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GENERAL RESEARCH METHODS FOR POSITIONING STRATEGIES OF LEADING UNIVERSITIES IN WESTERN EUROPE

Abstract. The article examines the digital image of the contemporary education manager as a significant intangible managerial resource that determines the effectiveness of managerial decisions, the level of trust among teaching staff, parents, and other stakeholders, and influences the formation of corporate culture and the reputational capital of educational institutions. The aim of the study is to examine the specifics of forming the digital image of a modern education manager, identify the key factors that influence its effectiveness, and analyze the use of digital tools for the effective implementation of the integration approach in the educational process.

The interrelationship between digital image, reputation, and digital brand is analyzed, forming a hierarchical system of the manager's digital identity, in which the digital image serves as a communicative component, reputation reflects the outcomes of professional activity, and the digital brand represents an integrated manifestation of value-based and strategic leadership. A system of indicators for assessing the digital image is outlined, encompassing communicative-managerial, reputational-trust, motivational-corporate, and strategic-innovative parameters, allowing the evaluation of the managerial effectiveness of education managers in the digital environment. It is demonstrated that the digital image has a bidirectional relationship



with the corporate culture of the institution, reflecting its values while simultaneously shaping a culture of openness, trust, innovation, and professional interaction, which ensures sustainable organizational development. The practical significance of the study lies in the development of an algorithm for digital image formation, applicable in the work of educational leaders and in enhancing managers' digital competence, contributing to the efficiency of management processes and the strengthening of the institution's corporate image.

Keywords: digital image, digital brand, future education manager, management resource, corporate culture, digital communication, reputation, educational leadership, professional image.

DIGITAL-ІМІДЖ СУЧАСНОГО МЕНЕДЖЕРА ОСВІТИ

Анотація. У статті розглядається digital-імідж сучасного менеджера освіти як важливий нематеріальний управлінський ресурс, що визначає ефективність управлінських рішень, рівень довіри педагогічного колективу, батьків та інших стейкхолдерів, а також впливає на формування корпоративної культури та репутаційний капітал закладу освіти. Мета дослідження - вивчити особливості формування digital-іміджу сучасного менеджера освіти, визначити ключові чинники, які впливають на його ефективність, проаналізувати особливості використання цифрових інструментів для ефективності впровадження інтеграційного підходу в освітній процес.

Проаналізовано взаємозв'язок між поняттями digital-імідж, репутація та digital-бренд, які утворюють ієрархічну систему цифрової ідентичності управління, де digital-імідж виступає комунікативним компонентом, репутація – результатом професійної діяльності, а digital-бренд – інтегрованим проявом ціннісного та стратегічного лідерства. Виокремлено систему індикаторів оцінювання digital-іміджу, що охоплює комунікативно-управлінські, репутаційно-довірчі, мотиваційно-корпоративні та стратегічно-інноваційні параметри, які дозволяють оцінювати рівень управлінської ефективності менеджера освіти в цифровому середовищі. Доведено, що digital-імідж перебуває у двосторонньому взаємозв'язку з корпоративною культурою закладу, відображаючи її цінності та водночас формуючи культуру відкритості, довіри, інноваційності та професійної взаємодії, що забезпечує стійкий розвиток освітньої організації. Практичне значення статті полягає у розробленні алгоритму формування digital-іміджу, який може застосовуватися у діяльності керівників закладів освіти та у системі підвищення цифрової компетентності управлінців, сприяючи ефективності управлінських процесів та зміцненню корпоративного іміджу організації.

Ключові слова: digital-імідж, digital-бренд, майбутній менеджер освіти, управлінський ресурс, корпоративна культура, цифрова комунікація, репутація, освітнє лідерство, професійний імідж.

INTRODUCTION

The problem formulation. Problem formulation. In the contemporary context of educational development, a key factor in the effective management of educational institutions is the ability of a leader to create and maintain their own digital image – a set of digital manifestations of professional, communicative, and reputational competence in the virtual environment. Information technologies, social media, and online platforms are increasingly used not only for organizational activities but also for communication with the institution's staff, learners, parents, employers, and the broader public. Accordingly, the formation of a positive digital image becomes an integral component of the professional preparation and continuous development of education managers.

The relevance of the research is determined by the main tendencies of the modern educational system. The digitalization of the educational environment necessitates that managers master new forms of communication and managerial practices involving digital tools. Moreover, society increasingly assesses the effectiveness of educational institutions based on the visibility and accessibility of information about their leaders in the digital space. Thus, the digital image becomes a factor of reputational success. Ignoring this aspect may lead to decreased trust in managerial decisions and negatively affect interaction within the institution and with external stakeholders.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Analysis of academic sources indicates that the concept of a digital image is researched at the intersection of pedagogy, educational management, and digital technologies. Issues related to the digitalization of education and digital identity in pedagogy have been explored by V. Osadchyi and I. Serdiuk (2019); O. Liashenko, O. Spirin, S. Lytvynova, O. Pinchuk, O. Ovcharuk & A. Sukhikh (2024). The significance of the digital environment for educational management has been addressed by N. Bitar & N. Davidovich (2024); Y. Yampol (2024), M. Rostoka (2025). The impact of social networks on educational leadership was investigated by A. Daly, Y. Liou, M. Fresno, M. Rehm & P. Bjorklund (2019); D. Forbes (2017) and M. Ohara (2023). The correlation between digital competencies and the image-related characteristics of education managers was identified by S. D. Myller, H. Konzag, J. Nielsen & H. Sandholt (2024); O. Hrytsenchuk, O. Ovcharuk & O. Kravchyna (2025); M. Jing, Z. Guo, X. Wu, Z. Yang & X. Wang (2025), among others.

However, there remains a need for a comprehensive approach to studying the digital image of education managers in order to increase the effectiveness of managerial activity.

AIM AND RESEARCH TASKS

The purpose of the study is to examine the peculiarities of forming the digital image of a modern education manager, to determine the key factors influencing its effectiveness, and to analyze the use of digital tools for the effective implementation of an integrative approach in the educational process. The research is aimed at revealing the relationship between the manager's digital competencies and their image-based influence in the professional educational environment, in response to the current challenges of educational digitalization and to enhance the quality of institutional management.

RESEARCH METHODS: method of generalization, method of analysis, modeling, systems approach.



RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The concepts of “image,” “reputation,” and “brand” of a manager are closely interconnected and form a hierarchical system. Within this system, the image functions as a communicative tool of initial perception, reputation constitutes an outcome of managerial performance, and the brand represents an integrated manifestation of value-based and professional leadership in the educational space.

According to the sociologist E. Goffman, image is “the art of impression management” (Statinova & Radchenko, 2001). The image of an education manager represents an external and communicative portrayal of the leader, encompassing managerial style, digital presence (such as the institution’s website, social media, and public speeches), professional language, and rhetoric.

The reputation of an education manager is the assessment of their activity by the staff, learners, external stakeholders, and educational authorities. Reputation is shaped by factors such as the quality of managerial decisions, institutional educational outcomes, the level of academic integrity, and ethical and fair governance.

The brand of an education manager represents a personal managerial brand that extends beyond the boundaries of the institution, providing the manager with trust and authority within the professional community. Key attributes of a personal brand include recognition, expertise, strategic thinking, and value-based leadership.

The constructed image together with performance outcomes forms the reputation of the individual. Reputation combined with personal values and a strategic approach ultimately shapes the personal brand.

Under conditions of pervasive digitalization, the digital image becomes decisive for the self-presentation of education managers. The digital image is a contemporary form of image realization that influences the formation of reputation and indirectly the personal brand of an education manager.

Thus, a conceptual chain may be formulated as follows: **Digital image** \subset **Image** \rightarrow **Reputation** \rightarrow **Brand**

The digital image serves as a starting point under conditions of educational digitalization and often constitutes the first channel of stakeholder contact and initial perception. It is formed within the digital environment through targeted online communication, digital representation of professional activity, and managerial practices on institutional websites, social networks, and during public online engagements.

We propose to conceptualize the digital image of a modern education manager as an integrated phenomenon encompassing professional, communicative, reputational, and digital dimensions simultaneously. This approach integrates the traditional professional image of a leader with their digital presence across social media, professional platforms, and corporate online resources. Such an approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of interactions among image components and their impact on managerial effectiveness in the context of educational digitalization.

In contemporary educational practice, the digital image performs multiple functions:

- representational, contributing to positive stakeholder perception (staff, learners, stakeholders, society);
- communicative, providing effective interaction through digital channels (networks, platforms);
- motivational, stimulating the development of digital competencies among subordinates;
- innovative, manifested in the application of new digital tools in managerial practice.

We agree with O. Berezyuk that a modern education manager “must possess innovative methods and technologies for the effective implementation of distance, blended, asynchronous and synchronous, cloud-based learning, flipped and virtual classrooms, e-learning platforms, gamification, digital storytelling, and the organization of educational management systems” (Berezyuk, 2025, p.222).

Overall, the digital image combines the personal qualities of the education manager, their professional competencies, and digital skills. These components together create a holistic and effective professional profile within the digital educational environment.

Researchers distinguish the following structural components of the digital image:

- professional component, reflecting the level of managerial competencies, strategic thinking, and the ability to make effective decisions in the digital environment;
- communicative component, enabling effective interaction with staff, learners, and external stakeholders through digital channels;
- reputational component, encompassing trust in the manager, positive assessment of their activity, and professional authority including within the digital space;
- digital component, reflecting the manager’s ability to use digital tools, platforms, and media resources to enhance both the educational process and managerial activity.

The interaction of these components forms an integral digital image that affects managerial effectiveness and the image of the educational institution as a whole.

Consequently, the digital image of a modern education manager represents a complex characteristic integrating professional competencies, digital skills, and reputational aspects of leadership. As is known, managerial resource refers to the totality of elements possessed by a leader or organization enabling successful governance, implementation of change, and achievement of goals. The source of managerial resource is the individual, endowed with knowledge, skills, and experience in management (Humennyk et al., 2012). The digital image of an education manager may be considered as an intangible managerial resource enhancing managerial decision-making and the development of institutional corporate culture. For an education manager, such a resource facilitates innovation,



reduces communication barriers, strengthens institutional culture, and ensures sustainability of managerial processes. In the digital era, leadership is exercised not only through decisions but also through digital content.

Indicators of the digital image as a managerial resource reflect the quality of digital managerial communication, the degree of trust and motivation within the staff, the observance of digital norms, and the ability of the manager to ensure strategic development under digitalization. The systematization of indicators of the digital image of an education manager as a managerial resource by managerial effects is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Indicators of the digital image of an education manager as a managerial resource

Indicator	Content	Manifestation	Managerial Effect
Communicative	effectiveness of managerial communication in the digital environment	transparency of managerial decisions; accessibility of the manager through digital channels; promptness of response to inquiries; clarity and comprehensibility of managerial messages; consistency between official and informal digital communications	reduction of information barriers and rumors
Reputational	volume of reputational capital	digital trust within the staff; stability of positive digital perception; frequency of supportive reactions (comments, reposts, participation in discussions)	increased legitimacy of managerial decisions
Corporate	influence on corporate culture	staff engagement in digital initiatives; readiness for change; support of managerial innovations; staff identification with institutional values	increased internal motivation of the staff
Regulatory	quality of digital governance	adherence to norms of digital ethics; absence of public digital conflicts; consistency of digital behavior; alignment of digital actions with managerial role	stability and predictability of governance
Strategic	value of managerial activity	participation in digital educational projects; initiation and support of innovation; expansion of professional digital networks; recognition in the professional digital environment	enhanced competitiveness of the institution

The integral indicator of the managerial effectiveness of the digital image as a resource is determined by the consistency between the digital representation of the education manager and their actual managerial actions, the stability of a positive digital reputation, and the ability of the digital image to support the achievement of the strategic goals of the educational institution.

The digital image of an education manager functions both as a mirror reflection and as an instrument for shaping the corporate culture of the institution. Through their digital image, the leader sets norms of digital communication, establishes a culture of transparency, stimulates digital activity among the staff, and maintains an innovative climate. Inconsistency between the declared digital image and the actual corporate culture of the educational institution leads to a loss of trust. Conversely, a strong corporate culture reinforces the authenticity of the digital image, reduces reputational risks, and ensures coherence of communication.

In our publication (Shuryhin et al., 2025), we substantiated that digital literacy and corporate culture are deeply interconnected elements of contemporary professional preparation of students of pedagogical specialties, including education managers. Therefore, the level of digital literacy significantly affects the effectiveness of the digital image constructed by an education manager, and hence the success of the corporate culture within the educational institution.

The formation of the digital image of an education manager occurs through systemic digital communication, public managerial activity, and adherence to digital ethics, which together ensure trust, managerial effectiveness, and sustainable development of the educational institution. We have systematized the most common examples of constructing the digital image of an education manager through various information channels with descriptions of actions and resulting managerial effects (Table 2).

In addition, an educational manager should publicly support colleagues' projects through reposting educational initiatives and expressing public gratitude. In this way, the manager is presented as a motivational and human-centered leader, while simultaneously increasing the digital activity of the staff.

During digital engagement, an education manager must adhere to high standards of digital ethics: appropriate language, absence of manipulative content, and respect for privacy. It should be noted that the issue of ethical use of the digital environment is important in our information society. The specifics of digital ethics and the description of ethical challenges generated by the development of digital technologies have been explored in the works of N. Bostrom (Bostrom, 2020), A. Toffler (Toffler, 1970), F. Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 2018), as well as philosophers A. Borgmann (Borgmann, 1999) and H. Dreyfus (Dreyfus, 2001), who critically assessed the ethics of social networks.



Today, the most popular social networks for communication in Ukraine are YouTube – over 25 million users, Facebook – approximately 17 million, Instagram – over 16 million, TikTok – 11 million, LinkedIn – over 3 million, and X (Twitter) – about 1.5 million (Nepliach, 2025; Yudin, 2024); global statistics are provided by Statcounter GlobalStats. A detailed analysis of the main ethical challenges associated with the digital environment has been carried out in the work (Kravchenko, Kyzymenko, Krasilnikova & Husieva, 2025).

Table 2.

Examples of constructing the digital image of an education manager

Channel	Action	Type of Digital Image	Managerial Effect
Institution's website	public video/text addresses; explanations of managerial decisions (staffing, academic, organizational); open reports on institutional performance	open, responsible, strategically thinking manager	increased trust and reduced resistance to change
Social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	running a professional page rather than a formal account; publishing managerial commentary on educational events; highlighting the achievements of colleagues and learners; constructive interaction in comments	modern, communicatively competent manager	formation of loyalty and a positive digital environment
Online events and public speaking	regular participation in webinars, online conferences, professional meetings; presenting managerial cases; showcasing institutional experience; providing expert commentary	expert, innovative, change-oriented leader	increased authority beyond the institutional level
Internal communication	transparent governance: structured digital organization of meetings via Zoom/Google Workspace/Microsoft Teams/Webex; implementation of open calendars; transparent access to shared documents	effective, organized, fair manager	strengthened managerial discipline and accountability
Crisis communication	response to crisis situations in the digital environment (negative information, conflict): prompt publication of an official position; use of appropriate language; proposing solutions to the problem	responsible, ethically mature, stress-resistant manager	preservation of reputational stability
Personal expert content	publication of analytical posts/professional essays; commentary on educational reforms; presentation of authorial managerial approaches; reflection on managerial decisions	thoughtful, strategic, academically oriented manager	formation of a personal digital brand

Undoubtedly, by adhering to digital ethics, an education manager contributes to the formation of a safe digital environment.

Thus, the digital image of an education manager should be interpreted as the external and communicative image of a leader, which includes management style, digital presence (institutional website, social media, public communication, etc.), professional rhetoric, and openness to innovation.

The digital image of an education manager is formed as a result of purposeful digital managerial activity. The formation of the digital image of an education manager is a step-by-step management process aimed at increasing management efficiency and trust within the digital educational environment. A visualization of this process using AI is presented in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Algorithm for the Formation of the Digital Image of an Education Manager

At the first stage, value-oriented and strategic positioning is carried out, meaning the definition of the managerial mission, values, and the desired digital image of an education manager, taking into account the development strategy of the educational institution.



At the second stage, an audit of digital presence is conducted by analyzing existing digital channels and content for their compliance with the managerial role and the norms of digital ethics.

During the third stage, professional digital communication takes place – the systematic use of official digital channels to present managerial decisions, institutional achievements, and strategic priorities.

The next stage involves the formation of digital managerial interaction, which ensures management transparency, accessibility of the manager, and feedback through digital tools. At the subsequent stage, public expert activity is intensified through participation in professional online events and the presentation of managerial experience, with the aim of strengthening reputational potential. An important stage is the formation of digital ethics – the transfer of ethical norms of human communication, such as politeness, tactfulness, mutual respect, and tolerance, from the real to the virtual environment. At the final stage, monitoring and correction are carried out through the analysis of digital feedback and the adjustment of the digital image in accordance with managerial results and the strategic goals of the institution.

A properly formed digital image of an education manager serves as an effective tool for enhancing trust, managerial legitimacy, and the sustainable development of an educational institution.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

In the modern context of education digitalization, the digital image of an education manager acquires the status of an important intangible managerial resource that influences the effectiveness of managerial decisions, the level of stakeholders' trust, and the competitiveness of the educational institution. The digital image, reputation, and digital brand of an education manager constitute a hierarchically interconnected system in which the digital image functions as an initial communicative factor, reputation represents the outcome of managerial activity, and the digital brand serves as an integrated manifestation of value-based and strategic leadership.

The formation of the digital image of an education manager is a step-by-step managerial process that includes value-oriented strategic positioning, professional digital communication, managerial interaction, and continuous monitoring and correction. An effective digital image of an educational manager is in a bidirectional relationship with the corporate culture of the educational institution, both reflecting its values and norms and actively influencing the development of a culture of openness, trust, and innovation.

The prospects for further research lie in the development of instruments for empirical diagnostics of the digital image of an education manager and in studying its impact on the quality of educational management, the educational process, and the performance of educational institutions.

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