



# Romantic loneliness as creative fuel: Romantic loneliness and personal branding mediated by reframing mechanism among Generation Z in West Java

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Generation Z in Indonesia (27.94% of the population) faces paradoxical digital hyperconnectivity alongside escalating romantic loneliness discrepancies between desired and achieved intimacy. Personal branding has become essential in post-pandemic digital economies.

**Purpose:** This study examined whether romantic loneliness catalyzes personal branding development through cognitive reframing mechanisms among Indonesian Generation Z.

**Method:** This sequential explanatory mixed-methods study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with 151 Generation Z participants aged 20-29 years in West Java. The sample size satisfied the ten-times rule for PLS-SEM with post-hoc power analysis (>.80 for medium effect sizes). Instruments demonstrated adequate reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .696-.863$ ; AVE>.59). Five participants underwent semi-structured interviews using thematic analysis.

**Findings:** Romantic loneliness significantly predicted reframing mechanisms ( $\beta = .777$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which subsequently influenced personal branding ( $\beta = .461$ ,  $p = .002$ ), with reframing as a significant partial mediator. Qualitative analysis revealed three adaptive pathways: productivity redirection, supportive network cultivation, and existential self-prioritization.

**Implication:** These findings demonstrate that romantic loneliness, when cognitively reframed, functions as a transformative resource for authentic personal branding. Results inform psychosocial interventions emphasizing reframing competency in educational curricula and youth programs.

## KEYWORDS

Romantic loneliness; cognitive reframing; personal branding; generation Z; mixed-methods research

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## Introduction

Generation Z, encompassing individuals born between 1997 and 2012, comprising 27.94% (71,509,082 of 270,203,917 people) of the national population (BPS, 2020). This generational cohort has matured entirely within digitally saturated environments, experiencing formative years characterized by ubiquitous internet access, smartphone prevalence, and social media integration across virtually all daily life activities. Technological affordances have fundamentally shaped their communication patterns, relationship formation processes, identity construction practices, and professional development trajectories, distinguishing them markedly from preceding generations in both behavioral manifestations and psychological orientations. In contemporary post-pandemic digital economies, personal branding has transitioned from optional professional enhancement to essential survival competency for Generation Z populations (Gandini, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated fundamental transformations in employment landscapes, educational delivery systems, and professional networking

paradigms, compelling young adults to construct and strategically project distinctive digital identities across increasingly competitive and saturated virtual environments.

Within Indonesian contexts specifically, intensifying competition for limited employment and advancement opportunities exacerbated by economic contractions and accelerating technological disruptions render personal branding competencies particularly vital for Generation Z career trajectories and long-term professional viability. Digital platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok have evolved into primary arenas where young professionals systematically cultivate professional reputations, demonstrate domain expertise, and access critical opportunity networks that previously required physical proximity and institutional gatekeeping mechanisms. Organizations increasingly utilize digital footprints and personal branding artifacts as preliminary screening mechanisms during candidate assessment processes (Mavrych et al., 2025; Susanti & Paramita, 2024). This paradigmatic shift positions personal branding literacy not merely as advantageous an supplementary skill but as a fundamental prerequisite for Generation Z workforce participation and sustained career progression across diverse professional domains.

Personal branding has emerged as a critical developmental task for Generation Z, representing the deliberate cultivation and strategic projection of distinctive identity markers across digital and physical spheres to establish professional credibility, social recognition, and authentic self-expression. Unlike previous generations who compartmentalized personal and professional identities, Generation Z navigates fluid self-presentation landscapes wherein LinkedIn profiles, Instagram aesthetics, and interpersonal interactions coalesce into coherent identity narratives that signal competence, values, and aspirational trajectories. This imperative intensifies within Indonesia's competitive educational and Labor markets, where employers increasingly evaluate candidates through digital footprints and curated online personas alongside traditional credentials. However, authentic personal branding demands sustained psychological resources, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience capacities, potentially compromised by unresolved emotional states such as romantic loneliness. The intersection between affective experiences and identity construction processes thus warrants systematic investigation, particularly given Generation Z's simultaneous vulnerability to emotional isolation and pressure for strategic self-commodification.

Paradoxically, despite unprecedented digital connectivity enabling continuous communication across geographical boundaries, Generation Z exhibits the highest recorded prevalence rates of loneliness among contemporary generational cohorts. Romantic loneliness, specifically conceptualized as subjective cognitive-emotional discrepancies between desired and achieved intimacy within romantic relationship contexts emerges as a particularly salient psychological phenomenon affecting contemporary young adult populations (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Saputri & Lianawati, 2025).

To provide a robust theoretical foundation, this study defines the core variables within the specific sociocultural context of Indonesian Generation Z. Romantic loneliness in this research context is defined as the subjective distress experienced by an individual as a result of the need for close, reciprocal romantic or partner intimacy. Furthermore, this subjective experience as a perceived discrepancy between desired and actual partner closeness and is maintained by cognitive-emotional processes (biased appraisals, rumination, negative expectations) that reduce opportunities for corrective interpersonal experiences (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Weiss, 1973; Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010). Building upon this definition, the internal process is further analyzed through a reframing mechanism, defined as the psychological capacity to cognitively restructure these emotional deficits into opportunities for growth. Ultimately, these processes are

hypothesized to culminate in personal branding, operationalized as the strategic projection of a unique identity and self-actualization, as informed by Maslow's hierarchical needs, to navigate the digital professional landscape.

This form of loneliness encompasses multidimensional experiences, including unfulfilled needs for emotional closeness, perceived partner unavailability, inadequate communication depth, and discrepancies between relationship expectations and lived realities. Empirical data from this investigation revealed that 72% of Generation Z respondents reported agreement with romantic loneliness indicators, highlighting the widespread prevalence of this phenomenon within Indonesian contexts. Social media platforms, while facilitating connection opportunities, simultaneously enable constant social comparison processes whereby individuals evaluate their relationship experiences against curated idealized representations presented by peers. These comparison dynamics frequently intensify perceptions of romantic insufficiency and relational inadequacy, particularly among developmentally-sensitive young adult populations navigating identity formation processes (Goldman et al., 2025).

Traditional scholarly approaches have predominantly conceptualized romantic loneliness through deficit-oriented frameworks, emphasizing its associations with depression, anxiety, reduced well-being, and compromised relationship quality. Nowland and colleagues demonstrated that loneliness and rejection sensitivity correlate significantly with heightened threat sensitivity in romantic relationships, predisposing individuals toward defensive relational patterns and reduced relationship satisfaction (Nowland et al., 2018). While these investigations provide valuable insights regarding loneliness vulnerabilities, they inadequately address potential adaptive responses or generative possibilities emerging from loneliness experiences. This investigative emphasis on pathological outcomes obscures potential developmental opportunities wherein emotional challenges catalyze personal growth, creative expression, and identity elaboration. Emerging theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence suggest alternative conceptualizations wherein loneliness functions not exclusively as a psychological liability but potentially as a catalyst for creativity, introspection, and self-development. Solitude experiences distinct from yet related to loneliness have demonstrated positive associations with enhanced creativity, deeper self-understanding, and strengthened autonomous functioning (Lindloff et al., 2024). Several contemporary investigations document paradoxical relationships whereby negative emotional experiences, when cognitively reframed, generate positive developmental outcomes including, increased resilience, enhanced problem-solving capacities, and authentic identity consolidation (Mancone et al., 2025).

Specifically, within Generation Z populations, those who navigate digital self-expression as a primary identity construction mode, emotional experiences including loneliness, may fuel intensified personal branding efforts as individuals channel emotional energy toward strategic self-presentation and authentic identity articulation. Yet despite these theoretical possibilities, systematic empirical examination of whether romantic loneliness catalyzes personal branding development through cognitive reframing mechanisms remains absent from existing literature. Cognitive reframing the capacity to reconstruct subjective meanings attributed to experiences by adopting alternative interpretive frameworks represents pivotal psychological mechanism enabling adaptive responses to challenging circumstances. Alter and colleagues demonstrated through experimental investigations that reframing threatening situations as challenges rather than threats eliminates stereotype-induced performance decrements, suggesting that interpretive frameworks fundamentally alter how individuals respond to potentially adverse conditions (Alter et al., 2010). This research established that identical objective circumstances generate divergent outcomes depending upon cognitive appraisals individuals construct.

Extending these principles to romantic loneliness contexts suggests that individuals who successfully reframe loneliness experiences from threatening deficits into developmental opportunities may channel emotional intensity toward constructive self-development initiatives, including personal branding cultivation (Graphia, 2022).

Contemporary research examining Generation Z psychological functioning emphasizes the importance of psychological capital comprising hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism in facilitating adaptive responses to workplace demands and life challenges. Putra and colleagues documented that psychological capital, combined with organizational support, significantly predicted psychological resilience among Indonesian Generation Z workers, highlighting this generation's capacity for adaptive coping when provided appropriate cognitive resources (Putra et al., 2025). While this research focused specifically on occupational contexts, underlying principles regarding cognitive resource mobilization apply equally to personal branding domains, where self-efficacy beliefs and optimistic future orientations enable sustained identity development efforts despite emotional challenges. Several empirical investigations further illuminate theoretical foundations undergirding relationships between romantic experiences, cognitive processes, and identity development. Research demonstrates that rejection sensitivity shapes relational threat perception patterns, influencing how individuals interpret and respond to ambiguous romantic situations (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Studies examining emotional regulation strategies reveal that cognitive reappraisal techniques effectively modulate negative affect and promote adaptive behavioral responses across diverse stressful contexts (Gross & John, 2003).

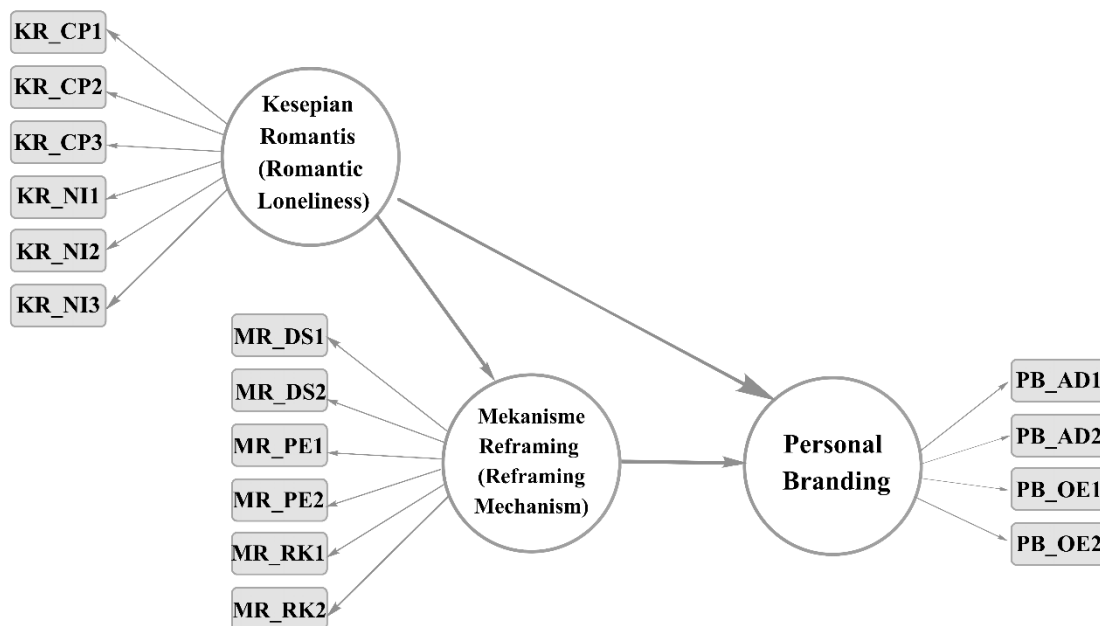
Additionally, investigations exploring young adult identity formation processes document that challenging life experiences, when integrated through meaning-making efforts, contribute substantively to identity consolidation and psychosocial maturity (McLean & Pratt, 2006). These converging lines of evidence suggest that romantic loneliness, reframing mechanisms, and personal branding development may form interconnected developmental pathways warranting systematic empirical examination. Integrating these theoretical trajectories, romantic loneliness as a widespread Generation Z experience, cognitive reframing as an adaptive mechanism, and personal branding as an essential contemporary competency yields a conceptual framework positioning romantic loneliness as a potential catalyst for personal branding development when mediated through cognitive reframing processes. This framework advances beyond traditional deficit models by recognizing that emotional challenges, rather than exclusively impeding development, may provide motivational impetus and emotional raw material for authentic identity construction and strategic self-presentation. Despite these theoretical convergences, critical empirical gaps persist. First, existing investigations examining loneliness effects on behavioral outcomes have focused predominantly on social withdrawal, relationship dysfunction, and reduced well-being, neglecting potential constructive adaptations, including intensified self-development efforts.

Second, while reframing research documents its efficacy for managing performance anxiety and stereotype threat, the mechanisms through which reframing transforms romantic loneliness specifically into personal branding motivation remain unexplored. Third, within Indonesian contexts, Generation Z experiences unique cultural dynamics, including collectivist relationship expectations, digital adoption patterns, and labor market pressures that differentiate their experiences from Western populations, where most existing research originates. No empirical investigations have systematically examined whether romantic loneliness predicts personal branding development through reframing mechanisms among Indonesian Generation Z populations. This investigation addresses these gaps by examining whether romantic loneliness

catalyzes personal branding development through cognitive reframing mechanisms among Generation Z individuals in West Java, Indonesia. The complementary qualitative component explores underlying psychological mechanisms and contextual nuances through which these relationships manifest in lived experiences. This research advances theoretical comprehension by repositioning romantic loneliness from a purely negative phenomenon to a potential developmental catalyst, while providing practical insights for educators, counselors, and young adults navigating contemporary relationships and career landscapes.

**Method**

This investigation employed a quantitatively driven sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (QUAN → qual), wherein the quantitative component constituted the primary analytical framework while the qualitative phase functioned as a complementary interpretive mechanism. Figure 1 illustrates the sequential architecture of this investigation. The quantitative strand utilized cross-sectional survey methodology, analysed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), subsequently followed by qualitative inquiry through semi-structured in-depth interviews.



**Figure 1.** Latent Variable Model of the Study

This sequential architecture enabled statistical identification of structural pathways before exploring underlying psychological mechanisms and contextual nuances through narrative analysis.

**Participants**

The quantitative phase recruited 151 Generation Z individuals (aged 20-29 years) residing in West Java Province, Indonesia, through purposive sampling targeting active students and/or workers. Sample size determination followed three criteria: first, the "10 times rule" for PLS-SEM (Hair, 2014) requires a minimum  $n = 10 \times$  the largest number of predictor variables pointing to a single construct. With three hypothesized pathways, the minimum threshold was 30

participants, substantially exceeded by 151 participants; second, post-hoc power analysis using G\*Power 3.1 confirmed statistical power  $(1-\beta) > .80$  for detecting medium effect sizes ( $f^2 = .15$ ) at  $\alpha = .05$  significance level, indicating adequate sensitivity to detect meaningful relationships; third, the sample size meets practical accessibility constraints while ensuring sufficient heterogeneity within this developmental population. This sample exceeds conventional adequacy standards for exploratory research using self-developed instruments and provides robust statistical power for complex structural equation modeling analyses. Control variables, including gender, active status (student/worker), and personal status (single/in a relationship), were systematically incorporated to enhance internal validity by accounting for potential demographic confounders that might influence outcome variables. Subsequently, five participants were purposively selected for qualitative interviews based on information power principles, Lindloff et al. (2024) justified by narrow theory-driven aims, high sample specificity, established theoretical frameworks guiding dialogue, strong interview quality (60-90 minute duration), and case-focused analytical strategy. Qualitative participant selection prioritized maximum variation sampling to capture diverse experiences across relationship statuses and romantic loneliness intensity levels, thereby enriching thematic depth and analytical comprehensiveness through representation of heterogeneous experiential perspectives. Selection criteria encompassed demographic diversity (gender: male=1, female=4; relationship status: single with crush=3, in relationship=2), extreme case representation reflecting the highest and lowest reframing scores, rich narrative potential identified through open-ended survey responses, and theoretical relevance illustrating key mediating processes.

### Instruments

A self-developed questionnaire comprising 16 items operationalized three constructs through differentiated 5-point Likert scaling systems tailored to each construct's theoretical properties. Romantic Loneliness (6 items) employed agreement-based responses anchored from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), assessing subjective endorsement of intimacy deficits and cognitive-emotional processing patterns. Reframing Mechanism (6 items) utilized frequency-based responses ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Often), capturing behavioral enactment rates of cognitive reappraisal strategies, ego defense activation, and social support utilization. Personal Branding (4 items) adopted agreement-based scaling identical to Romantic Loneliness measurement, evaluating self-actualization tendencies and experiential openness as identity construction indicators. This differentiated scaling approach aligned response formats with construct conceptualizations: agreement scales captured dispositional characteristics and subjective states, whereas frequency scales measured actual behavioral manifestations, thereby enhancing measurement validity through format-construct correspondence.

Romantic Loneliness was operationalized through six items assessing Need for Intimacy and Cognitive-Emotional Processes, theoretically grounded in Peplau and Perlman (1982) loneliness framework. Reframing Mechanism employed six items measuring Cognitive Reappraisal, Ego Defence, and Social Support dimensions, derived from Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory and Freudian defence mechanisms. Personal Branding utilized four items capturing Self-Actualization and Openness to Experience, based on Maslow's hierarchical needs and trait theories. Pilot testing ( $n=40$ ) established satisfactory psychometric properties with construct-specific Cronbach's Alpha coefficients demonstrating adequate internal consistency: Romantic Loneliness  $\alpha=.77$ , Reframing Mechanism  $\alpha=.71$ , and Personal Branding  $\alpha=.79$ . All measurement items underwent rigorous validity assessment through convergent and discriminant validity testing procedures, with Average Variance Extracted values exceeding .50

and discriminant validity were confirmed via this Fornell-Larcker criterion, ensuring measurement instruments captured intended theoretical constructs with sufficient precision and distinctiveness. These reliability indices exceeded conventional acceptability thresholds ( $\alpha \geq .70$ ) recommended for exploratory research utilizing self-developed instruments (Vogel et al., 2014), confirming that items within each construct exhibited sufficient inter-item correlation to function as coherent measurement scales and Average Variance Extracted values exceeding .59. Qualitative data collection employed semi-structured interview protocols directly informed by PLS-SEM results, wherein significant pathways generated specific probing questions exploring mindset transformation processes and personal branding development trajectories.

**Analytical Techniques**

Quantitative analysis proceeded through descriptive statistics, classical assumption testing (normality, heteroscedasticity, multicollinearity), and PLS-SEM via SmartPLS 4 software with 5,000-iteration bootstrapping procedures. Model evaluation encompassed measurement model assessment (convergent validity, discriminant validity, construct reliability) and structural model examination ( $R^2$ , path coefficients, effect sizes). Qualitative transcripts underwent Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis involving systematic familiarization, inductive coding in NVivo 14, inter-coder reliability assessment ( $\kappa = .82$ ), iterative theme development guided by quantitative constructs while remaining open to emergent patterns, theme refinement, and final thematic mapping. Researcher reflexivity was maintained through bracketing journals documenting the lead author's positionality as an Indonesian Gen Z nursing student, with weekly peer debriefing, member checking with three participants, audit trail documentation, and negative case analysis, ensuring trustworthiness to the criteria (Sakir, 2025).

**Result**

**Measurement Model Adequacy**

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties. Romantic Loneliness indicators exhibited loading factors ranging from .735 to .811 (AVE=.594). The Reframing Mechanism, following the removal of four problematic cross-loading indicators, achieved loading factors between .673 and .880 (AVE=.608). Personal Branding indicators loaded from .608 to .810 (AVE=.615). All constructs surpassed composite reliability thresholds above .85, while Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .696 to .788, confirming internal consistency. Discriminant validity was established through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading analysis after indicator refinement (see Table 1).

**Table 1.**  
*Validity and Reliability of Variables*

Construct	Dimension/Indicator	Loading Range	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Composite Reliability	AVE	Decision
Romantic Loneliness (RL)	Need for Intimacy, Cognitive-Emotional Processes	.735–.811	.771–.788	.898	.594	Valid & Reliable
Reframing Mechanism (MR)	Cognitive Reappraisal, Ego Defence, Social Support	.673–.880	.696–.752	.868	.608	Valid & Reliable
Personal Branding (PB)	Self-Actualization, Openness to Experience	.608–.810	.712–.774	.865	.615	Valid & Reliable

*Note.* All constructs demonstrate AVE values > .50 and CR exceeding .85. These results confirm that convergent validity and internal consistency reliability according to PLS-SEM standards.

Model fit indices presented mixed results. While  $d_{ULS}$  (1.214),  $d_G$  (2.275), and GoF (.666) indicated adequate structural alignment, SRMR (.125) and NFI (.393) fell below conventional cutoffs. Despite these marginal global fit limitations, the model demonstrates robust theoretical coherence and practical utility. The elevated predictive relevance indices ( $Q^2_{MR}=.595$ ;  $Q^2_{PB}=.659$ ) substantially exceed the critical threshold of .35, confirming that the model possesses strong out-of-sample predictive capabilities (Hair, 2014). This pattern—wherein local model quality surpasses global fit metrics is not uncommon in exploratory investigations employing self-developed instruments within culturally-specific populations, particularly when theoretical constructs reflect nuanced psychological processes inadequately captured by conventional fit indices designed for Western individualistic contexts (Henseler et al., 2015). The model's capacity to explain 60.4% variance in reframing mechanisms and 75.2% in personal branding substantially exceeds Cohen's threshold for a large effect ( $R^2>.26$ ), validating its explanatory power despite global fit considerations. However, predictive relevance remained strong ( $Q^2_{MR}=.595$ ;  $Q^2_{PB}=.659$ ), confirming the model's validity within this cultural-demographic context despite marginal global fit limitations.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis revealed a high prevalence of romantic loneliness among respondents, with 72% agreeing or strongly agreeing to loneliness indicators ( $M=23.21$ ,  $SD=5.27$  out of maximum of 28). Reframing mechanism demonstrated similarly elevated engagement levels (69% agreement;  $M=22.72$ ,  $SD=5.56$ ), while personal branding indicators showed 66% positive endorsement ( $M=14.94$ ,  $SD=3.59$  out of maximum of 20).

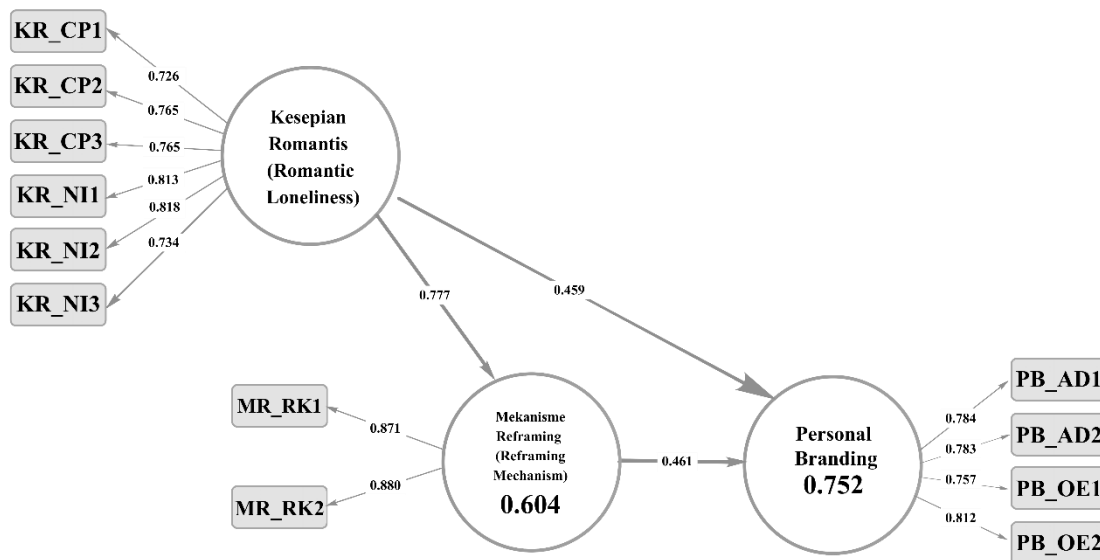
Structural Relationships

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples revealed significant direct effects (see Table 2 and Figure 1). Romantic loneliness strongly predicted reframing mechanism ( $\beta=.777$ ,  $t=13.817$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $f^2=1.524$  very large effect). Romantic loneliness also directly influenced personal branding ( $\beta=.459$ ,  $t=2.602$ ,  $p=.005$ ,  $f^2=.337$  moderate effect), while the reframing mechanism independently predicted personal branding ( $\beta=.461$ ,  $t=2.602$ ,  $p=.005$ ,  $f^2=.340$  moderate effect).

**Table 2.**  
Path Coefficients and Effect Sizes

Path	$\beta$	t-statistic	p-value	$f^2$	Effect Size
RL → MR	.777	13.817	<.001	1.524	Very Large
RL → PB	.459	2.602	.005	.337	Moderate
MR → PB	.461	2.602	.005	.340	Moderate
RL → MR → PB (indirect)	.358	2.831	.002	-	Partial Mediation

*Note.* All  $p$ -values < .05 indicate statistically significant structural relationships across all hypothesized pathways. The RL → MR path exhibits an effect size ( $f^2$ ) of 1.524, categorized as a massive effect, identifying romantic loneliness as the primary predictor for activating reframing mechanisms.



**Figure 2.** PLS-SEM Structural Model

The indirect pathway through reframing mechanism was significant ( $\beta=.358$ ,  $t=2.831$ ,  $p=.002$ ), confirming partial mediation. The model explained 60.4% variance in reframing and 75.2% in personal branding. Gender emerged as the sole significant control variable ( $\beta=.042$ ,  $p=.011$ ), with females exhibiting higher personal branding scores.

This gender differential warrants contextualization within Indonesian cultural frameworks wherein females navigate distinctive societal expectations regarding relational competence and social capital cultivation (Barreto et al., 2022). Active status (student/worker) and personal status (single/in relationship) demonstrated non-significant effects, suggesting that personal branding development transcends these demographic boundaries among Generation Z populations. The universal salience of personal branding across relationship statuses challenges assumptions that partnered individuals experience diminished motivation for self-development, instead indicating that personal branding represents autonomous identity work independent of relational configuration (Adamczyk et al., 2022). These control variable patterns illuminate boundary conditions wherein demographic factors exert minimal influence relative to psychological mechanisms, highlighting the primacy of cognitive-emotional processes over structural demographic variables in personal branding development trajectories.

### Qualitative Themes

Thematic analysis of five in-depth interviews (2 single females with crushes, 1 partnered female, 1 single male with a crush, 1 single female with a workplace crush) revealed convergent patterns across three domains:

#### *Romantic Loneliness Manifestations*

Participants described loneliness arising from minimal interaction despite physical proximity. Female informant RP stated: *"Loneliness is not the main problem but a trigger for creative energy."* Male participant AB emphasized social comparison: *"I often feel lonely when I see*

my friends who already have partners." Partnered informant KS reported emotional distance: "I feel I don't really know what my partner feels; he keeps feelings to himself."

*Reframing Strategies*

Cognitive reappraisal emerged as primary coping. Female informant SAZ explained: "I express uniqueness through exploring Chinese language skills...my crush sees me as intelligent and capable." Male informant AB articulated achievement-oriented reframing: "Having a crush is strong material for self-transformation; I am driven to learn new things to be worthy of her level." Social support patterns varied by gender: females utilized family and spiritual resources (SAZ: "Family support through Umrah effectively reframes feelings"), while males relied on friendship networks.

*Personal Branding Development*

Respondents transformed loneliness into strategic self-presentation. Female informant IDS emphasized existential agency: "I prioritize myself...only by that I won't be fragile when someone leaves." Male informant AB described temporal progression: "The greatest change was when I truly accepted myself; from there I built ambition to keep growing."

Joint Display: Quantitative-Qualitative Integration.

**Table 3.**  
*Integration of Statistical and Narrative Findings*

Quantitative Path	$\beta$ (p-value)	Qualitative Theme	Representative Quote	Convergence
RL → MR	.777 (p<.001)	Mindset transformation; loneliness as creative trigger	RP: "Loneliness is not the main problem but a trigger for creative energy...I challenge myself with new responsibilities in HIMA and BEM"	Strong pathway confirmed by explicit cognitive reappraisal narratives
RL → PB	.459 (p=.005)	Direct self-improvement motivation	AB: "Having a crush is strong material for self-transformation; I am driven to learn new things to be worthy of her level"	Moderate direct effect validated through achievement-oriented narratives
MR → PB	.461 (p=.005)	Skill-building; organizational engagement	SAZ: "I express uniqueness through exploring Chinese language skills...my crush sees me as intelligent"	Reframing manifests as concrete behavioral strategies
RL → MR → PB	.358 (p=.002)	Temporal transformation sequence	AB: "The greatest change was when I truly accepted myself; from there I built ambition"	Mediation pathway validated through narrative progression: loneliness → acceptance → growth

**Table 3.***Integration of Statistical and Narrative Findings*

<b>Quantitative Path</b>	<b><math>\beta</math> (p-value)</b>	<b>Qualitative Theme</b>	<b>Representative Quote</b>	<b>Convergence</b>
Gender effect	$\beta=.042$ ( $p=.011$ )	Gender-differentiated coping	Females: spiritual/family support (SAZ: Umrah); Males: friendship/achievement (AB: skill-building)	Statistical gender difference explained by culturally shaped coping patterns

*Note.* This table illustrates the convergence (triangulation) between quantitative and qualitative findings. The participant narratives reinforce the statistical results, demonstrating that romantic loneliness is transformed into creative energy and self-improvement motivation through self-acceptance and competency development.

This integrated analysis demonstrates robust convergence between statistical associations and lived phenomenology, with qualitative depth clarifying mechanisms underlying quantitative pathways.

## Discussion

This investigation constitutes a pioneering systematic examination of romantic loneliness as a potential catalyst for personal branding development among Indonesian Generation Z, mediated through cognitive reframing mechanisms. The convergent mixed-methods findings provide a robust empirical foundation for reconceptualizing negative emotional experiences as strategic psychological resources, thereby extending contemporary theoretical frameworks in developmental psychology while offering culturally contextualized insights into Indonesian youth adaptation patterns. The substantial positive relationship between romantic loneliness and reframing mechanisms ( $\beta=.777$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $f^2=1.524$ ) represents the most salient finding, demonstrating that heightened romantic isolation experiences trigger pronounced cognitive restructuring activation. This finding fundamentally challenges deficit-oriented paradigms positioning loneliness exclusively as a psychological vulnerability (Phillips et al., 2022; Zhan et al., 2022), instead aligning with emerging perspectives emphasizing adaptive coping potentials embedded within aversive emotional states. Qualitative narratives corroborate this statistical relationship through explicit cognitive reappraisal accounts, exemplified by participant articulations that romantic loneliness functions not as debilitating distress but rather as an energizing impetus for self-development through organizational engagement and skill acquisition. This transformative capacity extends recent meta-analytic evidence documenting that social support, when cognitively processed through reframing lenses, effectively buffers loneliness impacts (Zhang & Dong, 2022).

The massive effect size suggests romantic loneliness represents a particularly potent reframing trigger among young adults navigating identity formation, potentially because unfulfilled intimacy needs generate sufficient psychological tension necessitating adaptive cognitive responses. Contemporary investigations across diverse cultural contexts substantiate this reframing pathway. Hutten and colleagues identified that loneliness prevalence varies substantially across the life span, with young adults exhibiting elevated rates attributable to intensive relationship exploration and identity consolidation processes (Hutten et al., 2022). Indonesian Generation Z experiences these developmental pressures within collectivist cultural

frameworks emphasizing relational interdependence, potentially intensifying romantic loneliness experiences when intimacy pursuits conflict with familial expectations while simultaneously providing culturally embedded reframing resources through spiritual practices and communal support systems. Maes and colleagues' methodological review emphasizes that loneliness measurement must capture subjective experiential quality rather than merely objective social isolation, validating this investigation's focus on perceived romantic intimacy discrepancies as meaningful psychological constructs warranting reframing intervention (Maes et al., 2022). The moderate direct effect of romantic loneliness on personal branding ( $\beta=.459$ ,  $p=.005$ ,  $f^2=.337$ ) reveals that romantic isolation experiences independently stimulate strategic self-presentation efforts before considering mediating cognitive mechanisms.

This finding extends self-determination theory by demonstrating that thwarted relatedness paradoxically enhances autonomy and competence pursuits through compensatory self-development initiatives (Lampraki et al., 2022). Qualitative evidence illuminates this pathway through participant acknowledgments that admiration for unattainable romantic interests serves as a powerful motivational substrate for skill development and achievement striving, specifically to attain perceived equivalence with admired individuals. Recent longitudinal investigations document that individuals experiencing relationship transitions, particularly from partnered to single status, demonstrate heightened personal development motivation as an adaptive response to romantic disruption (Adamczyk et al., 2022). The moderate effect magnitude suggests romantic loneliness operates partially through pre-conscious motivational systems and partially through deliberate cognitive processing captured by the reframing construct. Cross-cultural investigations provide critical contextualization for these findings. Currin and colleagues demonstrated that living arrangements during social isolation significantly moderate loneliness experiences, with individuals lacking romantic partners reporting substantially elevated loneliness relative to partnered counterparts (Currin et al., 2023). However, their findings also revealed that technology-mediated communication only partially mitigates isolation effects, suggesting that authentic personal branding development encompassing genuine skill cultivation and identity articulation may provide a more sustainable adaptation pathway than mere virtual social connection.

This interpretation aligns with contemporary theorizing that personal branding represents substantive identity work rather than superficial self-promotion (Hawkley et al., 2022). The significant positive relationship between reframing mechanisms and personal branding ( $\beta=.461$ ,  $p=.005$ ,  $f^2=.340$ ) demonstrates that cognitive restructuring strategies exert substantial influence on self-presentation efforts independent of precipitating emotional states. Qualitative data reveal concrete manifestations through participants strategic cultivation of specific competencies such as language proficiency, technical skills, and leadership capabilities to enhance perceived attractiveness and social capital. This instrumental approach exemplifies how reframing transforms emotional discomfort into targeted capability-building initiatives, simultaneously addressing psychological needs and enhancing professional prospects. The moderate effect size indicates reframing represents a crucial mechanism through which Generation Z converts emotional adversity into productive self-development, consistent with broaden-and-build theory, wherein positive cognitive appraisals expand behavioral repertoires and build enduring personal resources (Dahlberg et al., 2022). Systematic investigations of loneliness risk factors across the life span illuminate age-specific vulnerabilities and protective factors relevant for intervention design.

Dahlberg and colleagues' longitudinal review identified that unmarried status, limited social networks, poor health, and depression constitute primary loneliness risk factors among

older adults, with relationship quality emerging as more salient than mere relationship presence (Dahlberg et al., 2022). These findings extend to young adult populations wherein romantic relationship quality, rather than simply having partners, determines loneliness experiences, validating this investigation's focus on subjective romantic intimacy adequacy rather than objective relationship status. Akhter-Khan and colleagues' Social Relationship Expectations Framework emphasizes that loneliness emerges from discrepancies between expected and actual relationship qualities, with young adults prioritizing intimacy and shared enjoyment, while older adults emphasize generativity and respect (Akhter-Khan et al., 2023). This developmental specificity underscores age-appropriate intervention targeting. The significant indirect effect confirming partial mediation ( $\beta=.358$ ,  $p=.002$ ) represents a theoretically critical finding demonstrating that reframing mechanisms simultaneously transmit and amplify romantic loneliness influences on personal branding.

The coexistence of significant direct and indirect pathways indicates romantic loneliness operates through dual routes: an automatic motivational pathway generating immediate self-development impulses and a cognitively mediated pathway wherein deliberate reappraisal processes transform emotional distress into strategic identity construction efforts. Qualitative evidence substantiates this dual-process interpretation through participant temporal progression narratives, wherein initial romantic frustration gradually transformed into self-acceptance, subsequently crystallizing into sustained growth ambition. Recent meta-analytic evidence from McClelland and colleagues documents that different loneliness, types family, romantic, and social exert differentiated effects on mental health outcomes, with romantic loneliness demonstrating particularly strong associations with suicidal ideation when unmediated by adaptive coping (McClelland et al., 2023). This underscores the critical importance of reframing competency development as a protective factor. Environmental and contextual factors significantly moderate loneliness experiences and adaptive responses. Astell-Burt and colleagues' systematic review revealed that green space access provides modest but consistent protection against loneliness through facilitating social interaction opportunities and providing restorative environments supporting emotional regulation (Astell-Burt et al., 2022).

Within Indonesian urban contexts, traditional communal spaces and religious gathering venues may serve analogous functions, providing culturally embedded settings wherein romantic loneliness can be processed through collective meaning-making rather than isolated rumination. Twenge and colleagues documented worldwide increases in adolescent loneliness coinciding with smartphone proliferation and intensive internet usage (Twenge et al., 2021), suggesting that digital connectivity paradoxically intensifies subjective isolation experiences despite expanded communication opportunities. This pattern may explain why personal branding, as authentic identity articulation rather than a curated digital persona, emerges as an adaptive response enabling meaningful self-expression transcending superficial social media engagement. Socioeconomic and demographic factors shape loneliness vulnerability and coping resource accessibility. McQuaid and colleagues identified that lower-income individuals and young women experienced elevated loneliness and mental health challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting how structural inequalities constrain adaptive coping opportunities (McQuaid et al., 2021). Within Indonesian contexts, economic pressures intensify personal branding imperatives as Generation Z navigates highly competitive labor markets requiring distinctive skill portfolios and professional networks.

Morrish and Medina-Lara's systematic review documenting bidirectional relationships between unemployment and loneliness underscores how economic precarity and social isolation mutually reinforce, creating vulnerability cycles potentially disrupted through personal branding

development, enhancing employability and social capital (Morrish & Medina-Lara, 2021). The significant gender effect on personal branding ( $\beta=.042, p=.011$ ) warrants careful interpretation given qualitative evidence revealing substantive gender differences in reframing strategies and motivational orientations. Female participants predominantly utilized relationally-embedded coping resources, including family support and spiritual practices, while male participants demonstrated greater reliance on achievement-oriented strategies and peer-based support, consistent with masculinity norms emphasizing instrumental agency (Barreto et al., 2022). Cross-national investigations reveal that loneliness stigma varies by gender, age, and cultural individualism-collectivism orientation, with young males perceiving greater stigmatization but exhibiting less shame regarding loneliness disclosure relative to females (Barreto et al., 2022). These patterns suggest gender-differentiated intervention approaches emphasizing culturally congruent coping resources. Methodological considerations illuminate measurement challenges and opportunities. Maes and colleagues' psychometric review revealed that many commonly-used loneliness scales include items failing to capture the subjective essence of loneliness, instead assessing objective social isolation or mental health symptoms (Maes et al., 2022).

This investigation's focus on perceived romantic intimacy discrepancies addresses these measurement concerns through a theoretically grounded assessment targeting subjective experience quality. Surkalim and colleagues' global prevalence meta-analysis documented substantial cross-national variation in loneliness rates, with Eastern European nations exhibiting elevated rates relative to Northern European countries, highlighting cultural and structural contextual influences on loneliness experiences and expressions (Surkalim et al., 2022). These cross-national patterns underscore the need for culturally adapted loneliness interventions rather than universalistic approaches. Barjaková and colleagues' comprehensive risk factor review concluded that ultimately loneliness determinants converge on relationship quantity and quality, with partnership status, living arrangements, and social network characteristics consistently emerging as the strongest predictors (Barjaková et al., 2023). However, their synthesis also revealed that socioeconomic factors and personality traits indirectly shape loneliness through influencing relationship formation and maintenance capacities. This multi-level determination underscores intervention opportunities targeting both individual psychological capacities—through reframing skill development and structural social contexts facilitating relationship opportunities. The present investigation contributes by illuminating specific cognitive mechanisms transforming romantic loneliness into constructive personal development rather than merely documenting loneliness correlates.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. Cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, necessitating longitudinal investigations establishing temporal precedence and developmental trajectories. West Java regional focus limits generalizability to other Indonesian regions with distinct cultural configurations or international Generation Z populations. Modest global fit indices suggest model refinement opportunities, although strong predictive relevance supports practical utility. Future research should examine moderating influences of attachment styles, cultural values, and digital media usage patterns on loneliness-reframing-branding relationships, while exploring intervention efficacy for strengthening adaptive reframing capabilities among vulnerable youth subgroups experiencing chronic romantic isolation.

## **Implications**

### Theoretical Implications

This investigation advances theoretical discourse by demonstrating that romantic loneliness, when subjected to cognitive reframing, functions as a generative force for authentic

personal branding among emerging adults. The findings extend the broaden-and-build theory by incorporating cognitive reframing of negative emotions as strategic psychological resources, confirming that adversity need not invariably yield maladaptive outcomes when appropriate cognitive scaffolding exists. The adaptation of threat-to-challenge appraisal principles from performance contexts to romantic-emotional domains validates the cross-domain applicability of cognitive reappraisal mechanisms. Integration of job demands-resources logic into community and familial support systems demonstrates that perceived social support operates as a crucial facilitator of reframing effectiveness, analogous to organizational support functions in occupational contexts. The dual-process model, wherein romantic loneliness exerts both direct motivational effects and indirect cognitively mediated influences, enriches theoretical understanding of how negative emotions catalyze positive developmental outcomes through multiple psychological pathways.

### Practical Implications

These insights inform multiple stakeholder groups. For educational institutions, findings support curriculum integration emphasizing emotional intelligence and cognitive reframing skill development, preparing students to transform relationship challenges into personal growth opportunities. Counseling practitioners can utilize reframing-focused interventions to help clients experiencing romantic loneliness channel emotional distress toward constructive identity development rather than maladaptive coping patterns. Career development professionals may leverage personal branding cultivation as a therapeutic intervention for young adults struggling with relationship difficulties, reframing romantic challenges as catalysts for professional skill development and marketability enhancement. Digital platform designers can create spaces supporting authentic self-expression and meaningful skill demonstration rather than superficial social comparison, thereby facilitating personal branding as identity work rather than performative self-promotion. For Generation Z individuals themselves, findings validate experiences of romantic loneliness as potentially generative rather than purely debilitating, providing a conceptual framework for transforming emotional adversity into strategic self-development initiatives.

### Methodological Implications

The quantitatively driven sequential explanatory mixed methods design successfully integrated statistical pathway modeling with qualitative phenomenological exploration, demonstrating the value of convergent triangulation for illuminating psychological mechanisms. The joint display integration technique facilitated explicit examination of quantitative-qualitative correspondence, revealing both convergence and complementarity. Specifically, qualitative findings illuminate temporal transformation sequences and gender-differentiated coping patterns obscured in aggregate quantitative parameters, while quantitative analysis established generalizability and effect magnitude precision unattainable through narrative methods alone. This methodological contribution validates mixed method approaches for investigating complex psychological phenomena wherein mechanisms require narrative explication while prevalence and effect strength necessitate statistical quantification.

### **Conclusion**

This investigation provides convergent empirical evidence that romantic loneliness operates as a catalytic force for personal branding development among Indonesian Generation Z when mediated through cognitive reframing mechanisms. The mixed methods design

successfully integrated statistical pathway modeling with qualitative phenomenological exploration, demonstrating that romantic loneliness exerts substantial influence on reframing mechanism activation ( $\beta=.777$ ,  $p<.001$ ), which subsequently facilitates personal branding construction ( $\beta=.461$ ,  $p=.005$ ) while maintaining direct motivational pathways ( $\beta=.459$ ,  $p=.005$ ). The significant partial mediation effect ( $\beta=.358$ ,  $p=.002$ ) confirms a dual-process architecture wherein romantic loneliness generates both automatic self-development impulses and cognitively mediated identity construction efforts. These findings fundamentally reconceptualize romantic loneliness not merely as emotional vulnerability but as a potential driver for authentic personal branding when appropriately channeled through cognitive reframing. Theoretical contributions extend broaden-and-build theory by incorporating cognitive reframing of aversive emotions as strategic psychological assets, while practical applications inform psychosocial interventions emphasizing reframing skill development and supportive network cultivation. Future longitudinal research should establish causal precedence, examine moderating influences of attachment styles and cultural values, and evaluate intervention efficacy for strengthening adaptive reframing capabilities among vulnerable youth subgroups experiencing chronic romantic isolation.

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