

## PERSONAL BRANDING THROUGH DIGITAL PRESENCE: EVIDENCE FROM INDONESIAN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMUNITY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to elaborate the perception and experience of the Indonesian international relations (IR) community regarding the utilisation of digital platforms, widely known as academic social network sites (ASNs) such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate, in supporting their efforts to build personal branding as academics. Our study derived from online training sessions supported by the 2022 Binus Community Development Internal Grant (HIP 2022) which was conducted in collaboration with the Indonesian Association for International Relations (AIHII). Using a unique dataset on an online self-reporting survey, the findings suggest that most respondents consider digital presence is important for academics to thrive in their career (75%). In terms of preferences in using ASNs, it is clear that some platforms are more popular than the others. Almost 48% and 27% of informants have established an account in Google Scholar and ResearchGate respectively. Far less interest was displayed towards ORCID, as only 12% of respondents indicated that they have joined the platform. The paper contributes to the conversation surrounding personal branding using digital platforms among academics in a Global South setting by using Indonesia as a case study. We conclude by offering insights on the potential of research avenues for future study.

**Keywords:** personal branding, digital platforms, academic social network sites (ASNS), international relations, academics, Research Gate, Google Scholar, ORCID.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of marketing continues to grow and various findings have strengthened strategies to market products more successfully. The marketing process involves branding techniques that make buyers' perceptions more positive and loyal to the product being marketed. Not only marketing products in the form of goods and services, marketers are now also applying image strengthening strategies (branding) for tourist destinations, organisations, ideas, and human individuals (Keller & Kotler, 2012). Personal branding is a marketing concept associated with various strategies adopted by individuals to promote themselves. Various discussions about personal branding have been published in the form of scientific articles (Gorbatov et al., 2018), books, magazines, training programs, and personal trainers that specifically teach various tips for launching personal branding (Khedher, 2014). Quoted from Lair et al. (2005), the phenomenon of personal branding has strengthened since the 1990s following the economic logic that affects product branding as a method of communication between marketers and buyers. Job seekers today (Minor-Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2020) are starting to use branding as a way to position themselves in a highly competitive job search environment, just like the competition faced by product marketers out there.

As an individual approach, everyone basically has their own unique brand or distinctiveness and image. Everyone has the opportunity to improve their image, and if personal branding is successfully applied correctly, that person can boost his image in the field he is working on. Rein et al. (2005) further argues that everyone can actually transform to get a personal or professional image, including educators, researchers, and students. A study that analysed how the image of lecturers has an influence on customer-based brand equity (CBBE) in the eyes of students found that lecturers can have a strong image if they cultivate and maintain reputation, competence, and teaching quality (Jillapalli & Jillapalli, 2014). Lecturers with strong personal branding will make students more interested in learning and strengthen their sense of belonging to the university where they study. Furthermore, the study that tested the 13 hypotheses showed that students were even willing to spend more to be able to take classes with lecturers who had a very good image. This then becomes an indication that lecturers with personal branding are assets for the university because the experience in the lecturer's class will contribute to a positive experience in general studying at that campus (Williams et al., 2012). Furthermore, web presence and visibility are used as indicators of global performance of a university in Webometrics index (<https://www.webometrics.info/en>). These indicators take into account the teaching commitment, the research results, the perceived international prestige, the links with the community.

A growing body of literature on this subject has been dominated by the Global North context (Yan & Zhang, 2019), leaving a lacuna of knowledge on how this development is evolving in the Global South. This paper seeks to fill this

gap by elaborating the perception and experience of the Indonesian international relations (IR) community regarding the utilisation of digital platforms, widely known as academic social network sites (ASNS) such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate, in supporting their efforts to build personal branding as academics. This paper is structured as follows. The following section provides an overview of the literature on personal branding and digital platforms. We elaborate the data and methods in the next part, followed by findings and discussion. The last part of the paper offers insights on the potential of research avenues for future study.

**2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Internet penetration in Indonesia has been significantly improved in the last 10 years (Kemp, 2021). And in fact, adoption rates have even accelerated in recent years, partly due to initiatives designed to address challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of 2011, data indicated that Indonesia was home to just under 40 million internet users, which equated to 1 in 6 (17 percent) of the 238 million people living in the country at the time. However, over the past 10 years, the number of internet users in Indonesia has increased five-fold. The latest data suggest that just over 200 million people across the country are now online, equating to just under 74 percent of the current population. For context, these figures suggest a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of almost 18 percent over the past 10 years. And what’s more, Indonesians now spend an average of 9 hours per day using the internet, which is considerably more than the global average of just under 7 hours per day.

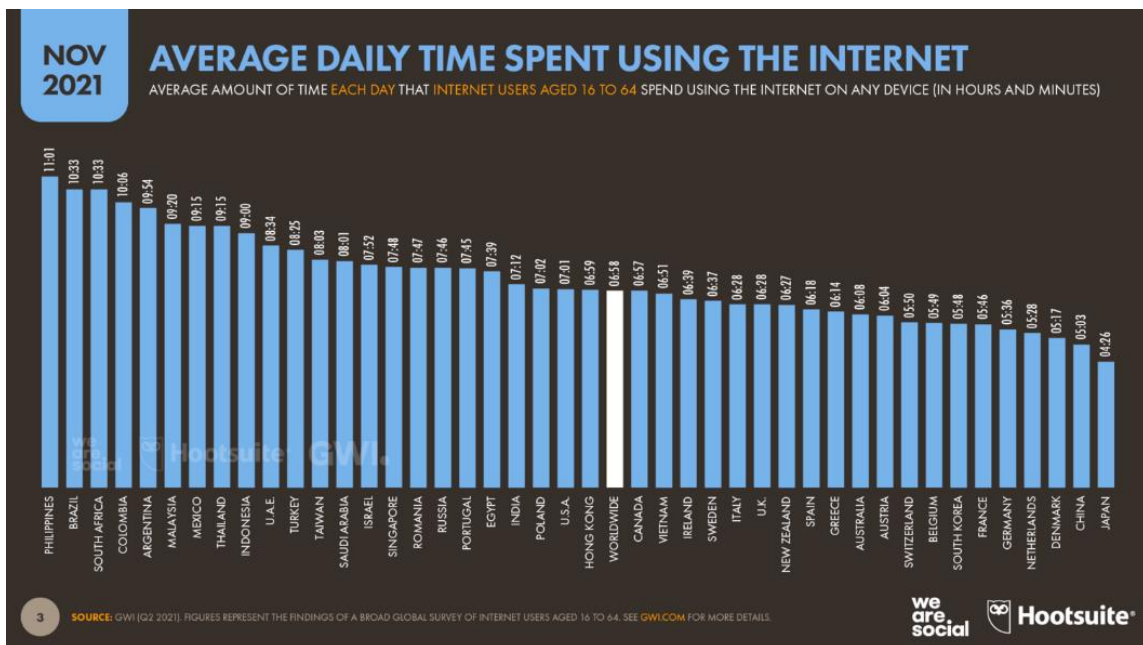


Figure 1. Average Daily Time Spent Using the Internet (Kemp, 2021)

Given the access to internet, users in Indonesia ranked 9<sup>th</sup> the world in terms of average amount of time each day that the internet users aged 16 to 64 spend using the internet on any device. Indonesians spent 9 hours a day on the internet, far exceeding the world average which sits at slightly less than 7 hours. The data further suggests that Filipinos spend more time using the internet than people in any other country around the world. This development indicates the opportunities to build personal branding using internet-based platforms.

In this paper, we define personal digital branding, discuss the professional implications of choosing to abstain from social media use, and urge educators to recognize that personal digital branding may be an emerging asset for young professionals in the twenty-first century (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). Personal branding is utterly important for jobseekers as it helps define their strongest attributes and sell themselves to companies (Brooks & Anumudu, 2016; Parmentier et al., 2013). Developing a personal brand is an incremental process that involves interaction with other parties both in the form of face-to-face and online communication (Hearn, 2008). A personal brand is a reflection of the expertise, expertise, ability, and experience of the owner. It is not limited to what celebrities or entrepreneurs have, but rather a personal brand belongs to everyone individually, including lecturers and students. This is why you should always ask questions when launching personal branding; “What do I want to be known as an expert in, or for what field of research?” (Petruca, 2016). One way to achieve a strong personal brand is by being present in the digital world, for example by being searchable in scientific social networks such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate.

Scholarly works on the importance of ASNS for scholars suggest that the virtual networks assist researchers to connect and interact with their peers effectively through exchange of information, altmetrics, and information behaviour in research communities and higher education institutions (Mason & Sakurai, 2021; Yan et al., 2021; Yan & Zhang, 2019). They all agreed that ASNS are becoming an important tool in the professional lives of researchers, providing an online space for international academic discourse and empirical evidence that measures individual researcher performance (Yu et al., 2016). At the micro-level, ASNS serve to facilitate, (a) knowledge sharing, (b) networking, and (c) identity-building (Corvello et al., 2020). Yet, an in-depth evaluation requires a more advanced procedure and indicators to measure many areas of scholarly activities like research, integration, application, teaching, and co-creation (Wiechetek & Pastuszak, 2022).

On the other end of the spectrum are those who consider the importance of ASNS for academics has been exaggerated (Greifeneder et al., 2018). Others suggest that the benefits for supporting communication and knowledge sharing within academic communities have been ignoring concerns over quality and credibility of the performance scoring. The academic social network site ResearchGate (RG) has its own indicator, RG Score, for its members. The high-profile nature of the site means that the RG Score may be used for recruitment, promotion, and other tasks for which researchers are evaluated. Within RG it is possible to distinguish between (passive) academics that interact little in the site and active platform users, who can get high RG Scores through engaging with others inside the site (questions, answers, social networks with influential researchers). Thus, RG Scores should not be mistaken for academic reputation indicators (Orduna-Malea et al., 2017). Copiello and Bonifaci (2018) further argue that the RG score is not a reliable indicator of scientific and academic reputation. Instead, it appears to be much more a tool to implement the entrepreneurial strategy of the RG’s owner company

**3. DATA AND METHODS**

Our community development project was delivered in collaboration with AIHII. We intend to conduct a series of training sessions on personal branding through digital presence. The first batch, held during the first half of the year, was set to cater Western and Eastern parts of Indonesia. Meanwhile, we plan to deliver the training sessions for Java, Bali, and Nusa Tenggara islands in the second half of 2022. The data was collected during training sessions in which participants are representing universities in Sumatera, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua. However, we also recorded one participant from Yogyakarta who may have heard about the training and was very keen to join. The following table depicts the distribution of participants by university. A total of 156 lecturers and students attended the training sessions.

We asked training participants to fill an online survey using Google Forms. A total of 67 respondents participated in the online survey, making the participation rate sit at 43%. We applied a descriptive statistical analysis to quantify and to visualise the responses.

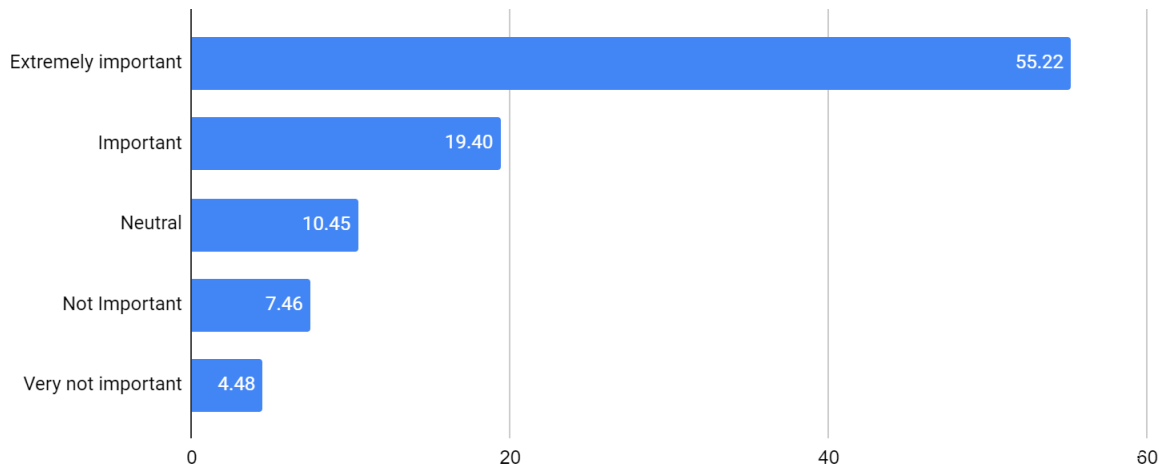
Table 1. Distribution of Training Participants by University (N = 156)

<i>University</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>
UIN Alauddin Makassar (UNAM)	98
Universitas Sains dan Teknologi Jayapura (USTJ)	40
Universitas Cendrawasih	4
Universitas Andalas	3
Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur	2
Universitas Sulawesi Barat	1
Universitas Bosowa	1
Universitas Pendidikan Muhammadiyah (UNIMUDA) Sorong	1
Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta	1
Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Kalimantan Timur	1
Universitas Potensi Utama	1
Universitas Mulawarman	1
Universitas Fajar	2

**4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

As we seek to explore the perception and experience of the Indonesian international relations (IR) community regarding the utilisation of digital platforms, we asked respondents to rate the importance for academics to have digital presence in ASNS. **Figure 2** indicates most participants (74.62%) consider digital presence as important for both lecturers and students. It is interesting to note that around 12% of respondents suggest that digital presence is not that important. More research is needed to unpack this negative perception, for example whether or not this answer

correlates with age, experience, or access to reliable internet infrastructure.



**How important do you think digital platforms for academics? (in percentage)**

Figure 2. The Importance of Digital Presence in ASNS (in percentage, N = 67)

As most respondents strongly inclined to utilise digital platforms to support their academic career, we further asked them to self-report the types of platforms that they have used. Picture 3 suggests Google Scholar is the most commonly used ASNS among research participants, followed by ResearchGate (RG). Some respondents confirm that they have gained knowledge from the scientific social networking sites through access to academic papers shared by the authors (Mason & Sakurai, 2021).

**Do you have an account in the following platforms? (in percentage)**

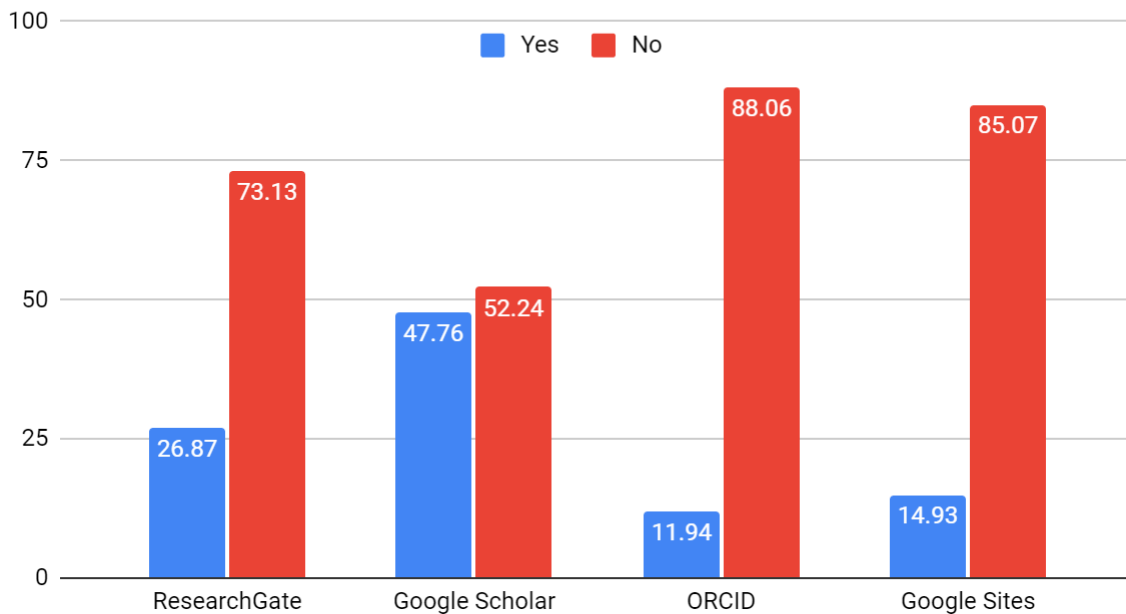


Figure 3. Accounts in Different ASNS (in percentage, N = 67)

On the other hand, very few respondents (12%) have joined Open Researcher and Contributor Identifier (ORCID). This 12-number ID has been used widely by scholars in countries like the US, UK, and other Global North contexts. Most authors and major journals nowadays are using ORCID to let their works be easily identified regardless of their past and current affiliation.

The disparity in preferences using ASNS platforms indicates that respondents have not yet maximised the opportunities available to them. It would be interesting to see once they learned different tools, their interest may change eventually. Aside from the lack of exposure to a variety of digital platforms, it is safe to suggest that ORCID and Google Sites are the least preferred platforms because the need to have ORCID and to engage using a dedicated

website are simply do not exist. Personal branding using digital platforms for academics in Indonesia remains limited and depending on the requirement from policies relevant to career advancement. This leads us to the importance of synchronising higher education regulations with the promotion of utilizing ASNS platforms.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated how Indonesian scholars are utilising ASNS to support their academic career. Although acknowledging the importance of having a digital presence, the utilisation is rather limited to Google Scholar. Other ASNS such as RG and Google Sites were not widely used, and the share of those with ORCID is being the smallest compared to all other ASNS. These findings suggest that future research could benefit from expanding the study on why Indonesian scholars tend to use Google Scholar and no other ASNS. In particular, more research is needed to elaborate on whether age groups help us to better understand the difference in preference.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study has been supported by the 2022 Bina Nusantara (BINUS) Community Development Internal Grant (HIP 2022). We would like to express our gratitude towards BINUS and the Indonesian Association for International Relations (AIHII) for allowing us to deliver the training sessions.

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