

Bridging professional identity and digital platforms: a comprehensive study of self-marketing and career development

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Abstract— Self-marketing has gained particular relevance in the digital age, where personal branding has become a crucial component of professional self-realization. This study adopts a comprehensive approach that combines theoretical analysis of self-marketing with empirical data collected through an online survey conducted among students from higher education institutions in KRG. The article delineates the key elements of self-marketing essential for developing a personal brand and the tools for their implementation. Depending on specific objectives and chosen methodologies, the strategies of self-marketing are categorized into distinct types, ensuring flexibility and adaptability in their application. Particular emphasis is placed on digital platforms as vital channels for promoting personal brands, where the integration of professional and personal identities within the media space is increasingly evident. The research findings synthesize and systematize the primary digital platforms utilized for personal brand development while identifying barriers to implementing self-marketing strategies and addressing ethical considerations in personal brand promotion. It is demonstrated that active self-marketing facilitates professional self-realization but necessitates a mindful approach to preserve authenticity. A marketing study was conducted to empirically assess the effectiveness of self-marketing, analyzing its impact on student's career prospects and readiness for professional self-realization. This research identified the key factors contributing to personal brand development and formulated practical recommendations for leveraging self-marketing in professional growth. The article introduces new evidence underscoring the significance of digital platforms for building personal brands among young students. The study's hypothesis posits that the effectiveness of self-marketing strategies depends on awareness of their influence on career prospects and the selection of appropriate tools. This work's theoretical contribution lies in advancing knowledge of self-marketing as a personal marketing strategy, while its practical value is reflected in the findings' applicability for improving career positioning. This empirical investigation provides a

foundation for further analysis with an expanded sample and the exploration of the algorithmic effects of digital platforms on content visibility.

Keywords— Self-Marketing Strategies, Personal Branding, Digital Platforms, Professional Identity Integration, Career Development, Media Space Dynamics, Algorithmic Content Visibility, Ethics of Digital Self-Promotion.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of digital technologies, self-marketing has emerged as a critically important tool for developing personal brands. It enables professionals to build their reputations and engage actively with their audience, fostering trust and recognition. With the proliferation of social media platforms and online tools such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube, establishing a personal brand has evolved to unprecedented dimensions. Today, professionals can showcase their skills and achievements on a global scale, irrespective of their field of expertise, by leveraging content marketing, effective communication strategies, and creative approaches to capture attention. Digital platforms have significantly expanded opportunities for individual visibility, making brand-building accessible to all. This, in turn, stimulates competition and fosters personal growth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies reveal a growing interest in self-marketing as a pivotal instrument for personal brand development, an



increasingly relevant phenomenon in the digital era. For instance, (Kytyskai, L.I. (2016)) examines the theoretical aspects of self-marketing, focusing on its role as a socio-economic phenomenon that facilitates the creation of a positive image and enhances an individual's reputation in the labor market. The author also explores the concept of self-marketing and identifies its structural components, which strengthen personal branding by applying appropriate marketing tools. Other researchers, such as (Novikova, et al. (2022)), adopt a systematic approach to personal brand formation by analyzing influential factors, including psychological, individual, behavioral, and identity levels. They propose a framework encompassing the selection of tools, specific strategies, and measurable criteria that can enhance the effectiveness of the self-marketing strategy, particularly within digital platforms. This approach is particularly relevant for managing personal brands on social media, where visibility and publication frequency are critical determinants of success.

Additionally, scholars such as (Uyari, M. (2019)) explore the role of web analytics in supporting personal brand promotion. This analysis highlights the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of digital tools, such as web platforms and social media, in amplifying individual branding efforts and achieving professional recognition. (Dominique-Ferreira, et al. (2019)) emphasize the significance of self-marketing in the job search process. Their research demonstrates that personal brand development plays a pivotal role in enhancing the employability of graduates in the labor market. By employing quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the role of self-marketing, their findings confirm that effective personal branding contributes to employers' stronger perception of graduates as valuable human capital. (Shevchenko, et al. (2023)) investigate the factors influencing the success of personal brand creation. They identify positive aspects—such as authenticity, regular activity, and adaptability—and negative factors, such as the absence of a clear strategy and rigidity in approach, which may hinder branding efforts. A critical analysis highlights that self-marketing is a multifaceted instrument, offering significant potential when applied as a tailored and adaptive strategy. In the digital era context, it is particularly effective in managing personal branding through social media and online platforms. The adaptability of self-marketing ensures its relevance across diverse professional environments and underlines its importance for individuals striving to establish a strong and authentic personal presence in competitive marketplaces.

III. OBJECTIVE AND TASKS

The objective of this article is to explore the role of self-marketing in the development and strengthening of personal branding. It also seeks to identify key approaches and strategies for effectively utilizing self-marketing within the digital environment. The primary tasks include analyzing the fundamental elements of self-marketing in the context of personal brand formation, systematizing various strategies, and

examining the role of digital platforms in brand promotion. Additionally, the study aims to conduct a marketing analysis to evaluate the impact of self-marketing on students' career prospects and assess their preparedness for professional self-realization. The findings will facilitate the development of practical recommendations for effectively applying self-marketing strategies in professional growth and career development.

IV. RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods for studying self-marketing and personal brand development in the digital age involve well-known data collection and analysis techniques and tools specifically adapted for this study. Data was gathered through an online survey among students who viewed self-marketing as a key element of their professional self-realization. The survey included over 300 participants and was carried out over two months, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives on how digital platforms impact their career prospects. The empirical foundation of the study was based on the results of questionnaires and interviews, providing a solid basis for evaluating the influence of self-marketing on young people's career opportunities within the context of the digital economy.

V. RESULTS

In the digital era, approaches to professional self-identification have undergone significant changes. In an age of information overload, professional competence and achievements alone no longer guarantee success. The ability to effectively present one's skills, accomplishments, and experiences through digital communication channels has become increasingly important. Self-marketing has emerged as a critical tool for strategically promoting unique professional attributes, shaping an individual's image, enhancing recognition, and providing a competitive edge in the job market. Self-marketing is a deliberate process of showcasing one's skills, achievements, and personal qualities to build a positive professional image and reputation. A personal brand, in turn, is the outcome of this process, representing a set of perceptions that a target audience forms about an individual, including their unique traits and professional values (Avery, J., & Greenwald, R. (2023)). As a tool, self-marketing is central to creating and maintaining a personal brand. Effectively communicating one's professional knowledge, values, and accomplishments through digital platforms leads to developing a recognizable brand that fosters trust and loyalty among the audience. In today's digital world, self-marketing and personal branding have evolved significantly compared to the early 2000s. With the growing influence of social media and digital platforms, creating a personal brand has become more accessible and global. While traditional communication channels such as mass media and personal networks were dominant in the 2000s, individuals today, in 2024, can build their reputations online, receiving instant feedback. Digital platforms enable individuals to

become visible and recognizable on a global scale, regardless of their professional field. (Binda, J., & Bolibruk, L. (2022)) However, this also brings new challenges: the need for constant reputation management, quick adaptation to changing conditions, and intense competition for attention (Kanasan, et al. (2024)). These transformations highlight the importance of active participation in the digital space, where individuals can effectively promote their values and professional achievements, build strong connections with their audience, and secure competitive advantages today. Table 1 outlines the key elements of self-marketing from the perspective of personal brand development.

TABLE 1. ELEMENTS OF SELF-MARKETING AND TOOLS FOR THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

| Self-Marketing Elements | Tools/Techniques | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Online Platforms | Social media networks (LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter)) | Establishing and promoting a personal brand through active participation and consistent content sharing. |
| Personal Website/Blog | WordPress, Wix, Medium | Creating original content to showcase expertise, share knowledge, and provide practical case studies. |
| Content Marketing | Articles, videos, podcasts | Regular publication of high-value content reflecting professional activities and personal qualities. |
| Networking | Professional events, conferences, online groups, and other interactive events | Expanding professional networks through direct contacts and participation in industry-specific events. |
| Emotional Intelligence | Self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation | Enhancing communication effectiveness and fostering interpersonal connections for personal branding. |
| Personal Branding | Unified visual identity (logos, colors, style) | Creating a recognizable brand image to build audience trust and loyalty. |
| Lifelong Learning and Professional Development | Online courses, certifications, training programs | Continuously improving qualifications to maintain competitiveness and professional growth. |
| Reputation Management | Reviews, recommendations, case studies, portfolios | Demonstrating achievements and leveraging positive client feedback to maintain a strong professional image. |
| Crisis Adaptability | Adapting strategies to market dynamics (economic downturns, industry shifts) | Flexibly adjusting marketing strategies to navigate challenges and seize emerging opportunities. |
| Positioning | Unique Selling Proposition (USP) | Defining and promoting one's unique value to stand out in the market. |

Source: Compiled by the author based on [Kytskai, L.I. (2016), Doody, Sarah. (2022), Merdin Ugur, Ezgi. (2021), Manai, et al. (2015)]

A. Self-Marketing Strategies and Challenges in the Digital Age

All the elements discussed contribute to forming a self-marketing strategy, (Krykavskyy, et al. (2022)) advancing personal branding, and strengthening professional reputation. For instance, online platforms enable communication with audiences, personal websites or blogs serve as a professional's digital portfolio, content marketing enhances visibility through valuable content, and networking builds professional

connections. Emotional intelligence improves communication effectiveness, (Abdulla, D. F., et al. (2019)) personal branding creates a cohesive image, lifelong learning boosts competence, reputation management builds trust, adaptability demonstrates resilience, and positioning highlights uniqueness. A self-marketing strategy is a long-term plan aimed at systematically promoting a personal brand through deliberate actions and the use of appropriate tools and communication channels. Unlike self-marketing as a one-time activity, a strategy focuses on defining key goals, (Tofiq, A. M., Qadir, A., & Mohammed, A. (2021)) establishing consistent actions to achieve professional and reputational outcomes, and ensuring adaptability to external changes. This approach fosters sustainable growth and continuous personal brand development over time.

Self-marketing strategies can be divided into several types based on goals and chosen methods:

- 1) **Expert Marketing Strategy:** Focuses on showcasing deep expertise in a niche field and participating in specialized professional communities. (Curry, B., & Moutinho, L. (1991))
- 2) **Image-Focused Marketing Strategy:** Aims to create a recognizable brand that evokes positive associations among a broad audience. (Safavi, F. (1996))
- 3) **Digital Marketing Strategy:** Leverages internet resources, social media, and platforms to promote a personal brand to the fullest extent. (Mandal, P., & Joshi, N. (2017))

However, despite the broad potential of self-marketing strategies, there are several challenges. (Binda, J. (2017)) One major obstacle is information overload, making it difficult to capture an audience's attention. Additionally, intense competition among professionals complicates efforts to stand out. Limited knowledge of digital tools can also restrict the ability to utilize online promotion effectively. Psychological barriers such as fear of criticism, lack of self-confidence, or undervaluation of achievements may further hinder progress. In the modern world, self-marketing strategies require constant adaptation to changing technologies and market conditions. Despite existing challenges, they remain powerful tools for building successful careers and achieving professional growth.

B. Building a Personal Brand

Developing a personal brand requires ongoing self-improvement, skill enhancement, and the creation of relevant content. Successful professionals recognize the importance of consistent interaction with their audience, sharing new knowledge and achievements to reinforce their professional values. In the fast-paced digital environment, (Harris, L., & Rae, A. (2011)) where information spreads rapidly, stable and high-quality content helps maintain audience interest and foster a positive image. The primary tools for personal brand development are social media and professional online platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms allow individuals to create content that resonates with their target audience while showcasing professional expertise through posts, blogs, videos, or other formats. For example, LinkedIn enables users to highlight their skills, experience, and accomplishments while connecting with potential partners or

clients. Positioning oneself as an expert in a specific field and actively engaging in discussions or responding to audience inquiries strengthens a personal brand and enhances authority. (Bliss, J., & Wildrick, M. (2005))

C. *The Role of Digital Platforms*

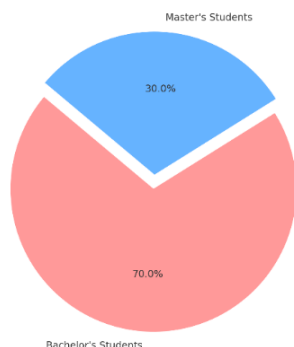
Digital platforms provide effective tools for creating and promoting a unique personal image, but each platform has its own features, advantages, limitations, and challenges. (Arab, H. R., & Qadir, A. M. A. (2024)) Choosing the right platform should be based on professional goals, audience characteristics, and personal objectives. Each platform's strengths and weaknesses must be carefully considered to ensure effective branding.

VI. RESEARCH FINDINGS

To explore these concepts, a marketing study titled "The Impact of Self-Marketing on Students' Career Prospects: Assessing Readiness for Professional Self-Realization" was conducted via Google Forms. The goal was to evaluate students' understanding of self-marketing, the tools they use to develop their personal brand, how this knowledge influences their career outlook, and which digital platforms they prefer for branding efforts. The study involved 310 participants aged 20 to 37, including bachelor's (70%) and master's (30%) students from higher education institutions in KRG. This diverse sample offered valuable insights into how students at different educational levels perceive and apply self-marketing strategies to their professional development.

Table (2) highlights the unique advantages and challenges of major digital platforms for personal branding. LinkedIn excels in professional networking but is limited to specific industries, while Instagram and TikTok dominate visual storytelling and creative content, albeit with high competition and dependency on algorithms. Platforms like Facebook and YouTube cater to broader audiences and in-depth content but demand significant resources for engagement. X (formerly Twitter) supports rapid communication and thought leadership but is constrained by format limitations. Success across platforms depends on tailored content strategies, consistent branding, and active audience engagement, with metrics like followers, interactions, and profile views serving as indicators of effectiveness.

CHART 1.: EDUCATIONAL LEVELS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY



Source: Compiled by the author based on research findings.

TABLE 1: DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR PERSONAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT

| Platform | Advantages | Limitations and Constraints | Specific Applications | Effectiveness Criteria |
|----------------------|---|--|---|--------------------------------|
| LinkedIn | - Professional audience | - Narrow focus on professional sectors | - Ideal for professional networking | - Number of connections |
| | - Opportunity to publish expert content | - High competition in popular fields | - Clear and professional profile setup | - Engagement with content |
| | - SEO support for profiles | - Limited appeal for mass markets or creative industries | | - Profile views |
| Instagram | - Visually appealing | - Frequent algorithm changes | - Building emotional connections with audiences through visual storytelling | - Number of followers |
| | - Suitable for creative industries | - High competition, requiring consistent activity | - Engaging with audiences through visual content | - Post engagement |
| | - Effective use of stories and videos | - Strong dependency on visual content | | |
| Facebook | - Broad audience reach | - High dependency on paid advertisements | - Creating business pages and community engagement | - Group activity |
| | - Integration with non-profile users | - Less popular among younger demographics | | - Engagement with content |
| | - Group support for interaction | | | - Participation in discussions |
| X (formerly Twitter) | - Rapid publishing | - Character limit restrictions | - Effective for expert discussions and news sharing | - Number of followers |
| | - Supports professional dialogues | - Not suitable for visual-heavy content | | - Replies and interactions |
| | - Use of hashtags for visibility | - Limited format for personalization | | - Responsiveness |
| YouTube | - Video provides in-depth connections | - Requires substantial resources for high-quality content production | - Effective for educational and tutorial content creation | - Video views |
| | - Supports diverse | - High competition | | - Viewer engagement |

| Platform | Advantages | Limitations and Constraints | Specific Applications | Effectiveness Criteria |
|----------|--|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| | content formats | | | (likes, comments) |
| | - Facilitates sharing of educational materials | | | |
| TikTok | - Rapid popularity growth | - Constant demand for fresh, engaging short content | - Best suited for creative, informal, and youthful content | - Video views |
| | - Quick sharing of viral content | - Limited options for long-form or professional branding | | - Recommendations and follower growth |
| | - Appeals to younger audiences | | | |

Source: Compiled by the author based on [Kytskai, L.I. (2016), Doody, Sarah. (2022), Merdin Ugur, Ezgi. (2021), Manai, et al. (2015)]

Over 80% of respondents (82%) demonstrated a strong understanding of the concept of "self-marketing" and its essence. Only 18% indicated that they had heard of the term but were unsure of its exact definition. This high level of awareness highlights the widespread adoption of the concept among students, likely due to its inclusion in educational curricula or its general popularity among young people.

When asked, "Do you use social media to build your personal brand?" 65% of undergraduate students responded positively, with the majority being third- and fourth-year students. Additionally, 77% of master's students confirmed active use of social media. This trend reflects the increasing importance of professional self-presentation at higher levels of education, driven by the demands of specialization and career advancement.

Among the tools for promoting and developing a personal brand, students highlighted the following:

Professional Resume: The most popular choice, selected by 50% of respondents, emphasizing its importance for formal representation in the job market.

Portfolio of Work: chosen by 42%, which is especially valuable for professions requiring demonstrations of skills and projects.

Blogs or Articles: These are used by 36% to enhance their online visibility and establish a name in their field.

Video Content: Preferred by 32%, particularly popular among young professionals who create visual materials.

Participation in Professional Events and Public Speaking: Selected by 26% and 20%, respectively, as important self-marketing tools.

In response to the question, "How do you rate your presentation skills?" The distribution of answers was as follows:

Excellent: 20% of respondents were highly confident in their abilities.

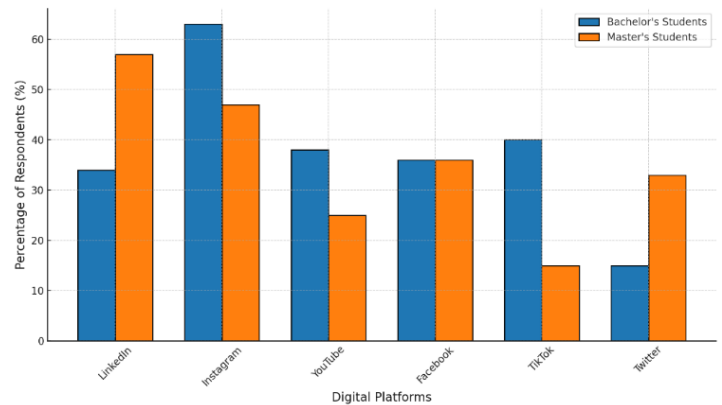
Good: 50% rated their skills positively but saw room for

improvement.

Satisfactory: 22% felt their skills were adequate but expressed a desire to grow further.

Needs Significant Improvement: 8% acknowledged a substantial need for development, highlighting gaps in their preparation for self-presentation. The study's results regarding the use of digital platforms for personal brand development are visually represented in Chart 2.

CHART 2.: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION: "WHICH DIGITAL PLATFORMS DO YOU USE FOR PERSONAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT?"



Source: Compiled by the author based on research findings.

A. Analysis of Social Media Platforms for Personal Brand Development:

The data presented in Chart 2 highlights which social platforms are most popular among students at different educational levels (bachelor's and master's) for developing their personal brands. The findings reveal clear trends in platform preferences based on each group's unique needs and communication tools.

LinkedIn is the most popular platform among master's students (57%), as it provides professional opportunities for networking and sharing academic or career achievements. Conversely, LinkedIn is less commonly used by bachelor's students (34%), likely because this group is less focused on professional networking at their current stage and does not yet see LinkedIn as a key platform for personal branding.

For bachelor's students, Instagram stands out as the most popular platform (63%), reflecting their preference for visual self-expression and easy audience engagement. Among master's students, Instagram is less popular (47%), likely because they are more focused on professional platforms.

Bachelor's students also actively use YouTube (38%), which suggests a growing interest in creating video content for self-presentation. However, master's students use YouTube less frequently (25%), possibly due to the time and technical skills required to produce high-quality videos.

Facebook is more popular among master's students (36%), likely because it supports professional pages and group interactions. Meanwhile, TikTok is widely used by bachelor's students (40%), reflecting its popularity among younger users. However, master's students rarely use TikTok (15%), as it is

considered less relevant for professional branding.

(X) formally Twitter, is relatively popular among master's students (33%) because of its functionality for sharing news and professional opinions. Bachelor's students use Twitter less frequently (15%), indicating that this platform is not a priority during the early stages of professional development.

B. Challenges in Using Digital Platforms for Personal Branding

The survey results indicate that the choice of digital platforms varies by education level and reflects different needs for professional branding. LinkedIn is the top choice for master's students due to their active involvement in professional environments, while bachelor's students prefer more entertainment-focused platforms like Instagram and TikTok, reflecting their early stage of career development.

Several challenges were identified in using digital platforms for personal branding:

- 1) **Lack of Experience:** Among the respondents, 45% (135 individuals) noted that insufficient knowledge and skills limit their ability to use digital platforms for building and promoting their brand effectively. This issue is especially prominent for new users unfamiliar with platform algorithms, content strategies, and audience engagement methods, which are critical for success in the digital space.
- 2) **Difficulty Maintaining Activity:** About 30% of respondents (90 individuals) reported struggling to create and publish content consistently. Maintaining an active presence on platforms requires time and commitment, and a lack of regular content reduces audience engagement and limits the growth of a personal brand.
- 3) **Limited Resources:** A significant 28% (84 individuals) admitted that a lack of time and financial resources restricts their ability to invest in their brand. High-quality content, hiring professionals, and advertising often require financial investments that are not always accessible to students or young professionals.
- 4) **Content Saturation and Competition:** Approximately 22% of respondents (66 individuals) highlighted that the large volume of users and content on platforms makes it challenging to stand out and capture the audience's attention. In such an oversaturated information space, users must adopt unique approaches and innovative strategies to differentiate themselves, which requires additional effort and creativity.

The key difficulties faced by users reflect a multifaceted problem: the need for a combination of experience, consistent activity, resources, and strategic thinking. These factors are essential for effectively leveraging digital platforms to build a strong personal brand.

VII. DISCUSSION

This article highlights the importance of self-marketing as a key tool for developing a personal brand in the digital age. It examines the fundamental elements that contribute to personal

brand formation and analyzes the role of digital platforms in this process. A marketing study was conducted to assess the impact of self-marketing (Jenei, S., et al. (2024).) on students' career prospects and their readiness for professional self-realization. The findings indicate that self-marketing significantly influences building a personal brand, particularly among young people aspiring to advance in their careers. Our research, consistent with the conclusions of other studies, confirms that digital platforms such as LinkedIn and Instagram are essential tools for showcasing professional qualities and achievements in the digital space. These results align with prior studies emphasizing the role of social networks (Zhou, L., et al. (2007)) in shaping professional image and reputation.

The results also suggest the need for further exploration of the ethical aspects of self-marketing and the psychological effects of long-term self-promotion on digital platforms. Future research could focus on identifying optimal self-marketing strategies that preserve authenticity and avoid negative impacts on users' emotional well-being. One of the main limitations of this study is its focus on a student sample, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other social groups. Additionally, the study did not include a detailed analysis of social media algorithms and their effects on content visibility, which could play a critical role in the effectiveness of self-marketing strategies. Future research should expand the sample and consider the impact of platform algorithms (James, T. L et. Al. (2006)) for a deeper understanding of self-marketing effectiveness in digital environments. Self-marketing is a valuable tool for modern professional development. However, its effective application requires a deep understanding, caution, and balance to achieve positive outcomes both in professional contexts and at a personal level.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Self-marketing has become an important means of enhancing professional competitiveness and achieving personal and career goals. The growth of digital technologies and the widespread use of social media have simplified access to broad audiences, allowing individuals to share information about their brands quickly. This is especially relevant for students who, at the start of their careers, face challenges such as intense competition and limited experience. The study identified several self-marketing strategies that can be adapted depending on individual goals, tools, and methods. This flexibility allows users to personalize their strategies for achieving specific outcomes. The students surveyed demonstrated varying levels of awareness regarding tools and techniques for promoting their brands. The survey confirmed that students actively use digital platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook for self-marketing and personal brand development. These platforms offer flexibility in content creation and provide tools for analyzing results and refining strategies. However, challenges related to the constant updates to platform algorithms, which affect content visibility, were also noted. One limitation of this study is its focus on a student audience, which prevents the generalization of findings

to other social groups. Future research is recommended to consider the algorithmic effects of digital platforms to evaluate the effectiveness of self-marketing strategies more accurately. The results of this study provide valuable insights into the features and trends of self-marketing as a tool for personal brand development in the digital age. They also lay the groundwork for further research and practical recommendations in this field.

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