

# The Integrative Role of Digital Branding and Library Services in Enhancing Generation Z Engagement and Interest

Dwi Putri Aulia<sup>1</sup>, Delight Chikara<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Palembang, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Africa University, Mutare, Zimbabwe

## Article Info

### Article history:

Received: Jul 22, 2025

Revised: Nov 22, 2025

Accepted: Nov 26, 2025

### Keywords:

digital branding, generation z, library services, user engagement

## ABSTRACT

The advancement of digital technology has driven the transformation of library services, shifting the focus from functional provision to user experience through digital branding. This study aims to analyze the integrative role of digital branding and library services in shaping Generation Z engagement and interest at the Library of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed, involving Generation Z students as research participants. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed thematically through data reduction, categorization, and interpretation. The findings indicate that digital library services are widely utilized due to their accessibility and usefulness; however, user engagement remains primarily functional. Digital branding practices are still oriented toward information dissemination and have not fully developed into interactive and sustainable user experiences. In addition, the integration between digital branding and library services remains partial. This study concludes that strengthening user-centered digital branding strategies is essential to enhance Generation Z engagement and contributes both conceptually and practically to the development of digital-based library services

*This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) license.*



## Corresponding Author:

Dwi Putri Aulia

Ilmu Perpustakaan, Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Palembang, Indonesia

Jl. Prof. K. H. Zainal Abidin Fikri, Pahlawan, Kec. Kemuning, Kota Palembang, Sumatera Selatan 30151

Email: [putriauliadwi@gmail.com](mailto:putriauliadwi@gmail.com)

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of digital technologies has not only transformed the operational landscape of academic libraries but has also fundamentally reconfigured their epistemic and functional roles within higher education ecosystems. Libraries are increasingly expected to operate as hybrid knowledge infrastructures that integrate technological sophistication with user-centered design, thereby responding to the evolving expectations of digitally native users. Within this transformation, Generation Z emerges as a critical demographic cohort whose information behavior is deeply embedded in digital environments characterized by immediacy, interactivity, and algorithmically mediated content consumption (Florenthal, 2019; My, 2025). This shift challenges traditional paradigms of library service provision and necessitates a reconceptualization of how libraries position themselves in relation to user engagement, relevance, and institutional visibility (Debnath, 2025).

In this regard, digital branding has gained increasing scholarly attention as a strategic mechanism through which libraries can construct, communicate, and sustain their institutional identity in digitally mediated contexts. Unlike conventional branding approaches, digital branding operates at the intersection of technological affordances and experiential design, encompassing not only visual representation but also the orchestration of user experience, interaction quality, and relational engagement across digital platforms (Debnath, 2025; Hariff & Rowley, 2011). Concurrently, digital library services—such as e-libraries, OPAC systems, and electronic resource platforms—constitute the functional dimension of this ecosystem, enabling access to information in ways that align with contemporary user expectations. However, the relationship between these two dimensions remains theoretically underdeveloped, as existing studies often conceptualize branding and service delivery as discrete rather than interdependent constructs.

Recent scholarship (2019–2025) has begun to address this intersection, suggesting that the integration of digital branding and library services plays a pivotal role in shaping Generation Z engagement and interest. This body of work is theoretically anchored in a constellation of frameworks, including the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which foregrounds perceived usefulness and ease of use as key determinants of technology adoption; the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which explicates the role of attitudinal and normative factors in behavioral intention; and the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which emphasizes the active agency of users in seeking personalized and meaningful digital experiences (Florenthal, 2019; Prasetyo et al., 2025; Pratama & Noviaristanti, 2026; Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). While these frameworks provide valuable insights, they are often applied in isolation, thereby limiting their explanatory power in capturing the multidimensional nature of user engagement within digitally branded service environments.

Methodologically, the field has witnessed a growing reliance on mixed-method designs that attempt to reconcile quantitative generalizability with qualitative depth. Quantitative studies frequently employ Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships between technological perceptions, behavioral intentions, and engagement outcomes, while qualitative approaches offer contextualized understandings of institutional practices and user experiences. Bibliometric analyses further contribute by mapping intellectual structures and identifying emerging research trajectories (Daqal et al., 2025; My, 2025). Empirical findings

consistently indicate that digital branding—when operationalized through dimensions such as brand experience, trust, and perceived authenticity—significantly enhances user engagement, particularly when aligned with user-centered service design principles (Debnath, 2025; Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). Nevertheless, the analytical integration of these findings remains fragmented, with limited attempts to develop cohesive conceptual models that bridge branding and service dimensions.

Despite the growing body of literature, several critical gaps persist. First, the predominance of cross-sectional research designs constrains the ability to capture temporal dynamics and longitudinal shifts in Generation Z engagement. Second, the homogenization of Generation Z as a uniform user group overlooks the heterogeneity of socio-cultural, economic, and geographical contexts that shape information behavior (Kumar & Yadukrishnan, 2025; My, 2025). Third, the limited incorporation of emerging immersive technologies—such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR)—restricts the exploration of new modalities of user engagement. Fourth, the emotional and affective dimensions of engagement, including trust, identity formation, and sense of belonging, remain under-theorized. Finally, the absence of standardized evaluative frameworks for digital branding effectiveness poses significant challenges for comparative and cumulative research. Collectively, these gaps highlight the need for a more integrative and theoretically grounded approach to understanding the interplay between digital branding and library services. From a strategic perspective, engaging Generation Z requires a paradigmatic shift toward participatory, data-driven, and experience-oriented branding practices. Contemporary studies underscore the importance of leveraging social media ecosystems, influencer-mediated communication, user-generated content (UGC), and advanced analytics to create personalized and interactive user experiences. Generation Z's preference for authenticity, inclusivity, and value alignment further necessitates branding strategies that are not only technologically sophisticated but also socially and culturally resonant. In this sense, digital branding transcends its promotional function and becomes a mechanism for co-creating meaning and fostering relational engagement between libraries and their users.

Situated within this broader discourse, the present study focuses on the Library of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang as an empirical context that exemplifies the ongoing digital transformation of academic libraries in developing regions. While the library has implemented various digital services, including e-library platforms and OPAC systems, the integration of these services with coherent and strategic digital branding practices remains limited. This disjunction provides a critical opportunity to examine how the alignment—or lack thereof—between branding and service delivery influences user engagement and interest, particularly among Generation Z users who are highly attuned to digital experience quality. Accordingly, this study aims to develop a more integrated understanding of the role of digital branding in enhancing the effectiveness of library services in engaging Generation Z. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives, addressing identified research gaps, and grounding the analysis in an empirical case, this study seeks to contribute to the advancement of library and information science by proposing a more holistic and conceptually robust framework. Furthermore, it offers practical implications for rethinking library strategies in ways that are adaptive, user-centered, and aligned with the complexities of contemporary digital ecosystems.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes an in-depth understanding of subjective meanings and social constructions developed by individuals within specific contexts. This approach is particularly suitable given the complex and context-dependent nature of the phenomenon under investigation. The case study design allows for a comprehensive exploration of the integration of digital branding and library services within a real-life setting, as emphasized by John W. Creswell (2018), who argues that qualitative research is effective in understanding phenomena within their natural contexts. This study was conducted at the Library of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. In this research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument (human instrument), directly engaging in data collection and interpretation, consistent with the perspective of Nasution, who highlights the central role of the researcher in qualitative inquiry. The research subjects consist of Generation Z students who actively use digital library services, while key informants include librarians and digital service managers involved in digital branding implementation.

The population of this study includes all users of digital library services at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. The sample was determined using purposive sampling based on specific criteria, namely active users of digital services who have been exposed to the library's branding strategies. Data collection techniques were conducted through methodological triangulation, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation analysis, and questionnaires as supporting data. Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. Observations focused on the use of digital services such as e-library systems, OPAC, and social media platforms, while documentation analysis examined digital content and branding materials. Research instruments were developed based on conceptual indicators of digital branding and digital library services. This approach is consistent with the principles outlined by Sugiyono (2023), who emphasizes the importance of triangulated data collection techniques in ensuring the validity of qualitative research.

Data analysis was conducted inductively through processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to identify patterns, categories, and emerging themes from the empirical data. The analysis involved systematic coding procedures to organize and interpret the data meaningfully. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied techniques such as source and method triangulation, member checking, and audit trails to enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability. This approach aligns with qualitative research standards that emphasize rigor through trustworthiness, as discussed by John W. Creswell (2018) and Nasution (2023). Therefore, the methodological framework adopted in this study enables a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the integrative role of digital branding and library services in enhancing Generation Z engagement and interest

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data collected and analyzed through interviews, observations, and documentation, this study identifies key findings regarding the role of digital branding and library services in shaping Generation Z engagement and interest at the Library of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. The findings reveal dynamics in digital branding practices, service utilization, and user engagement. For systematic presentation, the findings are categorized into four main

themes: (1) digital branding practices, (2) Generation Z engagement, (3) integration of branding and library services, and (4) challenges in implementing digital branding integration.

### **Digital Branding as Informational Practice: Evidence of an Early-Stage Transformation**

The findings of this study reveal that digital branding practices at the Library of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang are primarily manifested through the active use of digital platforms such as social media, institutional websites, and e-library applications. The content produced across these platforms consistently emphasizes service-related information, promotion of digital collections, and information literacy initiatives, typically presented in visually simplified and accessible formats. Despite the regularity and consistency of content dissemination, the communication pattern remains predominantly unidirectional, positioning the library as an information provider while users largely assume a passive role in content consumption.

This empirical pattern suggests that digital branding within the institution is still oriented toward visibility rather than experiential engagement. Such a condition reinforces findings from recent scholarship indicating that many institutions remain in the initial phase of digital branding development, where communication is largely informational rather than relational. Debnath (2025) argues that the effectiveness of digital branding lies not merely in the transmission of information but in its capacity to cultivate meaningful digital experiences that foster emotional connection and long-term user loyalty. In this regard, the findings of this study indicate that digital branding practices within the library have yet to fully transition into an experience-driven strategy.

Furthermore, the limited level of interactivity observed in this study aligns with broader empirical evidence suggesting that Generation Z users demonstrate a strong preference for participatory and interactive digital environments. Studies by Cheng et al. (2020) and Tarigan et al. (2026) emphasize that user-generated content and bidirectional communication play a crucial role in enhancing user engagement and building a sense of community. The absence of such participatory elements in the observed practices indicates a misalignment between the implemented digital branding strategies and the behavioral characteristics of Generation Z users, who increasingly expect authenticity, interaction, and co-creation within digital spaces.

### **High Usage but Limited Engagement: Reinforcing the Adoption-Engagement Gap**

The findings further demonstrate that Generation Z users exhibit a high level of utilization of digital library services, particularly e-library platforms and online public access catalogs (OPAC). These services are perceived as highly accessible, efficient, and flexible, enabling users to fulfill their academic information needs with minimal constraints of time and space. The predominance of mobile device usage further reflects the adaptive nature of Generation Z in engaging with digital information environments. However, despite the high frequency of usage, user engagement remains largely functional and does not extend into deeper levels of emotional or participatory involvement. Users tend to access the services primarily when needed, without developing sustained interaction or attachment to the digital ecosystem of the library. This phenomenon illustrates a critical distinction between usage and engagement, where high adoption rates do not necessarily translate into meaningful user involvement.

This finding is consistent with recent empirical studies that highlight a similar gap between technological adoption and user engagement. Prasetyo et al. (2025) and Pratama and Noviaristanti (Pratama & Noviaristanti, 2026) demonstrate that Generation Z's adoption of digital services is strongly influenced by perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness;

however, these factors alone are insufficient to generate sustained engagement. Moreover, Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos (2025) emphasize that engagement among Generation Z is significantly shaped by the quality of digital brand experiences, including personalization, interactivity, and emotional resonance. Therefore, the limited engagement observed in this study suggests that while the functional dimensions of digital services are well established, the experiential dimensions remain underdeveloped.

### **Fragmented Integration: Confirming the Disconnect Between Branding and Service Delivery**

The study reveals that the integration between digital branding and library services remains fragmented and lacks a coherent strategic foundation. While digital platforms are utilized to promote library services, branding functions primarily as a supplementary communication tool rather than as a guiding framework for shaping user experience. Inconsistencies in visual design, navigation, and messaging across platforms further indicate the absence of a unified digital ecosystem. This finding reinforces existing research that identifies a persistent separation between service delivery and branding in many institutional contexts. Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos (2025) argue that in contemporary digital environments, the value of a service is not solely determined by its functional utility but also by how it is communicated, experienced, and internalized as part of a broader brand narrative. The lack of integration observed in this study thus reflects a gap between theoretical ideals and practical implementation.

Additionally, Kumar and Yadukrishnan (2025) introduce the concept of social listening as a strategic approach that enables institutions to continuously adapt their services and branding based on user feedback and behavioral data. The absence of such adaptive mechanisms in the present study suggests that the integration of branding and services remains static and insufficiently responsive to the evolving expectations of users. Consequently, the digital ecosystem of the library has not yet achieved the level of coherence required to support a fully integrated user experience.

### **Structural and Strategic Challenges: Evidence of Organizational Readiness Limitations**

The challenges identified in this study indicate that the integration of digital branding and library services is constrained not only by technical limitations but also by broader issues related to organizational readiness. One of the most significant challenges lies in the limited capacity of human resources in the domain of digital branding and strategic communication. Although librarians actively engage in content creation and digital platform management, these practices are largely operational and lack a long-term strategic orientation. This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing that successful digital transformation is contingent upon the organization's ability to align technological capabilities with human resource competencies and strategic vision. Kumar and Yadukrishnan (2025) highlight that institutions capable of navigating digital transformation effectively are those that integrate technological innovation with organizational adaptability and skill development. In the context of this study, the lack of such integration suggests that the transformation process remains incomplete.

Furthermore, the underutilization of social media as an interactive and participatory platform reflects an unrealized potential for fostering user engagement. Cheng et al. (2020) demonstrate that social media can serve as a powerful medium for building digital communities and facilitating user interaction. However, the findings of this study indicate that social media

is still predominantly used as a one-way communication channel, limiting its effectiveness in creating meaningful engagement. This condition underscores the need for a paradigm shift from service provision toward experience co-creation, where users are positioned not merely as consumers but as active participants in the digital ecosystem.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of digital branding and library services plays a significant role in shaping Generation Z engagement and interest; however, its implementation at the Library of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang remains in a transitional stage. The findings indicate that while digital library services are widely utilized due to their perceived usefulness and ease of access, user engagement remains predominantly functional and has not yet evolved into deeper, sustained involvement. This condition is largely attributed to digital branding practices that are still oriented toward information dissemination rather than the creation of interactive, personalized, and meaningful user experiences. Furthermore, the integration between branding and service delivery has not been systematically developed, resulting in a digital ecosystem that lacks coherence and user-centered orientation.

From a conceptual perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge by emphasizing that the effectiveness of library services in the digital era is not solely determined by their functional value, but also by how they are communicated and experienced as part of a digital brand. Practically, the findings highlight the need for more interactive and user-oriented digital branding strategies, the enhancement of human resource competencies in digital communication, and the optimization of social media as a participatory platform. Future research is recommended to adopt comparative and longitudinal approaches, as well as to explore the integration of emerging technologies in order to develop more adaptive and sustainable digital branding strategies within library contexts.

## REFERENCES

- Cheng, W. W. H., Lam, E. T. H., & Chiu, D. K. W. (2020). Social media as a platform in academic library marketing: A comparative study. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 46(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102188>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Daqal, H. A., Sani, M. K. J. A., Mohamad, A. N., & Alahdal, A. H. (2025). A bibliometric analysis of perceived innovativeness and value of digital library services in enhancing academic research productivity. *Information Services and Use*, 45(3-4), 167-187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18758789261434340>
- Debnath, R. (2025). Digital branding with social media instruments. In *Brand Creation and Management in the Phygital Era* (pp. 257-286). <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-0948-4.cho10>
- Florenthal, B. (2019). Young consumers' motivational drivers of brand engagement behavior on social media sites: A synthesized U&G and TAM framework. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 13(3), 351-391. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-05-2018-0064>
- Hariff, S., & Rowley, J. (2011). Branding of UK public libraries. *Library Management*, 32(4), 346-360. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01435121111132338>

- Kumar, A., & Yadukrishnan, T. A. (2025). Proposing a Conceptual Framework for Social Listening in Libraries: A Potential Game Changer to Engage Gen Z and Centennial Users. *Open Information Science*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1515/opis-2024-0012>
- My, N. T. (2025). Digital Knowledge Networks and Global Research Trends on Generation Z: A Bibliometric Perspective (2006–2024). *Journal of Logistics, Informatics and Service Science*, 12(9), 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.33168/JLISS.2025.0904>
- Nasution, A. F. (2023). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. CV. Harfa Creative.
- Prasetyo, B., Suryono, H. G. P., Ramadhian, M. A. R., & Hadiansah, I. (2025). Understanding Generation Z's Use Behavior Toward Peer-to-Peer Online Transportation Services: A Behavioral Intention Perspective in Indonesia. *2025 International Conference on Data Science and Its Applications, ICoDSA 2025*, 758–763. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICoDSA67155.2025.11157469>
- Pratama, B. S., & Noviaristanti, S. (2026). Analyzing Digital Service Acceptance in Gen Z: The by.U Experience. In *Studies in Big Data* (Vol. 177, pp. 91–101). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-97609-4\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-97609-4_9)
- Sugiyono. (2023). *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan (Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Kombinasi, R&D Dan Penelitian Pendidikan)* (3rd ed.). Alfabeta.
- Tarigan, E. D. S., Lores, L., & Purba, A. W. D. (2026). MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE DIGITAL STRATEGY: E-COMMERCE, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND INFLUENCERS FOR GENERATION Z-Y LOYALTY. *Corporate and Business Strategy Review*, 7(2), 86–95. <https://doi.org/10.22495/cbsrv7i2art8>
- Theocharis, D., & Tsekouropoulos, G. (2025). Sustainable Consumption and Branding for Gen Z: How Brand Dimensions Influence Consumer Behavior and Adoption of Newly Launched Technological Products. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 17(9). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17094124>