

Value of Personal Branding in COVID-19 Era

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Abstract

This article aims to bring focus to the practical scenarios, individuals and businesses can use to build a strong Personal Brand. It raises directions on how PB can lead to business success, both financial and business goals-wise. A sentiment analysis is used for understanding what strong Personal Branding is that serves as a quantitative indicator for this study. This article follows their traits in order to drive future research directions. An indisputable growth is shown of Personal Branding as an academic phenomenon. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified its importance in both digital and offline words. Furthermore, the principles of the circular economy provide a framework for sustainable personal branding, emphasizing resource efficiency and long-term adaptability. The article shows connections to employee branding, as well as methodological approaches and metrics that might be used for standardized measurement.

Keywords: *Personal Branding, Business Development, Sentiment Analysis, Circular Society, Circular Economy.*

Introduction

Branding has been discussed in academia since Goffmann's (1959) perception influence and Kotler's approach of marketing beyond product, which serve as fundamental as seen in Vallass and Cummis' (2015) reference of marketing studies from the 1980s. As businesses like Apple and Nike have brands, individuals have as well.

Personal Branding is a process of positioning an impression of an individual's characteristics, which results in establishing certain outcomes for any chosen target audience.

A major gap that is found in existing Personal Branding theoretical definitions is its limitation to positive and strategic effect. On the contrary, a person's perception – thus brand – is drawn in every aspects of our lives, from taking a job interview, throughout to going on a date, to our digital footprint that can be found in a quick Google search, popping content up from social networks like Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and even TikTok. Some of these are in fact more strategic and driven by the individual. LinkedIn reflects the picture of a person from the angle of how they want to portray themselves, while more casual social networks, like Instagram or Facebook are more instant and less strategic forms of self-promotion. At the end, the result comes down to building trust and credibility in order to reach goals. Módosné Szalai and Jenei (2021) underline the interconnection between corporate culture, leadership personality, and CSR activities, which reinforces the strategic alignment between personal and corporate branding. It can be manifested on an individual or organizational level, where businesses should encourage employees to create a strong Personal Brand that is aligned with their strategy (Kaur et al., 2021). The reasoning is plain and simple, since members of an organization speak for their employer in any given occasion, may it be social gatherings, business meetings, as well as in the digital sphere. This exposure affects both sides. Hence, the brand representation of a firm and an individual overlap and this is exactly why their strategy, message and image should be aligned. The individual's representation directly correlates with the business' reputation (Zinko, 2015).

While it can be argued if strategy is a mandatory part of the definition of Personal Branding – since it is part of branding in general–, articles (Gorbatov, 2018) debate that this part of branding must have a certain strategy for achieving a positive outcome via defining their image. This strategy should clearly define what they want to accomplish and how they wish to achieve certain goals. It is fundamental to understand the

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four aspects of self-interpretation. (Joann and Paige, 2018). A clear Personal Branding contains clear answers for the questions shown in Figure 1.

How do I see myself?	How do others see me?
How do I want to see myself?	How do I want others to see me?

Figure 1.

Researches in the field of business and marketing indicate a strong relationship between brands that correlate with their customers' and partners' self-schema. The strong ties of the employee's brand and the employer brand that indicate similarity with the self-image of their customers have been shown as factors that increase brand attachment. This phenomenon serves as a positive influence on intentions. These business and marketing concepts, on the contrary, have not been thoroughly extended – in academic research – into the field of Personal Branding. Current research indicates that one of the keys of branding is authenticity (Joann and Paige, 2018).

Additon to the Results of Covid-19

In this era of technological advancement, Personal Branding is essential (Avinash, 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic, with the shift to technological usage of conducting business, this phenomenon only increases. Malatyinszki et al. (2024b) argue that the adoption of circular economy principles during the pandemic contributed to economic resilience, which can serve as a parallel for sustaining personal branding strategies. Similarly, Kabil et al. (2024) highlight the role of circular tourism in driving sustainable development, emphasizing how personal branding strategies can align with broader economic and societal resilience goals. This perspective is echoed in studies examining the cultural and economic impacts of Asian companies in Hungary, which underline the importance of integrating branding strategies with local market dynamics (Jenei et al., 2024). Showcasing one's efforts creates personal brand (Gander, 2014). Mura et al. (2022) highlight how rising unemployment during the pandemic increased the importance of personal branding as a tool for maintaining employability. Furthermore, it is not only the work one puts in, but also the intangible characteristics that make a personal brand, even if individuals have not gathered awareness about their own personal brand. This results in reputation and image drawn from one's actions (Paul et al, 2018). Módosné Szalai et al. (2025) found that regional disparities in economic recovery highlight the need for localized and adaptable branding strategies in response to the pandemic's effects. As Malatyinszki et al. (2024a) highlight, sustainable practices, such as the circular economy, not only shape national income but also provide a framework for consistent personal and corporate branding. Sustainability also plays a key role in property renovation, shaping market perspectives and consumer preferences (Jenei et al., 2024). The findings of recent studies, further underscore the importance of green human resource management (GHRM) practices in fostering employee green behavior (EGB). These practices enhance environmental knowledge management (EEKM) and self-efficacy, which are critical in enabling both employees and organizations to align their behaviors with sustainability goals (Miah et al., 2024a, Miah et al., 2024b). Furthermore, the growing emphasis on sustainability aligns with public opinion on labor market and environmental protection, (Remsei et al., 2023). Incorporating such frameworks not only ensures compliance with environmental regulations but also reinforces a brand's alignment with the values of increasingly eco-conscious consumers (Szigeti et al., 2023; Remsei et al., 2023). This approach leverages environmental knowledge and green behaviors as central elements in developing resilient branding strategies, particularly in the higher education sector where these practices are gaining traction (Kurucz et al., 2023; Demóczy-Polyák & Kurucz, 2019).

These elements are authenticity, consistency, relevance, authority, distinctiveness, integrity, goodwill and persistence (Potgieter and Klopper, 2017). The interplay of leadership and communication styles is pivotal in fostering motivation across generations in the workplace (Jenei & Machova, 2024). Jenei et al. (2024) emphasize that addressing workforce challenges, particularly for vulnerable groups, requires branding

approaches that integrate inclusivity and authenticity. Several articles agree that an employee's brand can help in business' growth (Vosloban, 2014, Kómvés et al., 2022). This brings the discussion to the evolution of Personal Branding during the COVID-19 pandemic, where several articles (Adriana, 2019; Drugs and Khalid, 2019, Kómvés et al., 2022) indicate that PB should go into the category of business development as a strategic element. While the literature is limited on how PB can be measured, indications show it has a place for future research.

As the sentiment analysis (Kaur et al., 2021) shows during the pandemic, uploading content on social networks has grown and taken place in a raw form. Poór et al. (2023) note that economic recovery efforts vary significantly across regions, suggesting that personal branding strategies must align with these regional dynamics. Furthermore, Kabil et al. (2024) emphasize the role of circular economy principles in redefining economic frameworks, providing a structured approach for integrating sustainability into personal branding.

Facial and vocal expressions are not only indicators on social networks, but on online meetings as well. For sentiment analysis, this fact serves as an additional dimension on top of written formats. Kazmaier and Vuuren (2020) developed a generic framework that can be further researched and tested.

Personal Branding's Relation to External Global Economic Environment since COVID-19

The COVID-19 global pandemic has changed the way people live and work and has affected how businesses should use branding and professional's their personal brand, since interactions shifted to digital tools and platforms to continue their work in isolation. The pandemic's uncertainty hit in different ways of living and interacting. "Going to work" has changed drastically, as remote work and social distance have changed how we perform our professional roles (Hite & McDonald, 2020). This shift has also influenced financial behavior and decision-making, particularly among younger professionals and tertiary students, as highlighted by Kálmán and Szóke (2024), who emphasize the role of adaptability in financial practices during crises. Additionally, lifelong learning has emerged as a cornerstone for enhancing labor market competitiveness, enabling individuals to adapt to evolving demands (Molnár et al., 2024).

Additionally, the perception of corruption in relation to green transition indicators has also gained prominence in these challenging times, as noted by Kálmán et al. (2024c), providing insights into how societal shifts influence professional and organizational dynamics. The necessity for effective human resource management and strategic knowledge sharing has been underscored by Szóke and Garamvölgyi (2020), highlighting its role in adapting to evolving work environments. Moreover, the impact of global megatrends on controlling professionals has also been documented, illustrating the importance of aligning strategic objectives with emerging challenges (Szóke et al., 2016).

The undoubtable fact of changing environment – economic, thus marketing – clearly indicates that no matter how strong a brand is, may it be business, product or personal, sustaining competitive advantage is getting more and more difficult (Gringarten, 2018), especially in today's unpredictable events of COVID-19. With more than 359 million people infected and 5.62 million death in the world (Our World in Data, 2022). Leading to unemployment on the rise and drastic effects on the world economy. Economists predict a decline that bring similarities to the Great Depression. Anticipating unemployment rate being as high as 32%, which is much higher than the 25% during the Great Depression (Huddleston, 2020). Effective knowledge sharing and human resource strategies play a significant role in navigating these economic uncertainties (Szóke & Garamvölgyi, 2020). Corporate communication and adaptive leadership styles have also been shown to significantly impact organizational performance in SMEs (Kuczman et al., 2024).

In an era where 'essential' and 'nonessential' are unpredictable, being an essential employee or professional is crucial. Moreover, intellectual capital evaluation and strategic application are essential for maintaining sustainable competitive advantage in such volatile times (Szóke, Gábor, & Bárczi, 2019). Financial culture and strategic revenue planning also serve as critical pillars for both SMEs and public sector entities, particularly during times of economic uncertainty (Bakos et al., 2024).

Thus, building maintaining a personal brand is more essential than ever before. During times of uncertainty, a strong brand is nothing but inevitable. The role of controlling in sustainable development further emphasizes the need for structured approaches to adapt to dynamic environments (Gabor, Zéman, & Szóke, 2017).

Studies (Bick et al., 2020) showed that at least 35.2 percent worked entirely from home. Historical lessons also underscore the importance of strategic recovery frameworks to facilitate organizational resilience during crises (Poór et al., 2024). The established McKinsey & Company's report about the future of work after COVID-19 (Susan Lund, 2021) highlights how much the amount, duration and character of labor transformation is essential in the upcoming year due to the post-COVID-19 aftermath. What is more, Covid-19's has turned upside down how people engage with one another – both in private and professional communication. Not only has the digital footprint and technological usage grown during the pandemic (Nagel, 2020), more importantly in terms of PB, due to global lockdowns, professionals and organizations are interacting digitally more than ever before.

A study developed by (Umar et al., 2021) showed that Covid-19 had a favorable impact on the Gig Economy - described as people who sell their labor through apps, also known as platforms (Taylor et al., 2017). To put it in perspective, eBizMBA's (2021) ranking published the four major social networking platforms' Unique Monthly Visitors: Facebook (2,200,000,000), YouTube (1,850,000,000), Instagram (1,100,000,000), and Twitter (375,000,000). The mentioned data clearly indicates that posting on social media needs strategy and is essential to build a strong PB (Kang, 2013) as it is accepted to see employees' personal brand as a construct that is involved in selecting, transferring, and delivering the value of business goals (Kotler & Keller, 2009).

Integrating Circular Economy and Sustainability into Personal and Organizational Branding

Recent studies underscore the growing importance of sustainability and circular economy principles in shaping both personal and organizational branding strategies. Kálmán et al. (2024a) explored how sustainable city tourism in Budapest and Mumbai reflects broader goals of infrastructure and policy alignment, emphasizing the need for adaptable branding frameworks. Similarly, the integration of circular economy principles in addressing material consumption and its influence on national income in Europe has been highlighted by Malatyinszki et al. (2024a, 2024b), showcasing how sustainability directly influences economic resilience and brand identity.

The role of perceived corruption as a barrier to green transitions and sustainable branding was analyzed by Kálmán et al. (2024c), suggesting that transparent and ethical practices are central to building trust in both personal and organizational brands. Expanding this perspective, Zéman et al. (2024a) linked corruption and sustainability, emphasizing the challenges organizations face in aligning branding efforts with societal values.

The critical role of leadership in fostering green human resource management (GHRM) practices and environmental behavior, as explored by Miah et al. (2024a, 2024b), demonstrates how sustainable HR practices enhance the credibility and impact of organizational branding efforts. Furthermore, the application of predictive AI models to estimate crowdfunding success, as discussed by Zéman et al. (2024b), highlights the intersection of technology, branding, and sustainability in achieving organizational goals.

In the context of personal branding, Kálmán et al. (2024b; 2024d) emphasize the role of adaptability and lifelong learning, particularly in the evolving dynamics of sustainable tourism development. Additionally, the dual perspective analysis of financial security in Hungary by Németh et al. (2024) reflects the broader implications of economic and societal factors on personal and organizational branding.

By integrating these diverse insights, it becomes evident that sustainability and circular economy principles not only enhance the adaptability and resilience of branding strategies but also align them with evolving societal expectations and global trends.

Empirical results and Research Methodology

The reviewed articles tend to use surveys of hundreds of individuals and conduct sentiment analysis. In this article the scope is to draw a foreseeable path for future research, where both individuals and organizations can be asked via surveys and applying several analytical frameworks to it, like Sentiment Analysis. One main takeaway is that it should be randomized. Result of Kaur et al. (2021) shows that most of the respondents are aware of Personal Branding, while being neutral about whether or not they have created their own personal brand. 96% of them agreed that they use social media platforms to promote their personal brand. Effective communication and intangible skills were the dominant important traits for successful Personal Branding.

Future Research and Takeaways

There can be four takeaways drawn from the reviewed literature and sentiment analysis.

- Authentic self over self-promotion: personal brand should be genuine, since people are conscious and easily see through insincerity and dishonesty
- Formulas exist and can be measured: the authentic ones use some sort of system in a recurring and habitual form. (This can serve as one metric for measuring PB.)
- (Self) innovation creates difference: traits like trying new things, perseverance can serve as indicators for highly performing individuals
- Conscious personal brand building: being aware of how one creates and curates their image in both the online and offline world. Consistency and authenticity is key to building a reputable brand. (This points towards surveys for future research.)

Conclusion

Personal Branding on rise in academia. „Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room.” – Jeff Bezos founder of Amazon.

PB has been associated with success, especially in business life. Its importance has seen a rise during the past years, since the pandemic, not only in social media, but in general business life as well. As human interactions are growing into many different communication forms – both online and offline –, PB has seen a fundamental growth by individuals portraying themselves in a look-at-me attitude.

One is developing their own brand, whether it is intentional or not, with the latter others having done it for them. On The other hand, a well-built Personal Branding strategy can help in varieties of levels, such as career attainment, but can correlate with the employer's brand. Thus, building an employee branding strategy in order to achieve certain business goals, seem tempting to enable individuals and put them in the front of the business.

While the definition and measurement of Personal Branding and its improvement is still in early stage and has not been properly defined, common knowledge correlates it's positive growth to different levels of success metrics.

Researches (Schumann and Sartain, 2009) show that Personal Branding with the strategic purpose of creating positive reputation – for reaching certain business goals or customer segments, where the latter can be B2C or attracting talents – is considered as a component to business success. A key alignment is between the employee brand and employer brand, as well as the end-consumer's brand. Establishing the fact that an employee's personal brand does contribute to the advancement of a business is one of the most important takeaways of this article. Furthermore, the usage of different theoretical frameworks will help

draw a better understanding onto the important aspects, such as patience and trust, which enhances the relationship with not only the customers, but with the members of the organization as well. This is how business performance increases. Integrating circular economy concepts into personal branding strategies not only enhances individual adaptability but also contributes to broader sustainability goals, reinforcing both professional and organizational resilience. If in future research, this can be able to result in a measurable and standardized framework, it can serve for businesses as an indicator for willingness to invest in building a strong personal brand or acquiring talent with an established personal brand in order to achieve future business goals. In conclusion, strong Personal Branding acts like the business' brand. This became more visible during the pandemic. It boosts positive results.

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