THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF LINKEDIN AS A NETWORKING AND PERSONAL BRANDING TOWARDS EMPLOYABILITY OF GENERATION Z STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the strategic role of LinkedIn as a networking and personal branding platform in increasing the employability of Generation Z students in Indonesia. This study uses a quantitative approach with data collection through online questionnaires filled out by 110 respondents across universities and provinces. The variables studied include LinkedIn as Networking (X1), LinkedIn as Personal Branding (X2), and Employability (Y). Data analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression with the help of the SPSS program to test partial and simultaneous effects. The results show that LinkedIn as Personal Branding has a positive and significant effect on employability (t = 6.080, Sig. <0.001), while LinkedIn as Networking has a positive but insignificant effect (t = 1.233, Sig. = 0.220). The simultaneous test shows that both variables together have a significant effect on employability (F = 75.752, Sig. <0.001), with an Adjusted R^2 value of 0.578, meaning 57.8% of the variation in employability can be explained by these two variables. These findings suggest that building a strong personal brand through LinkedIn plays a more dominant role in enhancing students' career readiness and competitiveness in the workplace. This study emphasizes the importance of digital professionalism and self-image building skills in increasing the employability of Generation Z students. Future research is recommended to include other variables such as digital literacy, soft skills, and the intensity of engagement in professional networks.

Keywords:
Networking, Personal Branding, Linkedin, Employability, Generation Z, Students, Professional

Introduction

The development of digital technology has transformed the way people build connections and introduce themselves in the workplace. One platform experiencing rapid growth in this context is LinkedIn, a professional social media platform that allows users to build social networks, showcase career profiles, and strengthen personal branding. In today's digital age, students' ability to build a professional image and expand their network through platforms like LinkedIn is a crucial factor in increasing their employability, or their readiness and competitiveness in entering the workforce (Garcia-Lopez et al., 2022).

Generation Z students, known as a digitally adaptive generation, tend to actively use social media for various purposes, including searching for career information and job opportunities (Turner, 2021). However, not all students from this generation are able to effectively utilize LinkedIn to build a credible and attractive professional profile for recruiters. Many still view LinkedIn as a formal social media platform, rather than a strategic tool for career development (Rybalko & Setzer, 2010). In fact, research shows that an active, complete, and professional LinkedIn profile can increase the chances of being noticed by companies and expand networks and contacts with industry professionals (van Dijck, 2013; Papacharissi, 2010).

This topic is crucial because amidst the competitive job market, students' ability to manage their personal branding and build digital networks is a key factor in determining their early career success. LinkedIn, as a global professional platform, functions not only as a job search tool but also as a means of building a sustainable digital reputation (Khedher, 2015). Therefore, an in-depth understanding of how Generation Z students use LinkedIn to build their personal branding and strengthen their employability is necessary.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the strategic role of networking and personal branding on the employability of Generation Z students. This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of digital career strategies for students and serve as a reference for higher education institutions in designing training programs relevant to the needs of the digital job market.

Theoretical Framework

LinkedIn, as a professional social media platform, has become a crucial tool for building self-image and professional connections in the digital age. In theory, this research is grounded in Social Capital Theory and Personal Branding Theory. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital is a resource derived from an individual's social network, which can be leveraged to gain economic and symbolic benefits. In the modern professional world, LinkedIn has become a medium that expands access to social capital by enabling users to interact, network, and recommend each other. The broader and more qualified an individual's professional network, the higher their employability potential (Ng & Feldman, 2014).

Furthermore, personal branding theory explains how individuals can strategically build and manage their professional image. Khedher (2015) emphasizes that personal branding is not merely self-image, but also a strategic process for building an authentic and credible reputation in the public eye. In the context of LinkedIn, this is reflected in the selection of a professional profile photo, self-description, inclusion of work experience, and activities that reinforce the perception of expertise.

Previous research supports LinkedIn's role in increasing employability. Garcia-Lopez et al. (2022) found that LinkedIn users actively contribute to improving students' digital skills and work readiness. Research by van Dijck (2013) also highlighted that this platform functions as a professional self-representation space, allowing individuals to simultaneously manage their reputation and network.

Furthermore, Papacharissi (2010) linked the phenomenon of professional social media to the emergence of a "digital identity," which increasingly determines career opportunities.
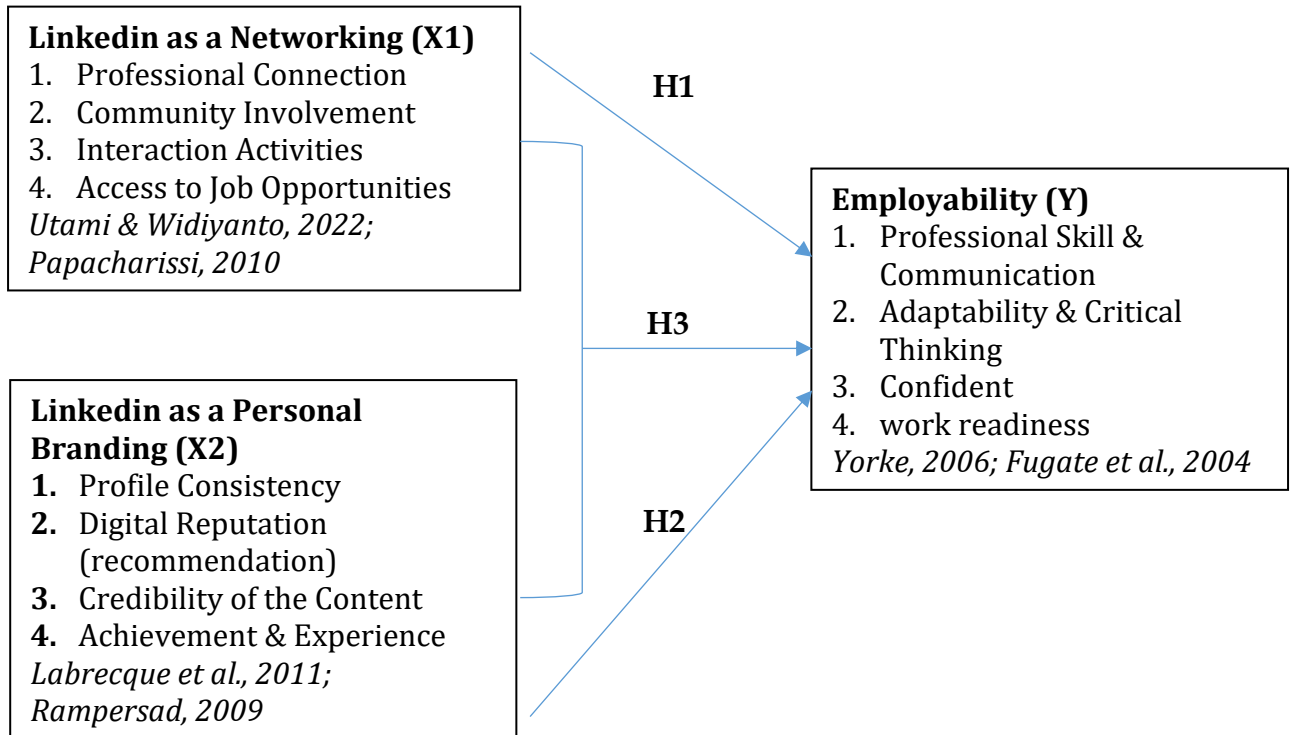
However, while numerous studies have addressed LinkedIn usage in general, a research gap remains apparent in the context of Generation Z and its relationship to employability. Most previous studies have focused on young professionals or graduate students in Western countries, while the context of Generation Z students in Indonesia remains underexplored (Rahardjo & Pradipta, 2021). Generation Z possesses unique characteristics, such as a tendency to multitask, visual orientation, and a high reliance on digital technology, but these characteristics are not always accompanied by the ability to manage a strong professional image (Turner, 2021). Therefore, this research is crucial for understanding how Generation Z students strategically utilize LinkedIn to build professional networks and increase their job opportunities in a competitive era.

Based on previous theory and findings, this study assumes that networking and personal branding through LinkedIn have a positive influence on student employability. A strong network allows students to expand their access to career opportunities, while consistent personal branding strengthens their professional image and the trust of recruiters (Labrecque et al., 2011). The integration of these two aspects is expected to create a competitive advantage for Generation Z students in the digital job market.

This research framework illustrates the relationship between three main variables:
1. Networking on LinkedIn : expands professional connections and access to career information.
2. Personal branding on LinkedIn : builds a credible professional image.
3. Employability: Generation Z students': readiness, competitiveness, and opportunities for acceptance in the workforce.

The two independent variables (networking and personal branding) are assumed to have a positive influence on the dependent variable (employability). Visually, the framework can be explained as follows:

Linkedin as a Networking (X1)
1. Professional Connection
2. Community Involvement
3. Interaction Activities
4. Access to Job Opportunities
Utami & Widiyanto, 2022;
Papacharissi, 2010

H1

Employability (Y)
1. Professional Skill & Communication
2. Adaptability & Critical Thinking
3. Confident
4. work readiness
Yorke, 2006; Fugate et al., 2004

H3

Linkedin as a Personal Branding (X2)
1. Profile Consistency
2. Digital Reputation (recommendation)
3. Credibility of the Content
4. Achievement & Experience
Labrecque et al., 2011;
Rampersad, 2009

H2

Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive-verifiable design, aiming to analyze the relationship between networking and personal branding through the LinkedIn platform and employability among Generation Z college students. This quantitative approach was chosen because it can objectively and measurably measure the level of influence between variables through a questionnaire (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The population of this study is Generation Z college students who actively use LinkedIn, namely individuals born between 1997 and 2012 and currently pursuing higher education in Indonesia. This generation was chosen because they are the age group most adaptable to developments
in digital technology and actively use professional social media in academic and career contexts (Turner, 2021).
The research sample was determined using purposive sampling, which selects respondents based on certain criteria, such as:
1. Active students aged 18-25
2. Have an active LinkedIn account
3. Have used LinkedIn for academic, internship, or career purposes

A total of 110 respondents successfully completed the research questionnaire, a number deemed sufficient for basic quantitative analysis (Hair et al., 2019). The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error. From the estimated population of 110 LinkedIn-using students, a minimum sample of n = 86 respondents was obtained, deemed representative for analysis.

Data was collected using an online questionnaire via Google Forms. This research instrument consists of three main variables:

1. LinkedIn as Networking (X1), measured using indicators such as establishing professional connections in relevant fields, involvement in the LinkedIn community, interaction activity on LinkedIn, and access to job/internship opportunities created on LinkedIn.

2. LinkedIn as Personal Branding (X2), measured using indicators such as profile consistency, digital reputation built through recommendations and testimonials, credibility of shared content, and shared achievements and experiences.

3. Employability (X3), measured using indicators such as work-supporting skills, adaptability and critical thinking in the face of change, confidence in searching for and applying for jobs, and readiness for selection processes, such as job interviews.

All questionnaire items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior to distribution, the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability to ensure the instrument's reliability and consistency. Validity was tested using Pearson product-moment correlation, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a minimum reliability threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The data analysis method was carried out in several stages. First, a descriptive analysis was conducted to describe the characteristics of the respondents and the average responses for each variable. Second, classical assumption tests (normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity) were conducted to ensure the validity of the data before regression analysis. Third, hypothesis testing was conducted using multiple linear regression analysis to examine the effect of the independent variables (networking and personal branding) on the dependent variable (employability). This analysis was supported by SPSS version 29.0.

The results were then interpreted quantitatively to answer the previously formulated research hypotheses. The interpretation of the results also took into account the context of students' digital behavior and its relevance to social capital and personal branding theories. Using this method, the research is expected to provide an empirical overview of how various digital strategies on LinkedIn contribute to the employability of Generation Z students in Indonesia.

Results

Table 1. Partial T-Test

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	12.402	2.475		5.010	<.001
	Linkedin sebagai Networking (X1)	.134	.109	.133	1.233	.220
	Linkedin sebagai Personal Branding (X2)	.595	.098	.654	6.080	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Employability pada Mahasiswa Generasi Z (Y)

The calculated T-value is 1.233 with a significance level of 0.220. Since the significance level (0.020) is > 0.05, H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected. This means that LinkedIn as a networking tool does not significantly impact employability among Generation Z students. This suggests that although students use LinkedIn to build professional networks, this activity has not directly improved their job preparation or opportunities. It is likely that students have not fully utilized LinkedIn's networking function optimally, for example by interacting effectively with industry professionals, participating in discussions, or strategically seeking career references.

The calculated T-value for LinkedIn as Personal Branding (X2) is 6.080 with a significance level of 0.001. Since the significance level (0.001) is < 0.05, H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. This means that Linkedin as Personal Branding has a significant influence on Employability in Generation Z students. This means that the better students build their professional image through Linkedin, for example by filling out a complete profile, writing an interesting description, displaying a portfolio, and actively sharing academic or professional activities, the higher their employability level will be. This finding is in line with research by Khedher (2015) and Labrecque et. al., (2011) which states that Digital Personal Branding plays an important role in shaping professional perceptions and increasing career opportunities.

Table 2. Simultaneous F-test

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3822.527	2	1911.264	75.752	<.001[b]
	Residual	2699.664	107	25.231		
	Total	6522.191	109			

a. Dependent Variable: Employability pada Mahasiswa Generasi Z (Y)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Linkedin sebagai Personal Branding (X2), Linkedin sebagai Networking (X1)

The table shows that the sig. (0.01) < 0.05, then H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted, which means that simultaneously Linkedin as networking and personal branding has a significant effect on employability in Generation Z students. This shows that the regression model used is appropriate to explain the relationship between the two independent variables (networking and personal branding) on employability. In other words, the combination of using Linkedin as networking and personal branding together makes a real contribution to increasing employability in Generation Z students. This finding confirms that, although Linkedin as networking individually is not significant (based on the previous t-test), its role remains important in strengthening the effect of personal branding when both are combined.

Table 3. Coefficient of Determination test

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.766[a]	.586	.578	5.023

a. Predictors: (Constant), Linkedin sebagai Personal Branding (X2), Linkedin sebagai Networking (X1)

The Adjusted R Square value is 0.578, which indicates that 57.8% is explained by two independent variables (LinkedIn as networking and LinkedIn as personal branding), while the remaining 42.2% is explained by other factors not examined in this study, such as organizational experience, technical skills, interpersonal skills, education, and other external factors not included in this study.

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Test

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	12.402	2.475		5.010	<.001					
	Linkedin sebagai Networking (X1)	.134	.109	.133	1.233	.220	.666	.118	.077	.335	2.987
	Linkedin sebagai Personal Branding (X2)	.595	.098	.654	6.080	<.001	.762	.507	.378	.335	2.987

a. Dependent Variable: Employability pada Mahasiswa Generasi Z (Y)

Based on the results of the multiple linear regression analysis in the table, the following regression equation can be constructed:

$Y = 12.402 + 0.134 X_1 + 0.595 X_2$

The regression equation above can be explained as follows:

A. The constant value of 12.402 means that if the variables LinkedIn as Networking (X1) and LinkedIn as Personal Branding are set to zero, then Employability (Y) will remain at 12.402. This indicates that other factors outside this study influence the employability level of students.

B. The multiple regression coefficient (X1) of 0.134 means that if networking activity on LinkedIn increases by one level, the employability level will also increase by 0.134, as long as other factors remain constant. However, because the significance value (sig.) is 0.220, which is greater than 0.05, the effect is not statistically significant. In other words, networking activity on LinkedIn does not have a direct impact on increasing employability among Generation Z students.

C. The multiple regression coefficient (X2) of 0.595 means that if personal branding skills on LinkedIn increase by one level, employability will also increase by 0.595, assuming other factors remain constant. The significance value is <0.001, less than 0.05, meaning the effect is very significant. This means that building a strong personal branding on LinkedIn has been proven to have a positive and significant effect on the job opportunities of Generation Z students.

Based on the results of multiple linear regression tests, it was found that LinkedIn as Networking has a positive but insignificant influence on the employability of generation Z students, while LinkedIn as Personal Branding has a positive and significant influence on the employability of generation Z students. Thus, the better students build personal branding through LinkedIn, the higher their level of employability.

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression Test (X1 Against Y)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	15.034	2.814		5.343	<.001
	Linkedin sebagai Networking (X1)	.674	.073	.666	9.269	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Employability pada Mahasiswa Generasi Z (Y)

The calculated t value of 9.269 with a significance (Sig.) < 0.001, smaller than the alpha value of 0.05, indicates that the LinkedIn variable as Networking (X1) has a significant effect on Employability (Y). This means that the use of LinkedIn in building professional networks statistically has a real contribution to increasing the employability of generation Z students.

Table 6. Simple Linear Regression Test (X2 Against Y)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	13.671	2.257		6.058	<.001
	Linkedin sebagai Personal Branding (X2)	.693	.057	.762	12.217	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Employability pada Mahasiswa Generasi Z (Y)

The calculated t-value of 12.217 with a significance (Sig.) < 0.001, less than 0.05, indicates that the LinkedIn variable as Personal Branding (X2) has a significant effect on Employability (Y). Thus, personal branding through LinkedIn is statistically proven to contribute to increasing work readiness and competitiveness of generation Z students in the labor market.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that LinkedIn, as a personal branding variable, has a positive and significant effect on the employability of Generation Z students, while LinkedIn, as a networking variable, has a positive but insignificant effect. This means that the better students build a professional image and demonstrate their abilities through their LinkedIn profiles, the higher their chances of being accepted into the workforce. However, networking activities without a clear strategy do not always directly increase job opportunities. Simultaneously, both independent variables significantly influenced employability, with an F-value of 75.752 and a significance

level of <0.001, indicating that the regression model was suitable for explaining the relationship between the variables.

These findings align with the Career Construction theory proposed by Savickas (2013), which states that individuals build careers through the process of constructing professional identities in social spaces. In the digital era, LinkedIn is a platform that allows students to showcase their competencies, experiences, and personal values. This activity represents a strong personal branding that is relevant to industry needs, thereby increasing employability. The research findings also support Van Dijck's (2013) study, which explained that platforms like LinkedIn are not only a networking platform but also a platform for building a digital identity. Through strong personal branding, users can attract the attention of recruiters and create a professional impression. These findings align with the findings of this study, which found that personal branding on LinkedIn significantly influences employability among Generation Z students.

Conversely, the finding that variables related to networking on LinkedIn had no significant effect suggests that having a broad LinkedIn network does not automatically increase job opportunities. This aligns with research by Caers and Castelyns (2011) that the effectiveness of professional networking on LinkedIn will only have a significant impact if the connections formed are strong and interactive, not simply a matter of increasing the number of connections. This means that Generation Z students need to build higher-quality relationships with professionals in their fields to maximize the benefits of networking on LinkedIn in increasing employability.

Scientifically, this study contributes to the literature on the relationship between digital self-presentation and career outcomes among Generation Z. The findings confirm that personal branding on professional platforms like LinkedIn plays a crucial role in establishing a competent and credible image in the eyes of recruiters. Practical implications: Higher education institutions can utilize the results of this study to develop career training and workshops focused on improving digital personal branding skills for students.

However, this study is limited by its sample size, which only included 110 Generation Z students, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the study used only a quantitative approach with a questionnaire, thus failing to explore qualitative aspects related to individual motivations or strategies in utilizing LinkedIn. Future research is recommended to employ mixed methods for more representative results.

Overall, this study confirms that LinkedIn, as a personal branding strategy, is an important strategy in increasing the employability of Generation Z students, while networking needs to be developed more effectively to have a significant impact on their career readiness.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, this study demonstrates that LinkedIn plays a significant strategic role in increasing the employability of Generation Z students. Multiple linear

regression analysis revealed that personal branding has a positive and significant effect on employability. The adjusted R-square value of 0.578 indicates that 57.8% is explained by two independent variables (LinkedIn as networking and LinkedIn as personal branding), while the remaining 42.2% is explained by other factors not examined in this study, such as organizational experience, technical skills, interpersonal skills, education, and other external factors not included in this study. These results confirm that the more active students are in building professional networks and self-image through LinkedIn, the greater their chances of being ready to enter the workforce.

Theoretically, this study supports Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital, which states that social networks play a crucial role in providing access to career opportunities. Furthermore, these findings align with the personal branding theory of Labrecque et. al., (2011) stated that establishing a professional identity online can increase trust and visibility in the eyes of recruiters. Thus, LinkedIn is not only a professional social media platform, but also a strategic tool for career development and digital competency development for students.

Practically, this research has implications for various parties. For students, the results emphasize the importance of building a professional LinkedIn profile and actively interacting within relevant networks to expand job opportunities. For universities, these results demonstrate the need to integrate digital career branding training into the curriculum, so students can optimally utilize LinkedIn to support their job readiness. Meanwhile, for companies and HR departments, LinkedIn can be an effective tool for identifying potential young talent, particularly from Generation Z, who tend to be adaptable to digital technology.

The strength of this research lies in the cross-university and cross-provincial sample of respondents, allowing for a more comprehensive depiction of the phenomenon of LinkedIn use by Generation Z students across various educational contexts in the region. However, this study still has limitations, particularly the use of data based on perceptions, which can potentially contain subjective bias. Therefore, further research is recommended to integrate qualitative or mixed methods approaches to better understand students' motivations and strategies in using LinkedIn as a career development tool.

Overall, this study confirms that LinkedIn plays a crucial role in increasing the employability of Generation Z students through strengthening networking and personal branding. Strategically utilizing LinkedIn can bridge the gap between education and the workplace, while also supporting the creation of a young generation that is adaptable, professional, and ready to compete in the era of digital transformation.

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