

THE ROLE OF INSTAGRAM IN SHAPING PERSONAL BRANDING STRATEGIES FOR CREATIVE FREELANCERS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

In today's competitive digital landscape, creative freelancers increasingly rely on personal branding to differentiate themselves and attract clients. A key platform for this purpose due to its focus on visual self-presentation and audience engagement such as Instagram is needed. This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to synthesize existing research on how creative freelancers utilize Instagram for personal branding, identifying key strategies, challenges, and research gaps. Guided by PRISMA, the review analyzed Scopus-indexed studies published between 2015 and 2025. Thematic analysis revealed Instagram's dual function for freelancers: facilitating creative self-expression and serving as a strategic tool for visibility, engagement, and monetization. Freelancers leverage curated posts, Stories, and algorithm-informed practices to craft authentic yet marketable identities. However, a significant gap exists, as few studies directly address the intersection of Instagram, personal branding, and creative freelancing. The review also highlights challenges including emotional and economic pressures stemming from algorithmic visibility demands and aesthetic labor. Current literature is predominantly Western-centric and overlooks newer features like Reels and Guides. Future research should explore these gaps and develop inclusive, culturally responsive frameworks to support sustainable personal branding. This SLR contributes by analyzing existing patterns and identifying best practices relevant to both academic research and the practical branding efforts of creative freelancers.

Keywords: *Creative Freelancers, Instagram, Personal Branding, Systematic Literature Review*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the gig economy has fundamentally reshaped creative work, enabling professionals such as illustrators, designers, and digital artists to pursue freelance careers beyond traditional employment structures (Vallas & Schor, 2020). Creative freelancers face structural precarity, competition, and algorithmic visibility pressures (e.g., shadowbanning, biased ranking systems) that demand relentless aesthetic labor and self-promotion, operating without institutional safeguards (Duffy & Meisner, 2023). Additionally, the number of followers affect personal branding which further specify the need to curate one's posts on social media (Dika et al., 2023). These demands elevate