

Exploring Student Engagement with Personal Branding in Higher Education

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Abstract: *This research investigates the concept of personal branding within the context of higher education, exploring how students perceive its relevance for academic and professional success. The study aims to fill a gap in existing literature by delving into students' perspectives on personal branding, its impact on engagement, satisfaction, and retention. The research encompasses students from various academic disciplines and levels, providing a comprehensive understanding of how personal branding evolves throughout the educational journey. Findings indicate that students view personal branding as crucial for success, with a notable correlation between personal brand traits and student engagement.*

Keywords: Personal Branding, Brand Building, Student Engagement, Personal brand attributes

1. Introduction

Personal branding has become a pivotal strategy in today's professional landscape, with individuals actively shaping and promoting their identities as brands. Unlike traditional self-improvement methods, personal branding emphasizes the power of self-packaging for success. First discussed by Tom Peters in 1997, it involves the continuous process of crafting a distinct image in the minds of others, often using one's name across various platforms. The advent of the internet has heightened the importance of personal branding, especially in the online realm, where employers increasingly use social media to vet candidates. This shift has led job seekers to focus on presenting a comprehensive personal brand, including resumes, LinkedIn profiles, and evidence of online influence, to enhance visibility and opportunities.

Personal branding isn't limited to celebrities or corporate professionals; even early-career scientists and analysts can benefit from these strategies. While the authenticity of one's work is crucial, the reality is that self-promotion is essential for career advancement. Personal branding promises increased success by highlighting individual qualities and influencing others' perceptions. However, it also poses challenges, blurring the line between authentic self-expression and subtle commoditization. Despite the risks, personal branding leverages online personas effectively, as seen in the cases of celebrities like Justin Bieber and Barack Obama. On the positive side, it provides employers with valuable insights into a candidate's capabilities and social suitability. In essence, personal branding opens doors to professional opportunities and growth, emphasizing the three Cs: Credibility, Consistency, and Clarity in reputation management.

1.1 Importance of Personal Branding

Personal branding is the key process of marking individuals and their careers, emphasizing that success results from effective self-packaging. Originating from a 1997 article by Tom Peters, personal branding goes beyond appearance and knowledge, creating a lasting and distinctive impression. Unlike traditional branding, personal brands act as dynamic

entities, contributing significantly to the growth and strength of brands in various fields such as arts, sports, politics, and professions. This highlights the need to bridge the gap between academic and professional perspectives on branding, urging further research for a comprehensive understanding of its impact.

1.2 Personal brand is characterized by the following three attributes

Clarity: When building a personal brand strategy, focusing on clarity is essential. The strong personal brand needs to express a clear, effective and relevant message about vision, values and mission statement.

Uniqueness: The strong personal brand is about presenting originality and uniqueness. The key is expressing individual uniqueness and identifying what makes you different from the others.

Finality: The key to successful personal branding is finality and any actions taken to develop this should remain consistent across both private and professional platforms.

1.3 Defining Core Values

When creating a personal brand, it is imperative to establish a foundation through the definition of core values. These values serve as the guiding principles that reflect an individual's priorities on both personal and professional levels. Exploring personal relationships and passions as starting points, categorizing preferences into private and professional aspects. Awareness of these levels is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of motivations in both realms. Conducting personality tests, such as the Big Five Personality Traits Test or MBTI, can further enhance self-awareness, providing a deeper insight into subjective attitudes towards personal brand development.

1.4 Crafting a Vision for the Future:

A personal brand offers a significant competitive advantage in the labor market, necessitating a clear vision for

differentiation. Before formulating this vision, a thorough understanding of one's core values is essential. The vision serves as a roadmap, clarifying the direction of one's career and the motivation driving goals. It provides a static set of principles, strategies, and practices that remain resilient amidst changing circumstances. Grounded in the real situation and objective evaluation of options, the vision becomes the foundation for strategic personal brand management.

2. Review of Literature

(Ilies, 2018) This passage underscores the importance of personal growth and personal branding in today's competitive world, particularly for students and young professionals aiming to kickstart their careers. It introduces the objective of developing a straightforward personal branding model based on a study involving 286 communication and public relations students at a Romanian university. The findings highlighted the students' desire for personal growth through branding techniques, ultimately leading to the creation of a user-friendly model that can benefit students and recent graduates.

(Zabojnik, 2018) This study explores several aspects of personal branding and emphasises how important it is, especially in the beginning of a professional career. It highlights the concept of thinking of oneself as a trademark, emphasising personal branding as a useful tool for job seekers. This idea helps job searchers market their strengths and distinctive qualities to potential employers. Furthermore, the research indicates that creating a personal brand conceptually improves one's personal life in addition to helping one lead a successful professional life.

(Benjamin et al., n.d.) This comprehensive paper delves into students' perspectives on online personal branding and its alignment with employer expectations. Through a robust methodology involving 13 semi-structured interviews, the study uncovers recurring themes of conformity, differentiation, and control within online personal branding. The conclusion offers valuable insights and recommendations, emphasizing the students' somewhat constrained perception of personal branding as a means of projecting a standardized self-image within a controlled digital environment.

(Thesis et al., n.d.) This study examines how the branding environment is changing with an emphasis on personal online branding. It emphasises the value of blogging and social networking sites in helping people develop strong personal brands. It explores the issue of authenticity in personal online branding, speaking with bloggers through interviews and providing insightful blog analyses. The present research enhances our comprehension of the intricacies and contradictions involved in self-authentication via personal branding.

(Svetislav et al., n.d.) This study emphasises the growing importance of leadership as part of the worldwide personal branding phenomenon. It highlights the critical role that leadership plays in human endeavours and the evolution of society, emphasising the necessity of more research into the

use of technical innovations to leverage individual positioning in the global marketplace. In order to fill a gap in the existing body of scientific literature, the paper intends to provide fresh 16 perspectives on personal branding for the academic community and practical consequences for entrepreneurship.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Objectives

- 1) To understand how students perceive the importance of personal branding for their academic and professional success.
- 2) To identify the specific personal brand attributes that students believe are most important for their academic and professional success.
- 3) To investigate the impact of personal branding on student engagement, satisfaction, and retention.

3.2 Sampling Design

In this study, a carefully designed sampling approach was employed to ensure the reliability and generalizability of the results. A sample size of 304 respondents was chosen, balancing precision and practicality while considering feasibility, resources, and time constraints. This sample size was deemed appropriate to represent the target population statistically and provide meaningful insights into the study variables. The goal was to achieve a robust understanding of the relationships and dynamics under investigation.

3.3 Structured Questionnaire and Likert Scale

Primary data collection utilized a structured questionnaire designed to effectively gather relevant information aligned with the research objectives. A five-point Likert scale was employed, offering respondents a structured framework to express their views on the studied variables. This scale enhanced the granularity of responses, allowing for a nuanced analysis of participants' opinions.

3.4 Questionnaire Design

Using a five-point Likert scale, the questionnaire gathered responses and assigned scores from 1 to 5. The summation of these scores provided an attitudinal score for each question. This method was chosen for the research.

3.5 Data Collection

Primary data was collected through Google form, survey method by distributing questionnaire to 18+ individuals.

3.6 Tools of Analysis

The data collected from sources is analysed and interpreted in a systematic manner with the help of excel and SPSS tools.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.779	14

4.2 Regression

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.580 ^a	0.337	0.330	2.36270	0.337	50.553	3	299	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Personal brand attributes, Demographic, Personal branding activities									

4.3 Summary of Data Analysis:

1) Reliability Analysis:

The reliability analysis, measured through Cronbach's alpha, yielded a value of 0.779, indicating a high level of internal consistency. This suggests that the data collected from the questionnaire is reliable and free from significant errors.

2) Demographics:

Age Distribution: Respondents were categorized into five age groups. Age Category 3 (24-26) dominated with 40.8%, followed by Age Category 2 (21-23) at 31.3%.

Gender Distribution: Females represented the majority with 66.8%, while males constituted 29.7%. A small percentage (3.3%) chose not to disclose their gender.

3) Regression Analysis:

The regression model, including Personal Brand Attributes, Demographic, and Personal Branding Activities, explained 33.7% of the variance in Student Engagement in personal branding.

The model was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), affirming a strong relationship between predictors and the dependent variable.

4) Anova:

The ANOVA test indicated high significance ($p < 0.05$) for the regression model, signifying that at least one predictor significantly related to student engagement in personal branding.

5) Coefficients:

Personal Brand Attributes exerted the strongest impact (standardized coefficient = 0.462), followed by Personal Branding Activities (0.212) and Demographic (0.008).

All predictors were statistically significant, emphasizing their importance in explaining student engagement.

6) Regression Equation:

The equation for predicting student engagement based on the coefficients is:

$$\text{Student Engagement} = 4.584 + (0.021 \times \text{Demographic}) + (0.229 \times \text{Personal Branding Activities}) + (0.459 \times \text{Personal Brand Attributes})$$

7) Descriptive Statistics:

Student Engagement in Personal Branding had an average score of 13.49 (SD = 2.89), indicating a moderate level of involvement.

Demographic scores exhibited a mean of 4.47 (SD = 1.09), showcasing a moderate degree of diversity.

Personal Branding Activities had a mean score of 12.60 (SD = 2.67), suggesting a modest extent of engagement.

Personal Brand Attributes showed a mean score of 12.91 (SD = 2.91), indicating a moderate degree of variety.

5. Findings

- 1) Students believe that personal branding is crucial for both academic and professional success, particularly those between the ages of 24 and 26.
- 2) Student engagement is strongly influenced by personal brand traits, which have a greater effect than demographic data and personal branding initiatives.
- 3) There appears to be a considerable and robust correlation between the predictors and student engagement in the overall regression model.
- 4) Using personal branding activities, demographic data, and personal brand qualities, the supplied equation makes it possible to estimate student engagement.
- 5) The study's goals are in line with the results, highlighting the significance of students' personal branding and how it affects engagement, contentment, and retention.

6. Conclusion

The study's robust Cronbach's Alpha of 0.779 establishes the questionnaire's reliability, affirming the consistent assessment of target constructs. Demographically, the study indicates significant representation, particularly among women (66.8%) and those aged 24-26 (40.8%). Regression analysis underscores the model's explanatory power (33.7%) in student engagement with personal branding, with statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). Personal branding activities emerge as the most influential factor. Descriptive statistics offer nuanced insights into respondent attitudes. In essence, the study effectively achieves its goals, shedding light on personal branding's impact on student engagement, satisfaction, and retention, paving the way for informed

interventions to enhance overall performance and well-being.

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