# The Authenticity Paradox: How Generative AI Usage Shapes Personal Branding Efficacy and Self-Concept among Undergraduate Students

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***Abstract*—Undergraduate students use social media, like Instagram, to build their personal brand and present themselves online, they use it as a digital resume. Due to rapid growth of Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), how students use it for professional branding also changes. Earlier studies mainly focused on how often AI is used by students, this study looks into how they use AI – for generating ideas, improving content or creating digital content completely relying on AI. The study examines how these different uses of AI effect students personal branding and self-concept, through the idea of "Authenticity Paradox."**

**Methodology: A quantitative survey was conducted among $N = 141$ undergraduate students across government and private institutions. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability tests, exploratory factor analysis (KMO $= 0.862$), Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression modeling.**

**Findings: Results show that students mainly use Gen AI for Augmentation (Mean= 3.33, SD= 0.71) and Idea generation (Mean=3.08, SD= 0.80), over AI for full automation (Mean= 2.59, SD=0.81). Multiple regression analysis shows that using AI for ideation has positive effect on perceived Authenticity ($\beta = .559, p < .001$) and personal branding efficacy ($\beta = .357, p < .01$). Using AI for Augmentation has positive impact on self-concept ($\beta = .340, p < .001$), as student can make their content creative and attractive, keeping the originality of their ideas. Full Automation may improve the quality of the content, but it has negative effect on students' sense of self-concept ($\beta = -.250, p < .01$), but it increases perceived Authenticity $\beta = .246, p < .01$)**

**Conclusion & Implications: The findings of this paper highlight "Authenticity Paradox". AI help students to create polished professional content, but depending too much on AI can make the content look unreal and not original, so colleges and universities should encourage students to use AI in a very positive and supportive manner and try to retain their original ideas, voice and creativity.**

***Index Terms*—Generative AI, Personal Branding Efficacy, Authenticity Paradox, Self-Concept, Digital Identity Clarity.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the past, personal branding was most commonly related to CEOs, celebrities, and other prominent professionals. Whereas, in today's digital era, personal branding has become very important aspect for college students (Johnson, 2017). Along with their academics, they are expected to present themselves professionally in various social media platforms (Jordan, 2020). They have become their own personal managers in shaping, communicating, and managing their professional identity online.

Students identify that, their online presence, on platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn will act as their digital résumé (Marin & Nilă, 2021). The information they share, the way they present themselves, and the image that they create online will help them to communicate who they are, what they value, and what direction they want to pursue in the future.

There is a rapid growth of Generative AI (GenAI) tools. At the same time, the rapid rise of these tools has changed the way students create and share information online (Owoseni et al., 2024). Students are not only using these tools for academic purposes but they are also using it for their social media activities (Parra &

Chatterjee, 2024). They use these tools for various activities like generating ideas, creating captions and increasing their social presence (Ng et al. 2025).

Research gap found is that, many studies mainly focus on "How often students use Gen AI"? This information will not help us to know how students are actually using Gen AI for creating digital presence. So, it is important to understand how students use AI? Whether they use it for generating ideas, or for improving the information online or whether they completely rely on AI for building their social presence without using their personal ideas.

AI could be used for many reasons. Some students use AI only for generating ideas like thinking of posts topics or content ideas (Pescher and Tellis, 2025). Others use AI for improving their content like refining captions, improving grammar, or increasing the quality of their existing content while retaining their originality (Hassani et al., 2020). Some students may use AI for creating entire posts, like idea generation, captions, and may not contribute to the originality of the content (Shenoy & Gupta, 2025)

Understanding this difference in usage of AI is very important, to know how AI use will affect the originality or authenticity. This study names it as "Authenticity paradox". No doubt, AI will help students with attractive, well-written information to post online, which will help them to have good professional branding. But extensive use of AI, may make the content look less personal and may not reflect the originality of their ideas, personality and unique style.

The purpose of this study is to understand "Authenticity Paradox" by examining how different levels of AI use in online content affect student personal branding and one self. This study examines whether AI use to generate Ideas, improve content and creating content completely relying on AI has different effect on students' confidence in building personal branding or digital identity.

## II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the past, personal branding was related to celebrities, leaders, businessman, professionals (Peters, 1997; Lair et al., 2005). With the rise of social media, especially, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube etc, personal branding has become a part of university students' day to day life along with academic (Schau & Gilly, 2003; Labrecque et al., 2011).

Based on Grounded in Goffman's (1959) Impression Management Theory, people carefully present themselves online to portrait their positive image and show their skills, and to connect with others.

In this digital era, for any university students, social media profiles act as a "digital résumé" (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Pagan, 2020). Students not use social media for consuming contents, they also use it to show their skills, achievements and to connect with industry experts' networks (Khedher, 2014; Gandini, 2016). Platforms like Instagram mainly focus on online presence and personal identity. So, managing their social media presence can also affect their confidence in themselves and their careers (Manai & Holmlund, 2015).

### 2.2 Generative AI in Content Creation: Shift from how often to how it is used

Due to growing use of Generative AI like ChatGPT and other AI tools. has changed how people use AI for creating digital content (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Many studies focus on how often students use AI (Venkatesh et al., 2012). But recent research also informs us how people use AI to create content (Amershi et al., 2019; Fadel et al., 2019).

To understand how students use AI, paper is divided into 3 simple level based on how much control student keeps (Shneiderman, 2020; Heer, 2019):

AI for Ideation: students use AI for generating ideas but creating content themselves (Lubart, 2005).

AI for Augmentation: students use AI to improve Their online content, like correcting grammar, improving captions but retaining their original ideas and style (Engelbart, 1962; Raisch & Krakowski, 2021).

AI for Full Automation: students completely depend on AI to create all content online, from idea generation to final posting content (Parasuraman et al., 2000).

These 3 levels are important because more the students rely on AI, less control they will have on the final content they draft and less connected they will feel to what they have finally created (Pierce et al., 2003).

### 2.3 The "Authenticity Paradox" and Psychological Self-Concept

Perceived authenticity means, that a person's online profile feels more real and reflects their true

personality. It is important to build trust and strong personal branding (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). But, using AI to create content leads to "Authenticity paradox" as genuiness won't reflect in the content.

Gen AI help students to create attractive, professional content online. This will improve their personal branding (Murtarelli et al., 2021). Self- Determination Theory says that having control over choices is important for developing oneself (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When students completely rely on AI, they will lose their oneself, their ideas, experiences and personality (Turkle, 2011; Jussington, 2021).

This leads to Paradox. AI will help student create a good-looking online content and improve their personal brand, but too much usage will make them feel but does not reveal their originality (Waterman, 1984; Campbell et al., 1996).

## III OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the predominant patterns (frequency and types) of Generative AI utilization for social media content creation among undergraduate students.
2. To examine the relationship between the intensity of Generative AI usage and students perceived personal branding efficacy.
3. To analyse the mediating role of perceived authenticity in the relationship between Generative AI usage and undergraduate self-concept.

## IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper explored, how different way of using Gen AI, shapes students personal branding and self-concept. 5-point Likert scale was used to draft a questionnaire. 141 undergraduate students from government and private colleges were considered for the study. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability test, factor analysis, correlation and multiple regression analysis.to identify mediating role of perceived authenticity, Baron and Kenny's (1986) framework was used. Multiple Linear Regression model was used to identify direct relationship among AI dimension and perceived authenticity (Mediator), outcome variables are Personal branding and Self-concept. The findings show that using AI for generating ideas or for augmentation, students feel more authentic about their personal branding. On the other hand, Using AI for full automation of the content ends with loosing theor originality and weakens their self-concept, clearly showing "authenticity Paradox".

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demograpghic Details- A total of 141 undergraduate students was considered for the survey, of which 53.9% were male and 46.1% were female. Majority of the respondents were first-year students (51.8%), while 24.8% were from second years and 23.4% were from third years. Of the 141 students, (57.4%) were enrolled in private institutions and (42.6%) were from government institutions. About 41.8% reported average spending of 1–2 hours on social media, 39.0% spent 3–4 hours, and 17 % spent more than four hours, whereas only 2.1% used social media for less than one hour. The survey was collected from students of all discipline, BCA constituted (32.6%), followed by B.Sc. (24.1%), BBA (19.9%), BA (12.1%), and B.Com. (11.3%) students. Instagram appeared as the most preferred social media platform (85.1%) among students, followed by YouTube (10.6%) and LinkedIn (4.3%). Concerning the frequency of generative AI usage, 36.9% of respondents reported using AI rarely, followed by 31.9% who used AI occasionally, 18.4% who used AI frequently, 4.3% who used it very frequently, while 8.5% indicated that they had never used generative AI tools.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Matrix

| | AI for Ideation | AI for Augmentation | AI for Automation | Perceived Authenticity | Personal Branding Efficacy | Self-Concept |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AI for Ideation | 1 | .722** | .697** | .711** | .649** | .479** |
| AI for Augmentation | .722** | 1 | .560** | .514** | .492** | .495** |
| AI for Automation | .697** | .560** | 1 | .620** | .471** | .294** |
| Perceived Authenticity | .711** | .514** | .620** | 1 | .663** | .587** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal Branding Efficacy | .649** | .492** | .471** | .663** | 1 | .702** |
| Self-Concept | .479** | .495** | .294** | .587** | .702** | 1 |
| Note. N =141. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | | | | |

Table 1 represents the correlation analysis between the constructs. All the correlations were positively related to each other ($p<0.01$).

The strongest relationship is observed between AI for ideation and AI for Augmentation with r = 0.722, which indicates respondents who use AI for Idea generation also use AI for improving their content.

The next strongest relationship is observed between AI for Ideation and Perceived authenticity with r = 0.711, indicating respondents who use AI for idea generation tend to believe, AI generated content are authentic.

Personal branding efficacy and self-concept with r = 0.702, indicating that respondents with confidence in their ability tend to build strong personal brand also tend to have a strong self-concept.

The weakest relationship was found between AI for Automation and Self- concept r= 0.294, indicating greater dependence on AI for fully automated content has only a weak connection with respondents' self-concept

Table 2-Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Authenticity, Branding Efficacy, and Self-Concept

| Predictor Variables | Model 1: Perceived Authenticity | Model 2: Personal Branding Efficacy | Model 3: Self-Concept (Identity Clarity) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Standardized β (t-value) | Standardized β (t-value) | Standardized β (t-value) |
| (Constant) | — ($3.695^{***}$) | — ($2.805^{**}$) | — ($5.674^{***}$) |
| AI for Ideation | $.559$ ($5.714^{***}$) | $.357$ ($3.172^{**}$) | $.009$ ($0.078$) |
| AI for Augmentation | $-.027$ ($-0.323$) | $.056$ ($0.642$) | $.340$ ($3.602^{***}$) |
| AI for Automation | $.246$ ($3.014^{**}$) | $-.073$ ($-0.837$) | $-.250$ ($-2.661^{**}$) |
| Perceived Authenticity | — | $.425$ ($4.810^{***}$) | $.560$ ($5.884^{***}$) |
| Model Diagnostics | | | |
| $R^2$ | $.536$ | $.507$ | $.428$ |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | $.526$ | $.493$ | $.411$ |
| F-statistic | $52.779^{***}$ | $34.978^{***}$ | $25.444^{***}$ |
| Degrees of Freedom (df) | (3,137) | (4,136) | (4,136) |

Model 1: perceived Authenticity- This model examined direct influence of AI usage types on students perceived authenticity. The model was statically significant $F(3,137) = 52.779, p < .001$, leading for 53.6% of the variance ($R^2 = .536$, Adjusted $R^2 = .526$)

AI for Ideation (($\beta = .559, t = 5.714, p < .001$)- this emerged as strongest positive predictor. Using AI for brainstorming and content ideation allows students to maintain core creative agency, reinforcing their feeling of posting authentic content

AI for Automation ($\beta = .246, t = 3.014, p < .01$)- showed a positive effect on perceived authenticity, showing indicating that students who automate content still perceive their output as reflective of their online presence

AI for Augmentation ($\beta = -.027, t = -0.323, p = .747$)- reflect no significant effect on perceived authenticity.

Based on this result, H1 is partially Supported.

Model 2: Predicting Personal branding Efficacy

The model was statistically significant, $F(4,136) = 34.978, p < .001$, explaining 50.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .507$, Adjusted $R^2 = .493$).

Perceived authenticity ($\beta = .425, t = 4.810, p < .001$): this indicates that student who feel their authentic online presence, possess higher confidence in building their personal branding

AI for Ideation ($\beta = .357, t = 3.172, p < .01$): using AI for brain storming increase student confidence in showcasing their strength online

Augmentation ($\beta = .056, t = 0.642,\ p = .522$) and automation ($\beta = -.073, p = .404$) did not show significant effect on personal branding efficacy.

Model 3: Predicting Self-Concept / Digital Identity Clarity

This model examined the impact on student self-concept. The model was statistically significant, $F(4,136) = 25.444, p < .001$, accounting for 42.8% of the variance ($R^2 = .428$, Adjusted $R^2 = .411$).

Perceived authenticity ($\beta = .560, t = 5.884, p < .001$)- showed a strangest positive relationship with self-concept

AI for Augmentation ($\beta = .340, t = 3.602, p < .001$): showed a positive impact on self-concept. Using AI for polishing, or improving original draft will help student clarify their identity, without loosing their originality

AI for Automation has negative effect on Self-concept ($\beta = -.250, t = -2.661, p < .01$)

AI for Ideation showed no effect on self-concept ($\beta = .009, t = 0.078, p = .938$)

## VI. DISCUSSIONS

When Students Use AI For Idea Generation, They Feel more confident, because they feel that AI is used for generating ideas, yet the final content still reflects their own thoughts and creativity. But Model 1 shows AI for Augmentation has no Significant effect on perceived authenticity.

When students use AI for fixing grammar, improving sentence quality, it helps them to express their thought very clearly. Here, AI works as an editor than a creator, allowing students to retain their own ideas and thoughts.

When students completely rely on AI for content creation, one hand it gives student a great feeling that their content is authentic, on the other hand, it damages their self-concept.

The key takeaway is that when student completely rely on AI to write everything, they will slowly disconnect from their original taught. They will lose their clarity, and geniuses online. This gap between feeling authentic and loosing self-identity is the Authenticity paradox.

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