

The Relationship Between Flight Attendants' Personal Branding on Social Media and Levels of Engagement and Perceptions of Professionalism

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Abstract

The way individuals build their self-image on social media has changed along with the development of social media. Currently, some flight attendants often post content related to their work or profession as flight attendants; however, some of the content they upload is spontaneous and not yet supported by a clear personal branding strategy. The aims of this research are (1) to examine the influence of flight attendants' personal branding on social media on audience engagement levels and flight attendant professionalism (2) to examine the role of engagement in explaining the relationship between personal branding and flight attendant professionalism on social media (3) to identify flight attendants' personal branding strategies on social media in building a professional image and increasing social media engagement. Sampling was conducted using a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. The data source was primary data obtained through direct interviews with flight attendants using in-depth interview methods and online questionnaires distributed to 180 respondents. The study employed descriptive analysis and PLS-SEM analysis. The descriptive analysis results indicate that the variables of personal branding, audience engagement levels, and perceptions of professionalism fall into the high category. The PLS-SEM analysis results show that personal branding has a positive and significant effect on perceptions of professionalism and audience engagement levels; engagement has a positive and significant effect on perceptions of professionalism; and personal branding has a positive and significant indirect effect on perceptions of professionalism through audience engagement levels. The managerial implications are that flight attendants need to develop a clear and directed digital identity concept, upload content about work activities and flight experiences to educate their audience, and build two-way communication on social media by replying to comments and responding to messages. Airlines need to establish policies in the form of guidelines regarding digital ethics, permissible content types, and limitations on social media use to protect the company's image and support employee personal branding. Training related to digital personal branding for flight attendants is necessary to enhance their ability to build self-image and the company's reputation.

Keywords: Engagement, Flight Attendant, Personal Branding, PLS-SEM, Professionalism.

1. Introduction

Communication technology is one of the fastest-growing technological developments in modern society. Advances in communication technology and digitalization have brought significant changes to the social and professional lives of people worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated digital transformation through the widespread adoption of social media across communities (Susanti & Paramita, 2024). These technological advancements enable individuals to exchange and disseminate information more efficiently. Communication has become increasingly accessible with the rapid expansion of internet usage. According to a global survey, approximately 5.65 billion people use the internet, of whom 5.41 billion are social media users, indicating that 63.9% of the world's population actively uses social media (We Are Social, 2025).

Social media refers to online platforms that enable users to participate, share, and create content. It has evolved from early platforms such as Friendster and

MySpace to contemporary platforms including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. According to Andriansyah and Maharani (2021), social media facilitates two-way communication, making it an effective medium for both personal branding and marketing. In the digital era, personal branding has become an essential strategy for establishing one's image, competencies, and professional reputation. Lady (2023) emphasizes that strong personal branding helps build trust and enables the public to recognize the distinctive characteristics of a content creator.

In the flight attendant profession, personal branding plays a crucial role because flight attendants are responsible not only for ensuring passenger safety and providing excellent service but also for representing the airline's corporate image. Sari and Kusuma (2021) argue that flight attendants are expected to demonstrate both professional competence and an appropriate appearance, while Kusuma and Paramita (2024) found that authentic, consistent, and relevant content can increase engagement while strengthening professional reputation. Similarly, Kapferer (2012) explains that personal branding is the process of building identity through the management of reputation, values, skills, and individual characteristics, whereas Rahmawati et al. (2025) describe social media as a platform for professional documentation. Kartajaya (2020) further asserts that every individual working in the service sector serves as a personal brand for the organization, while Chong (2007) describes flight attendants as the living representation of an airline's brand values and identity.

Recent trends indicate that many flight attendants regularly share content related to their work activities, pre-flight preparations, and layover experiences, often receiving substantial engagement in the form of likes, comments, and shares. Muflih et al. (2024) highlight the importance of visual communication in shaping public perceptions and fostering emotional connections with audiences. Moreover, several quantitative studies have demonstrated that personal branding has a significant positive effect on social media engagement (Saidah et al., 2022) and audience loyalty (Wulandari & Nurhadi, 2025; Az Zahra & Rizal, 2025). However, most existing studies focus primarily on influencers or public figures, leaving research on flight attendants as public service professionals relatively limited.

The researcher's observations on Instagram indicate that posts featuring professional attributes—such as airline uniforms, airport activities, and work-related duties—generate higher engagement than personal lifestyle posts. Audiences also tend to associate the flight attendant profession with competence, credibility, and professionalism in their comments. These observations are consistent with the findings of Saidah et al. (2022), Wulandari and Nurhadi (2025), and Az Zahra and Rizal (2025), all of whom concluded that personal branding contributes positively to audience engagement and loyalty.

On the other hand, social media use among flight attendants also presents significant challenges. Simorangkir (2021) argues that the way flight attendants portray themselves on social media influences public perceptions of the profession. Content that emphasizes self-presentation over professionalism may undermine public trust. According to Kongsri and Jaroenwanit (2024), personal branding identity is shaped by professionalism, self-expression, and self-disclosure, while Sedak et al. (2021) warn that inappropriate social media use by professionals may raise ethical, disciplinary, reputational, and even legal concerns if not managed properly.

Although flight attendants' personal branding appears to increase social media engagement, there is still limited empirical evidence regarding whether such engagement aligns with professional standards and the corporate image of airlines. Furthermore, clear guidelines defining appropriate boundaries for flight attendants' personal branding in digital spaces remain largely unavailable. Therefore, this study seeks to address this research gap by quantitatively examining the relationships among personal branding, social media engagement, and flight attendants' professionalism. The importance of this research is further supported by Rahmadini et al. (2026), who found that personal branding on social media positively influences consumer behavior. Nevertheless, current personal branding practices among flight attendants are often conducted spontaneously without well-defined strategic planning, potentially affecting the consistency of their professional image.

To date, analyses of the relationship between personal branding and engagement on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have largely been confined to celebrities, artists, and social media influencers. Research focusing specifically on the flight attendant profession remains relatively scarce. This profession offers a unique context for investigation because flight attendants represent public service, are bound by airline ethical standards and corporate policies, and are closely associated with professional appearance. Consequently, flight attendants' personal branding should be examined not only from the perspective of individual communication but also in terms of its influence on perceptions of professionalism.

2. Method

Research Stages

This research has several stages as follows:

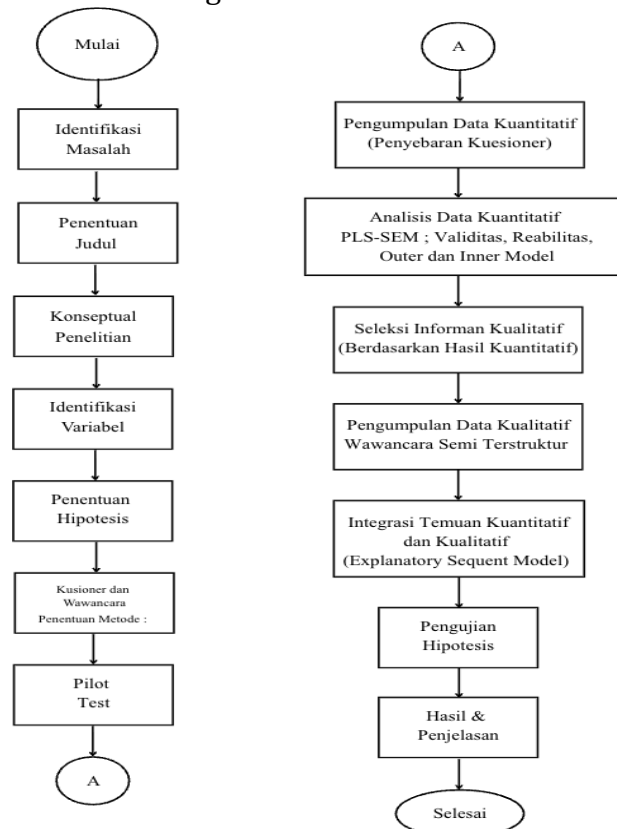


Figure 1. Research Stages

Figure 1 shows the systematic flow of the research from beginning to end. This research used a quantitative approach strengthened by data triangulation using in-depth interviews, combining quantitative and qualitative stages sequentially. The purpose of this approach was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between flight attendants' personal branding on social media and passenger engagement levels and perceptions of professionalism.

Research Data Sources

This research used primary data obtained from flight attendants as the primary respondents, both working for domestic and international airlines in Indonesia. Data collection was conducted online through an online survey and in-depth interviews with respondents who met the research criteria. The study used a quantitative approach to test the causal relationship between personal branding, social media engagement, and professionalism using PLS-SEM analysis, so the research results are expected to be generalizable, rather than using a case study approach that focuses on a single case.

Data Collection Method

Data was collected through an online survey with the aim of obtaining accurate information in line with the research problem formulation. To minimize response bias and social desirability bias, questionnaires were completed anonymously without revealing personal identification or airline affiliation. Respondents were also informed that the data would be used solely for academic purposes and were expected to provide honest responses.

Population

The study population consisted of Indonesian flight attendants working for domestic and international airlines and actively using social media to upload content related to their profession. The population was selected based on uniform service standards, regulations, and professional codes of ethics, thus representing the phenomena of personal branding, social media engagement, and professionalism in the digital space. The study did not differentiate between domestic and international flight attendants because the focus of the study was on social media usage behavior and professional perceptions, not on differences in job characteristics.

Sample

The sample size was determined based on the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019; 2022) using the 10-times rule approach and statistical power in PLS-SEM. Assuming a moderate effect size, a significance level of 5%, and a minimum statistical power of 0.80, the ideal sample size is around 100–200 respondents. Therefore, the study selected 180 flight attendants to ensure more stable and reliable model estimation results.

The sampling technique used a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Through purposive sampling, respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (1) at least 18 years old, (2) having social media and having uploaded content related to the flight attendant profession, (3) having at least six

months of work experience, and (4) being willing to complete the questionnaire in full. Furthermore, snowball sampling was used to expand the reach of respondents through recommendations from other flight attendants who met the research criteria so that all samples remained from a population relevant to the research objectives.

3. Result and Discussion

T-Test (Partial Test)

The t-test is used to examine the partial effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable with a significance level of 0.05. The hypothesis is accepted if the calculated t-value is greater than the table t-value or the significance value is <0.05.

The Effect of Personal Branding and Audience Engagement Level on Perceptions of Professionalism (X and Z versus Y)

The test results show that Personal Branding has a positive and significant effect on Professionalism, with a calculated t-value of 6.063, a significance value of 0.000 (<0.05), and a standardized beta coefficient of 0.521. Furthermore, Engagement also has a positive and significant effect on Professionalism, indicated by a calculated t-value of 3.257, a significance value of 0.001 (<0.05), and a standardized beta coefficient of 0.280. The complete t-test results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. T-Test Results of Personal Branding and Engagement on Professionalism Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	6.273	1.206		5.200	.000
Personal Branding	.511	.084	.521	6.063	.000
Engagement	.264	.081	.280	3.257	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Profesionalisme

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

The Effect of Personal Branding on Professionalism (X versus Y).

The next t-test results examined the effect of Personal Branding on Professionalism (X versus Y). The test results revealed a calculated t-value of 15.278, which is greater than the t-table value of 1.660. Furthermore, a significance value of 0.000 was obtained, which is less than 0.05, thus declaring the effect significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that Personal Branding has a positive and significant effect on Professionalism. The magnitude of this effect is indicated by the standardized beta coefficient of 0.753. The results of the t-test of personal branding on professionalism can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the T-Test of Personal Branding on Professionalism Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	7.215	1.202		6.001	.000
Personal Branding	.739	.048	.753	15.278	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Profesionalisme

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

The Effect of Personal Branding on Engagement (X Against Z).

Based on the test results in the coefficients table, the regression coefficient for the Personal Branding variable was 0.862, with a calculated t-value of 19.802 and a significance level of 0.000. Since the significance level is less than 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$), it can be concluded that Personal Branding has a positive and significant effect on Engagement. The standardized beta coefficient of 0.829 indicates that Personal Branding has a very strong relationship in increasing Engagement. The results of the t-test for personal branding on engagement can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of the T-Test for Personal Branding on Engagement

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	3.563	1.081		3.295	.001
Personal Branding	.862	.044	.829	19.802	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

F Test (Simultaneous Test)

The F test is used to simultaneously test the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable with a significance level of 0.05. The hypothesis is accepted if the calculated F value is greater than the table F value or the significance value is less than 0.05.

The Simultaneous Effect of Personal Branding and Engagement on Professionalism (X and Z on Y)

The ANOVA test results show a calculated F value of 128.313 with a significance value of 0.000 (<0.05) and a calculated F value greater than the table F value (3.89). These results indicate that Personal Branding and Engagement simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on Professionalism, thus accepting the research hypothesis. These findings also indicate that the regression model used is appropriate, and that both independent variables are capable of predicting the level of professionalism. The complete F test results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. F Test of Personal Branding and Engagement on Professionalism

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1186.931	2	593.466	128.313	.000 ^b
	Residual	818.647	177	4.625		
	Total	2005.578	179			

a. Dependent Variable: Profesionalisme

b. Predictors: (Constant), Engagement, Personal Branding

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

Simultaneous influence of personal branding on professionalism (X versus Y)

Based on the results of the F-test in the ANOVA table, the calculated F-value was 233.416 with a significance level of 0.000. This significance value is less than 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$), so it can be concluded that the Personal Branding variable has a

significant effect on Professionalism. The results of this study indicate that Personal Branding has a significant contribution to increasing Professionalism. Thus, the hypothesis stating that Personal Branding influences Professionalism is accepted. Furthermore, the calculated F-value of 233.416, which is greater than the F-table of 3.89, indicates that the regression model used in this study is suitable for explaining the relationship between Personal Branding and Professionalism. This means that the Personal Branding variable is a good predictor in explaining the level of Professionalism. The F-test table for personal branding on professionalism can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. F-test of Personal Branding on Professionalism

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1137.860	1	1137.860	233.416	.000 ^b
	Residual	867.718	178	4.875		
	Total	2005.578	179			

a. Dependent Variable: Professionalisme

b. Predictors: (Constant), Personal Branding

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

Simultaneous Effect of Personal Branding on Engagement (X versus Z)

Based on the F-test results in the ANOVA table, the calculated F-value was 392.129 with a significance level of 0.000. This significance value is less than 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$), so it can be concluded that the Personal Branding variable has a significant effect on Engagement. The results of this study indicate that Personal Branding has a significant contribution to increasing Engagement. Thus, the hypothesis stating that Personal Branding influences Engagement is accepted. Furthermore, the calculated F-value of 392.129, which is greater than the F-table of 3.89, indicates that the regression model used in this study is appropriate for explaining the relationship between Personal Branding and Engagement. This means that the Personal Branding variable is a good predictor in explaining the level of Engagement. The results of the F-test of personal branding on engagement can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. F-Test of Personal Branding on Audience Engagement Level

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1545.919	1	1545.919	392.129	.000 ^b
	Residual	701.743	178	3.942		
	Total	2247.661	179			

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Personal Branding

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

Results of PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling) Analysis

The quantitative test results in this study were conducted to examine the quality of the instruments and the relationships between the variables used in the research model. The test was conducted using a Structural Equation Modeling approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM). This analysis aimed to ensure that the indicators used were able to measure the constructs validly and reliably, and

to test the structural relationships between the variables in accordance with the formulated hypotheses. A total of 180 respondents were obtained through an online questionnaire distributed to Indonesian flight attendants from various airlines, including Garuda Indonesia, Citilink, Jetstar Australia, Qatar, Saudia Airlines, Emirates, and flight attendants from various other airlines. The software used for data processing was SmartPLS 4.0, with two stages of model evaluation according to Hair et al. (2017): measurement model evaluation (outer model) and structural model evaluation (inner model).

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

Convergent Validity Test

Convergent validity testing was conducted to ensure that the indicators adequately represent the latent constructs measured through outer loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. According to Ghazali (2015), an indicator is considered valid if it has an outer loading of ≥ 0.70 (or ≥ 0.60 in exploratory research) and an AVE value of > 0.50 . The results showed that all indicators had outer loadings of > 0.70 , so no indicators needed to be eliminated. The highest loading factor values were found in indicator PB6 (communication style) at 0.782 for Personal Branding, PR5 (professional ethics) at 0.792 for Perceived Professionalism, and EG3 (interaction consistency) at 0.840 for Engagement Level, indicating that these three indicators are the strongest representations of their respective constructs. The complete loading factor values are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Loading Factor Values

Peubah Laten	Indicator	Loading factor	p-value
Personal Branding	PB1	0,756	0,000
	PB2	0,735	0,000
	PB3	0,725	0,000
	PB4	0,776	0,000
	PB5	0,761	0,000
	PB6	0,782	0,000
Perceived Professionalism	PR1	0,743	0,000
	PR2	0,790	0,000
	PR3	0,743	0,000
	PR4	0,754	0,000
	PR5	0,792	0,000
	PR6	0,765	0,000
Audience Engagement Level	EG1	0,791	0,000
	EG2	0,796	0,000
	EG3	0,840	0,000
	EG4	0,800	0,000
	EG5	0,805	0,000
	EG6	0,820	0,000

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value indicates a construct's ability to explain the variance of its indicators. A construct is considered to have convergent validity if its AVE value is greater than 0.50. The AVE value for each latent variable is

greater than 0.5, indicating that each latent variable adequately reflects the indicator and is able to describe the variance explained by the questionnaire items compared to the variance resulting from measurement error. The AVE value for Personal Branding (PB) is 0.572, Perceived Professionalism (PR) is 0.585, and Audience Engagement Level (EG) is 0.654. The AVE values for each latent variable can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values

Variable	AVE
Personal Branding	0,572
Perceived Professionalism	0,585
Audience Engagement Level	0,654

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

Good convergent validity test results indicate that the measurement tool is capable of measuring the intended construct well, and that the measurement tool can be considered accurate, and that the latent variables can explain an average of more than 50% of the variance in its indicators.

Discriminant Validity Test with the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Discriminant validity testing aims to ensure that each construct in the study is clearly distinct from the others. One method used is the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). A construct is considered to have discriminant validity if the HTMT value is below 0.90, but under certain conditions, it can be tolerated up to 0.95. HTMT values can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Values

Variable Relationship	HTMT Value
Personal Branding ↔ Audience Engagement Level	0,954
Perceived Professionalism ↔ Audience Engagement Level	0,821
Perceived Professionalism ↔ Personal Branding	0,893

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

Discriminant Validity Test

Based on Table 9, all HTMT values meet the criteria for discriminant validity. The HTMT value between Personal Branding and Engagement Level of 0.954 is still within the tolerable limit (≤ 0.95), while the values between Perceived Professionalism and Engagement Level (0.821) and Personal Branding (0.893) meet the required limits. Thus, the model has good discriminant validity.

Composite Reliability

The Composite Reliability test demonstrates the construct's reliability based on Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. A construct is considered reliable if its value is ≥ 0.70 . Complete results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Composite Reliability Values

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)
Personal Branding	0,850	0,854	0,889

Perceived Professionalism	0,859	0,866	0,894
Audience Engagement Level	0,894	0,896	0,919

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

Based on Table 10, all variables have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70, thus all constructs are deemed reliable. Thus, the results of the outer model evaluation indicate that the research instrument meets the criteria for validity and reliability.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Coefficient of Determination (R-Square)

The coefficient of determination R-Square (R^2) is used to measure the ability of the independent variables to explain the dependent variable. The R^2 values for each endogenous variable are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. R-Square (R^2) Values

Endogen Variable	R-square	R-square Adjusted
Perceived Professionalism	0,645	0,641
Audience Engagement Level	0,698	0,696

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

Based on Table 11, the R^2 value indicates that Perceived Professionalism can be explained by Personal Branding by 64.5%, while Audience Engagement Level can be explained by Personal Branding by 69.8%. The remainder is influenced by other variables outside the study. According to Candana et al. (2023), the higher the R^2 value, the better the model's ability to explain endogenous variables.

Effect Size Test

The f-square (f^2) test is used to measure the magnitude of the influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable. The f^2 value is categorized as small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35). The test results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. F-square (f^2) Value

Variable Relationship	Nilai f^2	Description
<i>Personal Branding</i> → Perceived Professionalism	0,283	Sedang
<i>Personal Branding</i> → Audience Engagement Level	2,311	Besar
Audience Engagement Level → Perceived Professionalism	0,056	Kecil

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

According to Table 12, Personal Branding has a moderate effect on Perceived Professionalism ($f^2 = 0.283$) and a large effect on Engagement Level ($f^2 = 2.311$), making it the most dominant variable in the model. Meanwhile, the effect of Engagement Level on Perceived Professionalism is relatively small ($f^2 = 0.056$).

Path Coefficients Test

Path coefficients were conducted through a bootstrapping process to test the direct influence between latent variables based on the Original Sample (O) value, t-statistics, and p-values. A relationship is considered significant if the t-statistic is >

1.96 and the p-value is < 0.05 , while the Original Sample value indicates a positive or negative relationship. The complete test results are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Output Path Coefficients

Variable Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Personal Branding → Perceived Professionalism	0,577	0,581	0,090	6,428	0,000
Personal Branding → Audience Engagement Level	0,835	0,836	0,030	27,431	0,000
Audience Engagement Level → Perceived Professionalism	0,256	0,256	0,096	2,671	0,008

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

According to Table 13, Personal Branding has a positive and significant effect on Perceived Professionalism ($\alpha = 0.577$; $t = 6.428$; $p = 0.000$) and Engagement Level ($\alpha = 0.835$; $t = 27.431$; $p = 0.000$). Furthermore, Engagement Level also has a positive and significant effect on Perceived Professionalism ($\alpha = 0.256$; $t = 2.671$; $p = 0.008$), although the effect is smaller.

Indirect Effect Test

The Indirect Effect test was conducted to examine the role of mediating variables. In this study, Perceived Professionalism served as a mediator in the relationship between Personal Branding and Engagement Level. The test results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Indirect Effect Value

Variable Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values
Personal Branding → Perceived Professionalism	0,214	0,214	0,081	2,645	0,008

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

Based on Table 14, the indirect effect value is 0.214 with a t-statistic of 2.645 and a p-value of 0.08. This indicates that the indirect effect between personal branding and perceptions of professionalism through audience engagement levels is positive and significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that engagement levels mediate the relationship between personal branding and perceptions of professionalism. This indicates that in addition to its direct influence, personal branding also indirectly influences perceptions of professionalism through increased audience engagement.

Table 15. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Result	Decision
H1: Personal Branding → Perceived Professionalism	$\beta = 0.577, p < 0.001$	Accepted
H2: Personal Branding → Audience Engagement Level	$\beta = 0.835, p < 0.001$	Accepted
H3: Audience Engagement Level → Perceived Professionalism	$\beta = 0.256, p = 0.008$	Accepted
H4: Audience Engagement Level Mediates the Relationship between Personal Branding and Perceived Professionalism	$\beta = 0.214, p = 0.008$	Accepted

Source: primary data, processed data (2026)

Based on the test results, all research hypotheses were accepted. Personal branding was proven to be the primary factor influencing both engagement and perceptions of professionalism, while engagement acted as a mediator strengthening this relationship.

Discussion

The Effect of Personal Branding on Perceptions of Professionalism

The results of the PLS-SEM analysis showed that personal branding had a positive and significant effect on perceptions of professionalism ($\beta = 0.577$; $t = 6.428$; $p = 0.000$), with a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.283$). The better the personal branding a flight attendant built on social media, the higher the perception of professionalism. This finding aligns with Widiyowati et al. (2025), who stated that consistent and authentic personal branding increases positive perceptions, and Hutauruk et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of content consistency, audience understanding, and digital platform utilization. Interview results also indicated that flight attendants consciously construct a professional identity through consistent content related to their profession. Theoretically, these results reinforce the concept that a consistent digital identity can enhance credibility and professional reputation, while practically demonstrating the importance of a targeted personal branding strategy to strengthen the personal image and reputation of an airline.

The Effect of Personal Branding on Audience Engagement

The PLS-SEM analysis results show that personal branding has a positive and significant effect on audience engagement ($\beta = 0.835$; $t = 27.431$; $p = 0.000$), with a very large effect size ($f^2 = 2.311$). This indicates that personal branding is a dominant factor in increasing engagement through likes, comments, shares, and other forms of interaction. These findings align with Sa'idah et al. (2022), Kusuma and Paramita (2024), and Hutauruk et al. (2024), who stated that authentic, consistent, and relevant personal branding can increase audience engagement. Interview results also indicated that content showcasing flight attendants' professional activities and active interaction with followers resulted in higher engagement. Theoretically, these results reinforce the concept that a strong digital identity can increase audience engagement, while practically, they emphasize the importance of consistently presenting professional content and two-way communication to strengthen relationships with audiences.

The Effect of Engagement on Perceptions of Professionalism

The results of the PLS-SEM analysis showed that engagement had a positive and significant effect on perceptions of professionalism ($\beta = 0.256$; $t = 2.671$; $p = 0.008$), with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.056$). The higher the engagement achieved by flight attendants, the higher the perception of professionalism formed, although the effect was lower than that of personal branding. This finding aligns with Heiets et al. (2024), Widiyowati et al. (2025), and Maharani and Mardiana (2024), who stated that audience interaction reflects trust and strengthens a professional image. Interview results also indicated that a high level of audience response increases perceptions of credibility and professionalism. Theoretically, engagement strengthens the formation of professional perceptions on social media, while practically, flight attendants need to maintain active communication with their audiences to support their professional image.

The Role of Engagement as a Mediating Variable

The results of the PLS-SEM analysis indicate that engagement positively and significantly mediates the effect of personal branding on perceptions of professionalism ($\beta = 0.214$; $t = 2.645$; $p = 0.008$). This indicates that personal branding increases perceptions of professionalism both directly and indirectly through increased engagement, although the direct effect remains greater. This finding is supported by Heiets et al. (2024), Aslan et al. (2025), and Sa'idah et al. (2022), who stated that engagement is a mechanism that strengthens the relationship between digital identity and professional perceptions. Interview results also indicated that active interaction with the audience increases trust and strengthens the professional image. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the role of engagement as a mechanism in digital communication, while practically demonstrating the importance of combining consistent personal branding with active communication to enhance professionalism and reputation on social media.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the PLS-SEM analysis supported by interviews, it can be concluded that:

1. Flight attendant personal branding has a positive and significant effect on audience engagement and perceptions of professionalism. A consistent digital identity, professional communication, and relevant content can increase audience interaction while building a professional image.
2. Engagement has a positive and significant effect on perceptions of professionalism and mediates the relationship between personal branding and perceptions of professionalism. This indicates that engagement strengthens the influence of personal branding in building a professional image for flight attendants on social media.
3. An effective personal branding strategy includes presenting a consistent digital identity, professionally relevant content, and active communication with the audience. Interview results indicate that content related to work activities, flight experiences, education, and interactions through comments and messages can increase engagement and perceptions of professionalism.

Recommendations

Further research is recommended to add variables such as trust, credibility, or content quality, expand the research object to other professions, use mixed methods with a larger sample, and compare various social media platforms. Qualitative approaches and analysis of digital trends and social media algorithms are also needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Research Limitations

This study has limitations because all respondents were female flight attendants, so it does not reflect the perspectives of male cabin crew.

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