Research Article

Leveraging on social media in curating strategic content for professional digital persona in job seeking

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 10 Sep 2024 Accepted: 6 May 2025	With the advent of social media, many businesses are increasingly using the digital platforms in their daily operations, including in the recruitment process. Specifically, companies are utilizing social media to cybervet and validate the applicants. However, there is lack of research on curating social media content for professional digital persona among job seekers in Malaysia. Thus, this study aims to explore on how social media personal branding strategies can nurture future-ready talents in Malaysia to gain better career opportunities. Specifically, this study adopted a qualitative research approach in exploring the research objective and a total of 12 informants were recruited. The findings revealed that effective personal branding on social media significantly enhances the employability of job seekers by showcasing their skills, experiences, and professional values. Informants reported that strategic curation of social media profiles, including consistent posting of industry-related content and engaging in professional networks, contributed to greater visibility and credibility in the job market. Thus, this study expands the literature on strategic personal branding and employability for Malaysian job seekers, demonstrating how strategic social media content curation can offer better career opportunities. It also emphasizes the importance of social media literacy in today's job market, and to integrate digital branding strategies in career development programs and higher education curricula.

Keywords: content creation, professional digital persona, social media, self-presentation, job seeking

INTRODUCTION

As the world becomes increasingly digital and hypermobile, social media networks play an important role in communicating with others. Social media offers a virtual space for users to post content about themselves, daily musings, and other kinds of information. It is used to connect with other users online, including family members, co-workers, business partners and friends. This overlap of connection further blurs the lines between work and private life, altering individual's perceptions of what is public and private (Fieseler et al., 2014, p. 154). Recently, social media has also become an integral tool in the business world, where it is utilized both internally and externally in a workplace, making it common for professional and personal identities to overlap in the communication process (Rizzuti, 2020). Moreover, the advanced features and real-time

communication capabilities of social media are helpful in facilitating the recruitment process to attract potential candidates (Marin & Nila, 2021). Previously, the recruitment process involved traditional instruments such as application forms, advertising vacancies in local newspapers, recruitment consultants and more. However, Marin and Nila (2021) noted that companies are now using social media networks to post job vacancies and hunt for new employees.

More importantly, companies are increasingly using social media for comprehensive validation and background checks, a practice known as cybervetting. According to Walrave et al. (2022), cybervetting is referred to as when companies view applicants' social media profiles and public information found online as part of their information validation. Companies or future employers use these platforms to obtain insights into the applicant's background. It provides a more holistic view of the applicants' personalities, hobbies, and behaviors that cannot be gained through resumes or face-to-face interviews. They will then use these insights to make their hiring decisions. In addition to attracting better recruits, companies are also interested in using the Internet and social media to better understand employees after they have been shortlisted. Particularly, companies engage in search engines to find their candidates' information and viewed candidates' digital footprint across several social media platforms (Jacobson & Gruzd, 2020).

Drawing from past studies, employers or recruiters usually utilize several social media platforms to gain additional insights on applicants such as social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, X or Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. These social media platforms provide the opportunity for recruiters to know the applicant's personality, social standing, skills and expertise (Walrave et al., 2022). Furthermore, recruiters also explore the social media activity of applicants to further acknowledge whether or not their values, personality and lifestyle matches with the company's values and culture. The use of social media as a recruitment tool opens up various opportunities and challenges for employers. Social media potentially offers speed, efficiency and the ability to target and attract specific, particularly appropriate candidates in the recruitment process (Broughton et al., 2013).

Henceforth, in this digital age, maintaining a professional identity and persona is perceived imperative for applicants to be noticed, considered and selected to achieve their desired career positions. Digital persona is the image and identity that an individual wanted to portray to the audience, and in the context of job hunting, recruiters or potential employers. Establishing a professional and positive digital persona involves strategic personal branding and self-presentation that can be projected in social media content. It helps to enhance the candidates' competitiveness in the labor market (Marin & Nila, 2021). Applicants can use several types of social media platforms to ensure consistent digital persona including professional social media like LinkedIn or Jobstreet as well as personal platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram and more. While there are design and feature differences between these platforms, their basic elements are the same (Smith & Kidder, 2010). The basic design and feature elements of each platform include profile section (including hobbies and number of friends), contact information, picture galleries, videos, status updates, tags and more. For example, when users post pictures and number of friends on social media platforms, it demonstrates the user's popularity and also interpreted as user's social success (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

In ensuring that a person's digital personal is perceived to be professional and positive, applicants need to curate their social media content with the right information to build their own personal brand. This article delves into how personal branding strategies in social media can help applicants build a robust and professional digital persona to engage with recruiters and achieve favorable career. In particular, this study explores the best practices in constructing compelling and professional digital persona through targeted content creation to position applicants favorably among the recruiters. By understanding and implementing these strategies, applicants can enhance their visibility and credibility to unlock new opportunities for career growth and development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leveraging on Social Media in Recruitment

According to Solomon (2019), recruiters or companies are using digital strategies in America, by utilizing SNS in hiring processes. Findings showed that recruiters are using platforms like LinkedIn to screen for

professional skills and qualifications among job candidates. In social media, employers are able to read reviews, comments, recommendations and testimonials about candidates. Recruiters can access profiles' information, despite options available to applicants to limit access or privacy settings (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). Hiring professionals have already acknowledged the significance of social media for job seekers. Moreover, recent surveys of recruiters indicate a belief in the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of social media as a hiring platform (Wetsch, 2012). Through the screening of candidate's social media profiles, employers can evaluate their fit with the culture of the company, validate their qualifications and potentially reduce employee turnover rates. This cybervetting practice showed that recruiters put a lot of emphasis on finding candidates that fit with the job requirements and aligns with the organization's culture and values.

The act of shaping views on applicants is perceived to be crucial, in regards to social media as well as to the audience that it creates, such as recruiters or employers. Particularly, it is effective in many recruitment and hiring functions. For example, LinkedIn is a tool used by recruiters to seek potential candidates in terms of professional skills and qualifications. Employers assess the possibility of a new job applicant with respect to his or her social media accounts to check for cultural fit. Cybervetting, the process of reviewing publicly available information on social media, can further help in gathering data in knowing deeper about an applicant's personality, behavior, and values. Thus, candidates' awareness regarding personal branding and digital literacy would make them more employable toward new career opportunities.

Content Creation

Content creation plays a pivotal role in shaping a professional digital persona among applicants. The way individuals present themselves through high quality content such as professional photos, well-crafted posts and inspiring quotes can significantly impact how individuals will be perceived by recruiters (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). Particularly, the way content is curated with the right tone, information and appealing visuals can help applicants stand out in the competitive job market. Thus, applicants need to produce persuasive storytelling about themselves to ignite memorable and meaningful connection to the audience, which is the recruiter or potential employer.

To create compelling and professional digital persona, applicants should focus on producing content that pulls the audience (recruiter) to read on further and digest the information positively. Most companies seek for content that aligns with the company's goals and values. This coincides with Dzamic and Kirby's (2018) perspective that content should be created to be relevant to what the audience want to get and something that they want to spend their time on. According to Bly (2020), content on social media is used to build brand awareness (in this hiring context, the personal brand), spread ideas to the audience, change beliefs and foster relationships with them. Hence, by leveraging social media platforms strategically, applicants can cultivate a positive and professional digital persona that resonates with potential employers and the organization that they have applied for.

Importance of Positive and Professional Digital Presence on Social Media

Having a strong and pleasant social media presence is essential for both individuals and businesses in today's digital age. Social media platforms are becoming vital resources for lead generation, consumer engagement, and brand building since they have fundamentally altered the way we interact, communicate, and share information (Abdullayeva, 2024). Social media is used by people for many different purposes, such as keeping in touch with loved ones, joining a community, getting support, and even building their professional brand. The need to distinguish between digital and corporate identities has led to the development of a new concept: the personal digital brand (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015).

Wells (2022) asserts that firms of all sizes must have a strong web presence. Customers are inclined to patronize other businesses if they are unable to locate them online. Having a solid online presence makes it easier for consumers to find and learn about your company, increasing credibility and trust among both current and new clients. Additionally, having a good online presence makes companies stand out from the competition and draws in new clients while keeping old ones.

Wells (2022) lists the following three advantages of having a strong online presence:

1. Greater exposure

    a. Search engine optimization (SEO): SEO plays a major role in making a firm more visible in search engine results. Businesses may rank well in search results and increase website traffic by optimizing their content and websites for search engines. This makes it easier for customers to locate and visit their websites.

    b. Customer reach: Since many customers utilize the internet to find goods and services, it's critical to be easily found online. Having a solid internet presence guarantees that companies don't pass over potential clients.

2. Better relationships with customers

    a. Credibility and trust: Businesses can gain the trust of their clients by having a strong online presence. Being responsive and involved on social media can help achieve this.

    b. Personal connection: Engaging with customers online helps build a personal connection, which is crucial for maintaining customer loyalty.

3. Increased sales

    a. Accessibility: Businesses that are easy to find online and have good reviews are more likely to attract customers. Providing a positive online experience and easy access to information about products or services can drive sales.

    b. Growth and revenue: Investing in a digital presence can help businesses reach new customers, increase sales, and boost the bottom line.

One cannot stress how crucial it is to keep up a positive and polished online persona on social media. It increases exposure, fosters client confidence, and boosts revenue, making it crucial for success in the cutthroat market of today. This is especially important in dynamic contexts like the digital landscape of Malaysia, where businesses are realizing more and more how important it is to have a strong social media presence (Social Media Agency Malaysia, 2024).

Personal Branding Among Young Users on Social Media

Personal branding is how a person develops an identity and markets the identity to others. The concept was introduced in 1981 by Ries and Trout, referring to personal positioning through attire, behavior, and verbal communication. These days, personal branding has evolved mainly due to the rise of digital communication and the usage of social media. There is a combination of online and offline persona, which has opened discussion of identity creation, performance and management (Jacobson, 2020).

As time moves forward, generation Z, often referred to as the digital natives, has grown to understand the power of cultivating an online persona for professional purposes. Research indicates that young users actively engage in personal branding strategies to enhance their visibility, attract opportunities, and build professional networks (Labrecque et al., 2011). Social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Glassdoor provide a bridge from recruiters to the applicants. It is much easier these days to learn about the applicant's personality, social skills, and expertise (Walrave et al., 2022).

Personal branding through social media is seen as a critical differentiator between proactive and reactive individuals. It helps young professionals stand out in a competitive job market and can lead to better job opportunities. The literature highlights several strategies employed by young users for effective personal branding. One such strategy is the consistent use of a unique voice across all social media channels, which helps in creating a cohesive and recognizable brand image (Khedher, 2015). Additionally, young users often engage in networking activities, such as collaborating with influencers or participating in online communities, to increase their reach and influence (Gorbatov et al., 2018). As Shepherd (2005) notes, a well-managed personal brand can lead to job offers, partnerships, and other professional opportunities. This awareness drives young individuals to invest time and effort into their online personas, recognizing that social media is not just a platform for social interaction but also a powerful tool for career advancement.

Self-Presentation

Past studies have focused on self-presentation concepts from Goffman's (1959, 1978) dramaturgical framework and impression management (Johannes & Hung-Yue, 2015; Whitmer, 2018) to present an idealized version of self as part of personal branding. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework views self-presentation is akin to theatrical performance where individuals use various forms of media (i.e., text, pictures, videos, audio or live streams) to project their identity on social media. This allows users to convey their personality traits, talents, skills and capabilities as part of their impression management (Goffman, 1959). Furthermore, impression management involves social media users crafting and negotiating their identity to influence how they will be perceived by others (Goffman, 1959). Thus, social media serves as a stage for candidates to disseminate information about their daily lives and persona to employers.

In this theory, there are two performance sections: front stage and backstage. The front stage is where individuals curate situations to meet social and normative expectations or also known as dramatic interaction (Holmberg et al., 2018). Social media offers a unique avenue of front stage for impression management (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Conversely, the backstage is where individuals can act in ways that contradict their front stage persona, allowing them to show their true selves and display a more vulnerable image (Tao & Ellison, 2023). Behaviors exhibited backstage are typically deemed inappropriate for public display. Behaviors such as alcohol or drug use, inappropriate pictures, negative comments about others, discriminatory statements, aggressive political stances or criminal offences should be prevented when curating content for a more sustainable and positive digital persona.

Based on past studies, in the realm of social media like Facebook, scholars have categorized self-representation into three areas: performance, exhibition and personal region (Zhao et al., 2013 as cited in Tao & Ellison, 2023). The performance region involves users presenting themselves to others, while the exhibition region encompasses the ongoing performances including past posts. While the personal region is when content is archived by users for self-reflection or recollection. These areas elucidate how individuals manage their impressions through their social media content, with performance and exhibition regions are the content that users intend to reveal to the audience.

As noted by Sandal et al. (2014, p. 941), various tactics are employed in self-presentation including assertiveness, that highlights on individual's excellence, accommodation and narratives on overcoming obstacles in life. More specifically, assertiveness involves demonstrating passion, self-confidence and discipline. Individual excellence entails projecting personal strengths, competencies and achievements. Accommodation involves talents' adaptability to align with the job requirements. Lastly, sharing stories of overcoming obstacles to achieve career goals is another tactic utilized in self-presentation. To create future-ready talents, users should focus their content on revealing authentic narrative to build relationships and emotional connections with potential employers. Thus, the following research questions guide this study:

- How can social media personal branding strategies foster the development of future-ready talent for better career prospects?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an exploratory research design using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews. As Harding (2019, p. 44) explains, in-depth interviews provide a unique opportunity to listen to and understand an individual's perspectives or experiences over an extended period, allowing for probing questions that delve deeper into the topics at hand. Qualitative research typically involves smaller sample sizes (Fainshmidt et al., 2020). In specific, the in-depth interviews were conducted using purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020). This method was used to identify the right informants for the reliability of the findings. Consequently, this study selected 12 hiring professionals in Malaysia from various fields who met specific criteria relevant to this research:

1. The informants are responsible for employee recruitment within their organizations.
2. The informants have decision-making authority in the employment process.
3. The informants use social media platforms as part of their hiring procedures.

The selection of samples is to ensure that this study is able to obtain perspectives and experiences of hiring professionals from diverse industries in Malaysia. The informants' position and responsibility in the recruitment process is relevant as they have first-hand experience and are decision-makers for acquiring a potential employee. With their positions and years of experience in employment process, they will be able to suffice this study with the right viewpoints on how they assess information of job candidates in social media networks and how that information contributes to their assessment in making employability decisions.

Thus, 12 interviews (n = 12) were conducted on hiring professionals. The sample size was determined not solely based on response saturation but through a maximum variation approach to capture a wide range of perspectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). Saturation was reached when no new information emerged, signaling that additional interviews were unnecessary (Alam, 2020). According to Guest et al. (2006), saturation can be reached from 12 interviews. Similarly, Galvin (2015) also indicated that sample sizes of 12–16 may be large enough for a study.

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to guide the interviews in alignment with the research objectives. This protocol included the main topics of interest but remained open-ended and flexible to elicit rich insights and experiences from the participants (King et al., 2019), where the method can acquire a more freely gained information. Prior to data collection, informants were explained on the research information such as its research goals and interview protocol questions. For ethical considerations, informants' consent for the interview were procured. They were explained on how the findings would be anonymous and also on their choice to remove themselves from the process if they feel no longer comfortable or able to proceed with the interview. Interviews were conducted by the researchers. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed by the researchers.

The data were then analyzed using coding techniques of a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to determine recurring themes and strategies in achieving the research objective. Particularly, the process of data analysis goes through six steps such as becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, identifying and defining themes and writing up. In the first process, researchers read and re-read the transcripts many times before making rough notes on the insights found. Then, the researcher moved to organizing data into several chunks of meaning. The segmentation of data is based on theoretical underpinnings of the study's concepts and also research objectives. Then, the researcher searches for the patterns or themes that are relevant to the research question. In specific, the chunks of data are grouped together under the same umbrella if it has the same meaning or representation of the same topic. These themes emerged deductively based on the dialogues and insights of the informants. In step 4, the researcher reviews, modify and develop the themes to ensure that the themes are coherent and makes sense in answering the research question. Then, the process moves to the refinement of the themes and writing the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The respondents were labelled as R1 (respondent 1) through R12 (respondent 12). The demographic data of the respondents is detailed in **Table 1**.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research question. How can social media personal branding strategies foster the development of future-ready talent for better career prospects?

Based on the findings, there are two main approaches to curating content through social media personal branding strategies for professional digital persona. This includes the following:

1. Front stage self-presentation
2. Backstage self-presentation

Table 1. Demographic data of respondents

Respondent	Position	Work Experience (Year)	Company
Respondent 1	Global documentation manager	8	Technical Publication
Respondent 2	Asia campus hiring lead	2.5	Information Technology
Respondent 3	Talent acquisition leader–ANZ, Singapore, & Philippines	17	T/IT services
Respondent 4	Senior engineering manager/hiring manager	10	R&D Semiconductor
Respondent 5	SEA talent acquisition head	21	Information Technology & Computing
Respondent 6	Assistant director administrator ex HR assistant manager	21	Education
Respondent 7	Business analysis	2.5	IT and Engineering Services
Respondent 8	Client partner	8	IT and Engineering service
Respondent 9	Client partner	12	Software
Respondent 10	Senior executive, PR, & events	2	Consulting & Events
Respondent 11	Managing director	3	Advertising
Respondent 12	Director/founder	3	Video Production House

Approach 1: Front Stage Self-Presentation

In the first section, this paper will focus on the front stage self-presentation on social media. According to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory, the 'front stage' represents the persona that individuals meticulously craft for their audience, in this case, prospective employers. This part examines how job seekers shape their online presence to match professional standards and meet employer expectations. Among the themes found as part of social media personal branding strategies in portraying professional digital persona are key qualities, characteristics, qualifications, and a professional image (**Table 2**).

On the front stage, under the first theme of qualities, candidates can demonstrate their passion for their industry through posts related to their role and expertise, which helps recruiters determine their enthusiasm and dedication (R5, R7, and R11). This is related to a study by Gorbatov et al. (2019) with findings confirming that effective personal branding enhances how candidates are perceived–particularly in terms of passion and competence–thereby increasing their employability. This in turn will contribute to greater career satisfaction. Additionally, exhibiting a positive mindset when facing challenges and maintaining a consistently positive attitude in their postings can significantly enhance their appeal to potential employers. This perspective is supported by insights from R6, R7, and R8, who emphasize that a positive online presence can reflect a candidate's resilience, optimism, and overall approach to both personal and professional challenges. These qualities are highly valued in the workplace and can set a candidate apart in a competitive job market.

Under the second theme of front-stage self-presentation, which falls under characteristics, candidates can strengthen their professional identity by highlighting their professionalism and strong communication skills–traits that align closely with organizational values. It is crucial for candidates to present themselves genuinely, maintaining a professional demeanor that reflects their true character and capabilities. This authenticity not only helps in building trust but also ensures a better cultural fit within the organization, aligning their personal values with those of the company. In particular, employers seek individuals who display steady and reliable traits over time. Consistency in character is indicative of a person's dependability and predictability, qualities that are highly valued in a professional setting. The use of social media for personal branding allows individuals to showcase their professionalism and communication skills effectively. A study by Marin and Nila (2021) highlights that strategic self-presentation on platforms like LinkedIn can positively influence recruiters' perceptions and enhance employability.

Moreover, in assessing skillfulness, R4 places a strong emphasis on evaluating the depth of an individual's technical expertise within their specific domain. This means examining not only their theoretical knowledge but also their practical skills and hands-on experience. Furthermore, R4 delves into the impact of this expertise by analyzing the individual's past and current involvement in organizations. This includes detailing their key contributions and major achievements, such as successful projects, innovations, or process improvements. By providing concrete examples of how their technical skills have made a difference,

Table 2. Theme and response of front stage

Theme	Categories	Responses
Theme 1– Qualities (feelings)	Passionate	"For example, when candidate post on socially media, well maintained digital persona can be seen when they are passionate about their domain or position" (R7). "I look at the contents that candidates post whether it is related to their role, passion and expertise. If they have many sharing related to their careers, it allows me to determine that they are passionate about their industry" (R5). "… We also take their potential and passion into consideration. They need to be able to identify their own strength, passion, responsibility and shortcomings" (R11).
	Positivity	"Exhibiting a positive mindset when facing challenges, being independent, mannerism and self-conduct on social media can significantly enhance their appeal to potential employers" (R6). "We usually observe if the candidate has positive attitude or not, based on the postings that have been made" (R7). "Candidates should exhibit a positive attitude and energy through their social media postings. This includes demonstrating accurate information and maintaining an optimistic tone in their online interactions" (R8).
	Transparent	"When your digital persona is as close to your engagement, aspiration and capability, the recruiting team already have an idea on who you are and how you will play into the dynamics of the team" (R1). "Transparency and integrity are two of the most important elements that must be demonstrated by candidates" (R9). "The candidate needs to show consistency and transparency with the recruiting team to make us understand better" (R10).
Theme 2– Characteristics (salience/ identity)	Professional	"In candidate's digital footprint, I look for authenticity, professionalism … and alignment with the organization's values. Professionalism is when we see appropriate language, content and interactions are used" (R2). "It is very important to see consistency in a candidate's behavior. There are instances that in person their persona is very well mannered, but their social characteristics can be quite the opposite. This can include their presence in messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram" (R5).
	Skillful	"For instance, they should demonstrate proficiency in technical expertise in the current domain. Establish technical expertise involvement in the past and current organization in which key contributions or major impact are being listed" (R4). "The basic knowledge and awareness of digital tools. In today's digital age, proficiency in using technology is crucial across various professions" (R9).
Theme 3– Qualification (performance)	Certificate and experience	"New graduates, taking additional courses like Adobe, public speaking and more helps to differentiate them from others" (R1). "Candidates to provide tangible evidence of their skills and accomplishments, as well as demonstrate how they align their online presence with our values" (R2). "Candidates to share any achievements related to the opportunity or field of interest." (R8). "Importance of evaluating candidates based on their past achievements or works, as it offers deeper insights into their professional demeanor and collaborative abilities" (R11). "I will look for their past achievement or works, so that it could provide deeper insights into who the applicants are and how they work with others" (R12).
Theme 4– Image/ persona (imagery)	Appearance of social media platform	"When a candidate curates and updates their LinkedIn profile, it shows that they care for their career … I do look into Facebook and Instagram … It gives me an indicator on what type of person the candidate is" (R1). "Candidates that manage their social media well usually present their portfolio better… Be honest and put extra effort on your digital presence as it is like a first impression before you can get your desired employer" (R11). "Be careful of what you post on social media as it stays there and potential employers are watching. You might lose a job opportunity because of one wrong post" (R6). "Use a professional and recent profile picture. Ensure your handle, username and bio reflect your actual name and portray a positive image" (R12).

candidates can effectively demonstrate their skillfulness. Nowadays, employers are substantially increasingly alert to candidates digital footprints. A study by Garrido-Pintado et al. (2023) found that a well-managed digital presence is very important, even decisive, in recruitment.

In theme three, which is qualification or performance, the focus is on assessing candidates based on their certificates, experience, and achievements. The mention of additional certifications beyond basic

requirements are seen favorably, as it demonstrates a commitment to learning and skill development. R2 emphasizes the need for candidates to provide tangible evidence of their skills and accomplishments, as well as demonstrating how they align with the company's culture and values. This ensures transparency in the recruitment process and helps assess the candidate's suitability for the role.

According to Vaast (2021), recruiters place high importance on transparency and integrity, encouraging candidates to present themselves honestly and consistently across their online profiles. Other respondents highlight the importance of candidates having relevant experience and current certifications that directly contribute to the role and the company. This indicates that the hiring process seeks candidates who possess specialized knowledge or skills that can immediately benefit the organization.

Furthermore, R8 encourages candidates to share any achievements related to the opportunity or field of interest, suggesting that accomplishments can provide additional insight into a candidate's capabilities and dedication. A well-curated digital footprint that showcases relevant achievements and professional demeanor can positively impact career management (Bouchrika, 2024). On the other hand, other respondents emphasize the importance of evaluating candidates based on their past achievements, as it offers deeper insights into their professional demeanor and collaborative abilities. Lastly, candidates are advised to mind their content, ensuring that what they share aligns with their qualifications and achievements, as highlighted in R12.

Lastly, in theme four (image and persona), crafting a professional image on social media platforms entails strategic choices and deliberate actions that can significantly impact a person's career trajectory. Social media profiles should reflect dedicated interest in curating the right content, further showcasing applicant's creativity and engagement with digital platforms. In addition to the profile picture, maintaining an uncluttered profile is also essential. In addition, avoiding negative or controversial content is paramount, as such posts can tarnish candidate's professional reputation and hinder from their career prospects (Garrido-Pintado et al., 2023). Online presence reflects individual personal brand, where potential employers are actively monitoring the social media activity.

Digital presence in social media

Crafting a strong digital presence on social media is not merely about being present; it's about strategically shaping one's online identity to reflect professional attributes and aspirations. As highlighted by R2, a person's digital footprint serves as a window into their character, skills, and suitability for a role. It's the first impression potential employers or collaborators may have, heavily influencing their decision-making process.

Consider, for instance, the insights shared in R5. Metrics such as the frequency of posts, the level of engagement they generate, and the size and quality of one's network can speak volumes about industry relations and commitment to the field. A vibrant online presence, as suggested by R7, involves actively engaging with the audience, responding to queries, and participating in relevant discussions. This is in line with a study by Bauer et al. (2023) which found that growing a robust LinkedIn network and maintaining an active profile is valuable for success in digital networking in the Public Relations industry.

Effective communication, as highlighted in R10, is key to fostering meaningful connections in the digital realm. Whether through thoughtful captions, engaging comments, or professional networking messages, clear and concise communication enhances the online persona.

Lastly, it's crucial to remember that a digital presence is often the first point of contact with potential opportunities. Just as one would dress professionally for an interview, investing effort into curating a compelling online presence, as emphasized in R11, is essential. It's a chance to make a memorable first impression and stand out in a competitive landscape. By leveraging these points, individuals can elevate their digital presence from merely existing to truly impactful and influential.

Approach 2: Backstage of Self-Presentation

In this second section, this paper will highlight the backstage self-presentation on social media. In contrast to the 'front stage', the 'backstage' refers to the more private or less visible dimensions of identity where individuals reveal themselves to trusted circles (Goffman, 1959). Among the themes found as part of social

Table 3. Theme and response of backstage

Theme	Categories	Responses
Theme 1– Endorsement by others	Judgement	"When your digital persona is as close to your engagement, aspiration and capability, the recruiting team already have an idea on who you are and how you will play into the dynamics of the team" (R1). "Recruiting team get to know the candidate beforehand, before actually going into the recruitment process. This actually work well as a behavior filter for us" (R11).
Theme 2– Association to organization or recruiter	Resonance	"Align online activity with their career goals and values, engaging in relevant industry discussions and organizations … candidates need to represent themselves authentically and align with the organization's values" (R2). "I analyze the candidate's character in previous and current employment, social life and political views in order to gauge if the candidate is suitable with my office culture" (R6).
	Trust and honesty	"A beacon of wisdom, illuminates the path towards trust, emphasizing its profound importance in the interpersonal landscape" (R3). "The information shared should be legitimate and tally with the candidate's experience and qualifications. If it does not match, there will be assumptions that the candidate is not a honest person" (R7). "We assess whether the digital persona truly reflects the candidate's capabilities and suitability for the role… Be authentic and professional on social media, reflect skills and experience accurately" (R2).
	Relationship	"Have good working relationships goes a long way. The feedback from the recruitment team does take into consideration for hiring, other than the human behavior aspect" (R4). "Candidates need to actively share and interact with the recruiters or hiring managers" (R10).

media personal branding strategies in portraying professional digital persona are endorsement by others and association to organization or recruiter (**Table 3**).

In the backstage of self-presentation, under the theme one, which is endorsement by others, reflect the sentiment of the recruiting team, underscores the pivotal role of engagement, aspiration, and capability in shaping perceptions. Even before the recruitment process formally begins, R11 reveals how the recruiting team diligently acquaints themselves with the candidate's story, ensuring a seamless alignment of values and aspirations. Individuals often leverage endorsements and engagements to craft a nuanced and authentic image. According to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework, this backstage activity includes interactions where users can build rapport with their audience. For instance, recommendations and endorsements on platforms like LinkedIn play a critical role in shaping perceptions of a candidate's professional capabilities and values. These endorsements reflect the sentiments of colleagues and industry professionals, underscoring the candidate's skills, aspirations, and ability to align with the recruiting team's values even before the formal recruitment process begins (Jacobson, 2020). Such private endorsements provide a depth of character that may not be visible in a public resume or job application, allowing recruiters to perceive a more rounded and genuine image of the candidate.

In the second theme of association to organizer or recruiter, it unfolds the harmony or resonance between candidates and their prospective organizations or recruiters. Online activities become a canvas for showcasing not just skills, but a profound connection to career goals and organizational ethos. Engaging in industry discussions and affiliations becomes more than a networking tactic–it becomes a testament to shared values and aspirations.

Moreover, social media posts can demonstrate a candidate's integrity and trustworthiness, which echoes Goffman's (1959) idea of the backstage. Candidates create a narrative of authenticity and integrity when they openly and honestly discuss their own experiences, struggles, and victories. Studies reveal that employers and recruiters appreciate openness and the capacity to project a consistent, truthful picture across a range of platforms (Baker, 2012). According to Goffman (1959), recruiters are able to look past the polished front stage presence because of these candid and transparent backstage interactions. They offer a more profound comprehension of the applicant's actual personality and principles, which are essential for establishing a reliable rapport with the hiring supervisors (Qian, 2022).

Additionally, showcasing a candidate's affiliation with recruiters or organizers on social media further improves their backstage representation. A strong dedication to one's career goals and the values of potential employers can be conveyed by participating in industry-specific debates, posting connections with

professional organizations, and taking part in pertinent internet forums. Engaging in this kind of activity shows potential employers that an applicant is proactive in their career growth and aligns with the organizational ethos, which increases their appeal (Baker, 2012). Candidates can demonstrate their commitment to the company and culture by actively participating in online groups relevant to their industry. This gives recruiters concrete proof of the candidates' zeal and aptitude for the position. Thus, these behind-the-scenes initiatives showcase a candidate's abilities and expertise while also demonstrating their sincere interest.

CONCLUSION

Recently, users are utilizing social media when establishing professional identities with respect to the digital age and has been infinitely blurring the boundaries between private and working life. The merging of personal and professional identities, in turn, has called for an individual to strategically manage his or her professional digital identity. The features of social media, together with real-time communication capabilities, are therefore an advantageous tool for businesses to operate, especially for recruitment processes. Companies go through an elaborate exercise of cybervetting applicants to establish an insight into applicants' personalities, behavior, and values beyond the information accorded in a conventional manner during the short list of resumes and interviews. This practice creates a vital importance of surrounding oneself with strong, positive, and professional people. Hence, in maintaining a professional digital persona, one must incorporate aspects of self-branding and self-presentation via their social media platforms. A candidate must create and share content that would fit with his or her professional image while reflecting the potential employer's values.

These contents should consist of exhibits of good skills, experiences, and accomplishments while avoiding any negative content that may tarnish his or her professional reputation. Smart candidates will use social media to their advantage by becoming visible and credible in their field, thus creating avenues for new opportunities. Such a well-established digital persona would attract the attention of potential employers and maintain long-term professional growth and development. While this study certainly highlights valuable findings about how social media serves in establishing the professional digital persona, it is not without its own limitations. Research has first been qualitative involving only a dozen hiring professionals in Malaysia, limiting the generalizability of findings from this study to other places and industries. Primarily concern was given to the perspectives of the recruiters while shutting out their job seekers' voices. Future research could capitalize on these limitations and thus include possible exploration of the experiences and strategies exercised by job seekers in managing their digital personas. Also, the very rapid shift in the landscape of social media and its algorithms has not been incorporated into the study, which would sort of shape the perception of the digital persona over time.

Future research could proceed on from this one with a larger, more diversified sample that includes job seekers across various industries and cultural settings, coupled with some longitudinal studies that look into how digital personas evolve over time vis-ã-vis career trajectories. The study may also touch on the ethical ramifications of cyber vetting, particularly in social media contexts regarding privacy and data security. Therefore, guidelines or regulations could be developed so that social media screening is as fair and transparent as possible.

As highlighted in this research, the practical implications of the findings are for job seekers, recruiters, and organizations. For job seekers, the findings outline the importance of curating a professional digital persona that is aligned with their career goals and those of the prospective employers. This, in turn, involves consistent and positive online presence, demonstration of relevant skills and achievements, and avoidance of controversial or unprofessional content. Job seekers should also consider using professional platforms, such as LinkedIn, as a tool for creating their brand identity and for broader networking with industry professionals.

The study also informs recruiters and organizations about the value of exploiting social media to evaluate candidates' fit within the organizational culture and professional qualities. On the contrary, the present research cautions recruiters against subscribing to social media screening practices, which could bring about bias and unethical conduct. Organizations should provide training or resources to help employees and job seekers manage their digital personas effectively. As social media gains dominance in recruitment, it is suggested that policymakers impose some guidelines to regulate cybervetting practices, focusing on privacy,

data security, and the ethical issues of employing social media in recruitment decisions. Educational institutes should work towards including digital literacy and personal branding into their curricula, orienting students with the picture of the modern job market.

With the evolution of social media, strategies for personal brands and digital persona management will evolve. The study clearly confirms that it is crucial to adjust accordingly and capitalize on social media to give oneself an edge in terms of advancing career opportunities. Such a professional digital persona serves, therefore, to maintain higher chances of employment by job seekers while at the same time laying a strong foundation for long-term career realization and success. Ultimately, the steady integration of social media into recruitment processes stands as an opportunity and a challenge that task individuals and organizations to traverse the digital space carefully and steadily with intention.

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