it views social reality, including digital identity, as the result of a process of interaction and meaning that is co-constructed through symbols and communication (Beninger et al., 2021). The netnography method is used to allow researchers to observe social phenomena in depth in the context of online communities, especially on the Instagram platform used by lecturers to share their visual and verbal narratives (Kozinets, 2020). This design allows researchers to capture the context, meaning, and dynamics of lecturers' self-representation in digital spaces naturally and reflectively.

2.2 Data Collection

Data collection in this study was conducted through online observation without direct involvement of the Instagram accounts of lecturers who actively display content related to their professional identities and academic activities. The data observed included visual uploads such as photos and videos, narratives in captions, use of hashtags, and responses and conversations in the comments column. All of these digital materials were collected over a certain period of time and classified for thematic analysis. This technique allows researchers to capture the dynamics of lecturers' self-representation in a natural and authentic context without disrupting the flow of digital communication that occurs (Snelson, 2022). In addition, limited interviews were also conducted with a number of lecturers to gain a deeper contextual understanding of the motivations and strategies in forming personal branding. This strategy is in line with the principles of netnography which focuses on understanding behavior and culture in online communities (Kozinets, 2020), and is based on the constructivism paradigm which views social meaning as the result of symbolic interactions that take place in digital spaces (Beninger et al., 2021).

2.3 Data Analysis

Data yang telah dikumpulkan dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola, makna, dan representasi identitas yang muncul dalam konten Instagram para dosen. Analisis ini dilakukan melalui proses koding terbuka, aksial, dan selektif guna mengelompokkan elemen-elemen visual dan naratif ke dalam tema-tema yang relevan dengan personal branding. Setiap data ditelaah secara mendalam untuk menangkap nuansa simbolik dan konstruksi makna yang ditampilkan dalam konteks sosial digital. Proses analisis dilakukan secara iteratif, yakni melalui pembacaan ulang data, penyesuaian tema, serta triangulasi dengan hasil wawancara terbatas yang mendukung temuan dari observasi daring. Teknik ini memungkinkan peneliti menangkap pemaknaan yang kompleks dan tidak langsung dalam konteks representasi diri di media sosial (Snelson, 2022). Seluruh proses analisis dilakukan berdasarkan prinsip paradigma konstruktivis yang menekankan bahwa identitas sosial dibentuk dan dinegosiasikan melalui interaksi dan simbol yang digunakan dalam komunikasi digital (Beninger et al., 2021).

2.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data in this study, the researcher applied a number of strategies commonly used in qualitative studies. Validity was achieved through triangulation of data sources, namely by comparing data from observations of Instagram content and the results of limited interviews with informants. In

addition, the researcher also conducted member checking, namely asking for clarification or confirmation from informants regarding the researcher's initial interpretation of the implied meaning in their uploaded content. This strategy aims to ensure that the meaning read by the researcher is in accordance with the true intention of the informant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To increase reliability, the researcher compiled digital field notes, systematically documented the coding process, and maintained consistency in the analysis process. The application of an audit trail was also carried out to track the entire interpretation process so that the analysis could be traced and replicated in a similar context (Noble & Smith, 2015). All of these efforts were carried out by considering the principles of ethics and openness in digital media-based qualitative research.

Discussion

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Observation results of several lecturers' Instagram accounts show that social media is used strategically to form a professional image. Lecturers not only share academic activities such as teaching, researching, or speaking at seminars, but also display a personal side that shows a balance between work and personal life. This is in line with the findings of Duffy and Pooley (2020) that academic identities in digital media tend to be multifaceted, where professional personas are combined with more humanistic narrative elements.

Visual narratives built through photo uploads, inspirational captions, and hashtag selection show branding awareness in building credibility in the eyes of the public. Some accounts even consistently use certain colors, symbols, and language styles, reflecting efforts to build a consistent digital identity. This strategy supports Barbour and Marshall's (2020) opinion that individuals on social media form curated personas to build certain values in front of the audience.

In addition, interactions with followers such as replying to comments or greeting students openly are also part of the formation of relational identity. This process shows that personal branding is not only about promoting oneself, but also building social relationships based on trust. This is consistent with the constructivist view that identity is formed in symbolic interaction and continuous social negotiation (Beninger et al., 2021). From a netnographic perspective, it was found that the content that received the most public attention was content that combined academic achievement with narratives that touched on the emotional or inspirational side. Posts about student success, struggles in research, or self-reflection as an educator received a high response, indicating that the audience was not only interested in academic information, but also the personal values that accompanied it.

Thus, Instagram has become a symbolic space for lecturers to dynamically construct self-narratives. This platform allows the creation of an identity that is not only based on scientific authority, but also emotional closeness and social involvement. This representation is in line with the theoretical framework of digital persona and identity construction in online spaces, where users actively construct self-meaning based on audience interactions and expectations (Sutherland et al., 2022)

This finding strengthens the understanding that lecturer personal branding is not just a digital trend, but also a form of adaptation of professional identity in the contemporary communication ecosystem that is increasingly open and connected. The process of identity construction through social media reflects the transformation of the role of academics from just being teachers to public figures who shape discourse and build relationships through digital media.

3.1 Strategic Communication Through Digital Platforms

The use of Instagram by lecturers shows a consciously designed communication strategy to build a professional image in the digital space. They do not just share their daily activities, but also create messages that reflect their values, expertise, and academic contributions to society. Posts that show involvement in seminars, research collaborations, or scientific publications are delivered with an attractive visual style and narrative that is easy for a wide audience to understand. This strategy reflects a form of planned communication that aims to expand the reach of the audience, while increasing personal credibility as a relevant and active academic (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2020).

Furthermore, platforms such as Instagram allow lecturers to build two-way relationships with their audience. Comments, direct messages, and other interactive features are used to build dialogue, not just one-way monologues. This interaction not only strengthens audience engagement but also emphasizes the lecturer's position as an open and responsive public figure. Strategic communication through social media shows that professional image is not only formed by the content shared, but also by how academics respond to

audiences and consistently build digital relationships (Abidin, 2021). Thus, social media becomes an effective communication tool to build trust, expand influence, and strengthen the professional identity of lecturers in the digital era.

3.2 Deliberative Practices and Emancipatory Communication

In practice, many lecturers use Instagram not only as a medium to promote themselves, but also as a deliberative space—a place where they convey critical thinking, educational values, and an invitation to think reflectively. Through narrative and contemplative captions, lecturers often share life experiences, academic struggles, or views on social and educational issues. Content like this shows deliberative communication that aims to invite the audience to have an open and in-depth dialogue. This practice shows that social media can be an arena for the exchange of rational and inclusive ideas, not just a space to show off achievements (Sutherland et al., 2022).

Moreover, the communication conducted by lecturers on Instagram also reflects an emancipatory dimension, where they try to free their audience from a narrow or passive perspective on the world of education and knowledge. Lecturers use this digital space to expand access to knowledge, voice diverse perspectives, and fight for the values of social justice in an academic context. By sharing critical thinking and encouraging the active participation of their followers, they carry out a social function as educators who not only teach in class, but also educate the public through digital media. This practice is in line with the spirit of emancipatory communication that positions media as a tool for transforming consciousness (Habermas in Barbour & Marshall, 2020), while strengthening the role of lecturers as agents of social change in the digital ecosystem.

3.3 Challenges and Resilience in Communication Practices

In an effort to build personal branding through Instagram, lecturers are not free from various challenges, both technical, social, and psychological. Some of them face difficulties in maintaining content consistency, managing time amidst academic activities, and facing the risk of negative interpretations from the public towards their uploads. In addition, the existence of social norms that limit academic self-expression in public spaces is also an obstacle in itself. However, resilience is seen in the way lecturers continue to adjust their communication strategies, strengthen digital literacy, and maintain the integrity of academic values amidst the pressures of social media culture that demands performativity. This adaptation process reflects their ability to maintain authenticity while building a relevant presence in the digital space, as explained by Veletsianos and Kimmons (2020) that modern academics are required not only to be intellectually capable, but also flexible in communicating across platforms.

3.4 Collective Learning and Digital Literacy

Lecturers' participation in social media such as Instagram is not only related to the formation of self-image, but also opens up space for collective learning processes. Through digital interactions, lecturers exchange experiences, ideas, and effective communication strategies in building academic credibility. Comment spaces, collaboration features, and reflective posts become a means of informal knowledge exchange that forms a mutually supportive digital community. This process reflects that social media can be an educational medium that prioritizes horizontal dialogue, not just one-way communication from lecturers to the public. As stated by Abidin (2021), digital engagement enables the creation of dynamic and cross-disciplinary social learning networks.

In addition, the activeness of lecturers on Instagram also encourages increased digital literacy, both technically and critically. They learn to understand the dynamics of algorithms, choose appropriate visual platforms, and compose ethical and responsible messages. More importantly, they develop critical awareness of the risks of disinformation, visual manipulation, and privacy challenges in the digital era. Thus, the involvement of lecturers on social media not only shows the ability to adapt to technological changes but also reflects the transformation of the role of academics as educators and competent communicators in the digital ecosystem. This supports Snellson's (2022) findings that digital competence is now an integral part of academic professional practice in the 21st century.

3.5 A Conceptual Model of Collaborative Digital Communication

Conceptual Model of Collaborative Digital Communication relevant to the use of Instagram by lecturers for personal branding and professional interaction:

1. Digital Persona Construction

Lecturers actively shape their professional self-image through visual narratives and personal messages curated

on digital platforms.

2. Strategic Audience Engagement

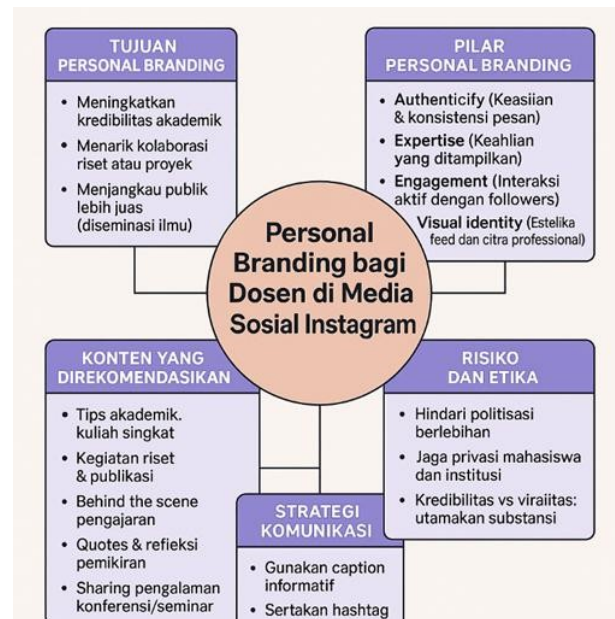
Communication is directed at building meaningful audience engagement through interaction, open dialogue, and educational content.

3. Collective Knowledge Sharing

Social media is utilized as a space for sharing knowledge and experiences between academics and between lecturers and the public.

4. Reflexive Digital Literacy

Lecturers develop critical and ethical digital skills, and are able to adapt to the dynamics of digital communication reflectively.



The “Personal Branding for Lecturers on Instagram” diagram presents five key elements that are interrelated in building a professional image of lecturers on digital platforms. This process begins with the main objective, namely improving academic reputation, expanding collaboration opportunities, and disseminating knowledge to the public. Lecturers’ personal branding is built through four main pillars, namely authenticity, highlighting expertise, active engagement with the audience, and a professional visual appearance. Lecturers are advised to share educational content regularly, such as teaching tips, research documentation, and reflective thinking. Communication is strengthened through the use of informative captions, choosing the right hashtags, and utilizing visual content such as short videos. Even so, ethical aspects remain a primary concern, such as maintaining privacy, avoiding political content, and ensuring that content quality is not sacrificed for the sake of popularity alone.

3.6 Future Development Opportunities

Future development opportunities in the study of police image representation on social media, especially through the X platform (formerly Twitter), are very wide open considering the rapid development of digital communication technology. One promising direction of development is the integration of netnography methods with big data analysis approaches and the use of machine learning in processing and classifying public narratives. This combination of methods will strengthen the validity of the findings and accelerate the process of identifying representation patterns that emerge massively and dynamically.

In an academic context, this research opens up space for the development of more contextual and applicable communication theories to the social media practices of state institutions. For example, Stuart Hall's Representation theory, Symbolic Convergence, and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) can be further explored in the scheme of virtual social interaction between institutions and the public. This understanding allows for an expansion of discourse on how institutions such as the police form an image through digital communication that is full of symbols and cultural connotations.

Another opportunity worth exploring is cross-disciplinary collaboration between communication science, data science, social psychology, and criminology. This multidisciplinary synergy can produce a more comprehensive approach in studying public perceptions of state institutions, not only from a narrative and symbolic perspective, but also from the online behavior patterns of society. Future research can link digital interaction patterns with changes in public behavior towards institutional trust.

In addition, the development of platform features such as AI-generated content, personalization algorithms, and content filters opens up new challenges as well as opportunities to examine how representations can be constructed and manipulated. This requires a more adaptive digital ethnographic approach, including exploring how bots, anonymous accounts, or political buzzers influence public perceptions of the police image. This aspect is important in understanding the extent to which the narratives circulating represent authentic public opinion or engineered constructions.

In practical terms, this research can be used as a starting point for developing digital branding training modules for police institutions and other government institutions. The module can include strategies for building a positive image, digital communication ethics, and mitigating image crises on social media. This effort supports institutional reform in the increasingly digitalized realm of public communication. Furthermore, future research can expand the reach to other platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube to compare representation patterns between social media. Each platform has different demographic, algorithmic, and communication style characteristics. This allows for a richer analysis of the institution's digital communication strategy, as well as public preferences and responses in receiving the image of state authority.

Finally, development opportunities are also open to the aspect of public participation in shaping institutional representation. Research can focus on the role of netizens in creating alternative or counter narratives to the official image built by institutions. Thus, representation is no longer seen as a one-way process, but rather as a dynamic arena for contestation of meaning between the state and netizens in the digital space.

Conclusion

This study confirms that social media, especially Instagram, has become a strategic space for lecturers in building and strengthening personal branding. Through the use of visual features such as feeds, stories, and reels, lecturers can represent their academic expertise, professional values, and personal closeness to their audiences, including students, fellow academics, and the general public. The most effective branding strategies are found in content consistency, message authenticity, and active interactions that build a credible and inspiring image.

The findings show that lecturers' personal branding not only expands academic influence in the digital realm but also increases competitiveness and public trust in the teaching profession. In the context of digitalization of higher education, the presence of lecturers on social media contributes to the transformation of academic communication that is more open, participatory, and humanistic. However, challenges such as the risk of disinformation, the limits of professionalism, and the pressure to appear perfect are also parts that must be managed ethically and reflectively. Therefore, strong digital literacy, ethical awareness, and institutional policies that support the positive use of social media for academics are needed. This research opens up space for further development, including the exploration of a personal branding model based on scientific values and local wisdom that is unique in the context of lecturers in Indonesia.

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