

The Use of Social Media for Personal Branding

Margaret Cullen^{1*}, Andre Calitz² and Aylin Botha³

¹Business School, NMU, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Orcid: 0000-0003-4225-4191

²Computing Science, NMU, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Orcid: 0000-0002-2555-9041

³Business School, NMU, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Orcid: 0009-0006-0890-3927

Keywords

Branding;
Personal brand;
Networking;
Social media.

Abstract

Building and maintaining a personal brand is a critical differentiator for the proactive and professional members of society. Branding is a marketing tool, which helps form a mental representation of a product, service, organisation or an individual. Equally important is communicating your personal brand through various networks. The ascent of the Internet and social media has amplified opportunities to build a personal brand virtually through online networking. Social media allows for the sharing of information through virtual networks and communities. The virtual space offers diverse stages or platforms to people to self-brand their own character with the assistance of the Internet. Personal branding is the process of defining and promoting yourself and what you stand for as an individual.

In this study, an online survey was used to investigate how social media can be used as a networking platform to build a personal brand. The 209 responses were statistically analysed, including Exploratory Factor Analysis. The majority of the respondents used 5 popular social media platforms, namely WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and LinkedIn. The study found that the factor Personal Branding is made of up of two components, namely Interpersonal Personal Branding and Intellectual Personal Branding. A significant finding was that Social Media networking is a good platform for your personal brand, but not your Intellectual Personal Brand, which links to your professional image.

^{1*}Corresponding Author

*Margaret.Cullen@mandela.ac.za

²Andre.Calitz@mandela.ac.za

³Amycu91@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The world is a competitive place and the need to stand out as an individual is crucial (Girard et al., 2020; Jones, 2021). Branding is a marketing tool, which helps form a mental representation of a product, service, organisation and individual and helps with getting noticed (Evans et al., 2015). Branding can be seen in economics, culture, sport, religion and in a social context (Maurya & Mishra, 2012). The definition of branding has since broadened and branched off to create Personal Branding, which is defined as the process of developing, harnessing and classifying personal information and providing a comprehensive narrative for others to easily understand one's identity-often using social media (Jacobson, 2020).

Personal branding is a proactive, planned and strategic process one follows to communicate their unique value (Venciute et al., 2024). Everyone is individually branded; one may not realise, acknowledge, embrace or manage their brand, but it certainly exists (Jacobson, 2020). Networking is not just a small part of personal branding; it is, in essence, what will connect and link you to the most valuable, insightful and personable contacts you can hope for in business (MSA, 2023).

The term Personal Branding was first coined in 1997 by Tom Peters (Peters, 1997). Personal Branding plays a critical role in today's competitive global environment regarding job applications and career opportunities (Girard et al., 2020). Similar to branding, Personal Branding can distinguish individuals from others. Individuals can use Personal Branding to help create identity, awareness, recognition and portray their values (Jones, 2021). Given that Personal Branding involves people and is related to marketing it is important to realise an audience will judge the individual based on their Personal Branding.

Personal Branding can be affected by several trends including economical, societal and technological (Gorbatov et al., 2018). Personal Branding should be a multi-stage process of continuous improvement and establishment over time (Muszyńska, 2021). As an individual evolves and more time and effort go into the establishment of the personal brand, it will strengthen their personal brand and make it stand out more. Social media has created opportunities for individuals to portray their personal brand online.

1.1. Problem Statement

Individuals can use a number of social media platforms to enable, develop and manage their personal brand (Scheidt et al., 2020; Steenkamp, 2020). Engagement on social media is also considered an important component of networking in order to strengthen a personal brand (Saad & Yaacob, 2021). The research problem investigated in this study is that *the value of Personal Branding through social media networking platforms available to an individual has not yet been fully explored and measured.*

1.2. Research objective

The research objective of this study was to determine how individuals can use social media networking to market their personal brand, with the focus on social media as a networking platform for the creation and communication of a personal brand.

2. Literature Review

The word brand originated from the German language and means burn and was used as a statement and designation of ownership (Mindrut et al., 2015). Branding then evolved to be associated with commodities; to give them meaning, represent their essence, direction and identity in terms of time and space (Bastos & Levy, 2012; Mindrut et al., 2015). A brand is defined as attributes associated with a product, service, location, person or organisation that establishes identity, recognition, reputation and highlights uniqueness (Ternès et al., 2014; Sammut-Bonnici, 2015). Branding is considered a sign and a symbol and can come in the form of an individual, group of people or property and it differentiates them from competitors (Bastos & Levy, 2012; Mindrut et al., 2015). It entails creating awareness and identity in the form of individual or social context with the intention of building a good reputation (Bastos & Levy, 2012). In legal terms, a brand is a trademark (Maurya & Mishra, 2012).

In today's world, branding can be seen in economics, culture, sport, religion and in a social context (Avery & Greenwald, 2023; Maurya & Mishra, 2012). Branding involves a creator who creates, interprets and controls the influence on actors, also known as the audience (Bastos & Levy, 2012). The branding can be interpreted in a positive or negative manner by an audience (Bastos & Levy, 2012). The essence of branding, similar to the will of purchasing, is based on confidence, trust and emotions evoked by goods or services (Evans et al., 2015; Muszyńska, 2021). A brand should be consistent, clear and focused (Shepherd, 2005). For a brand to sustain competitive advantage over others in the same industry, it is recommended to continually improve, add more value and strive for product development (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015). The ever-evolving digital world is offering new ways to communicate and manage brands (Manoli, 2022). A strong competitive branding strategy can be accomplished through the establishment of a good product design and product line innovation, competitive pricing strategy, distribution strategy and lastly an effective marketing communication (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015).

Personal Branding plays a vital role in today's competitive global environment in terms of job applications and career opportunities (Girard et al., 2020). Individualism is being embraced and identity can be portrayed through Personal Branding. The hope is to stand out from the crowd and be acknowledged by being unique and worthy of attention (Zarkada, 2012). A personal brand is much more intentional, it is how you want people to see you. Whereas reputation is about credibility, a personal brand is about visibility and the values that you outwardly represent (Gino et al., 2016). Jeff

Bezos, founder of Amazon, is quoted as saying: *Your brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room*” (Avery & Greewald, 2023).

Building and maintaining a personal brand requires knowledge of how today’s networks operate both on- and off-line (Harris & Rae, 2011). Personal branding is defined as a strategic process of creating, positioning and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based in a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery (Gorbatov et al., 2018).

Personal brand as an evolution of branding

Tom Peters (1997) was one of the first to introduce Personal Branding. Every individual can become a brand, irrespective of their age, position and business, whether undergraduate, graduate, early or late in one’s career, it is something that needs to be continuously evolved (Peters, 1997; Poeppelman & Blacksmith, 2014). It is continuous in terms of the establishment, maintenance and development of the personal brand (Scheidt et al., 2020). In a stagnant world economy, Zakarda (2012) described Personal Branding as an individual’s desperate effort to create jobs for themselves and unemployed colleagues. It can be described as an attention seeking device, or self-marketing, for young professionals to stand out from the crowd (Shepherd, 2005) through image building, selling, appearance and status (Gujarathi & Kulkarni, 2018). It can further be defined as a continuous process by which an individual defines themselves professionally by promoting their strengths, skills, abilities and experiences as well as managing their audience’s perception of who they are (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015; Johnson, 2017; Achmad & Ruhaena, 2021).

Personal Branding is an unavoidable aspect of entrepreneurship and social acceptance (Raftari & Amiri, 2014). It is also considered to be a marketing concept where individuals adopt marketing strategies with the intention to promote themselves in the market (Khedher, 2014). Since the rise of social media, Khedher (2014) argues that there has been a shift to build a personal brand for social consumption. In short, it is an individual's reputation and representation of their uniqueness (Shepherd, 2005; Busch & Davis, 2018), which needs to be confidently embraced (Poeppelman & Blacksmith, 2014). Personal Branding can be defined as a process, a marketing tool and as an image formed by various views (Muszyńska, 2021).

A personal brand can be created at any point in an individual’s lifetime, regardless of age, status, gender, background or employment. It can be used at the start of a career, during a transition of a career or even when wanting to explore a new career (Gujarathi & Kulkarni, 2018). Comparable to branding, Personal Branding is dynamic; constantly adapting and changing (Gorbatov et al., 2018). Technology, societal and economic development are areas that have helped Personal Branding to boom (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Scheidt et al., 2020).

Personal Branding is similar to product/service branding (Tarnovskaya, 2017). Theories that are applicable to branding should then also apply to Personal Branding. The Associative Network Theory will assist people with the positioning of their personal brand. Associative network is a term related to marketing research that represents consumer knowledge associated to nodes or units of information that can come in the form of brands, attributes and advertising (Lawson, 2002). For example, when 'bacon' and 'eggs' come to mind, a connection can be formed in a person's memory (Baumeister & Vhos, 2007). In other words, it is the collection of information a customer can recall when remembering a brand. Brandt et al. (2014) propose that brand information is organised, such as a network in human memory, which creates associations and associative links. This implies that the attributes that are portrayed in a personal brand will be associated with a person in the form of an associative link.

Networking

Professional networks lead to a number of benefits, which include more job and business opportunities, broader and deeper knowledge, improved capacity to innovate, faster advancement and greater status and authority. Networks as the basis for relationships also improve the quality of work and increase job satisfaction (Gino et al., 2016). In essence networks improve access to human capital, thus expanding the network and access to resources. Networking is the process through which all actors attempt to influence the evolving substance of their interactions and relationships (Ford & Mouzas, 2013). Networking is a form of resource management whereby individuals actively engage in generating social resources through networking (Jacobs et al., 2019). Perry (2023) proposes that networking is important for the following reasons:

- Networking contributes to your social well-being;
- Networking leads to the exchange of ideas;
- Networking helps you meet people at all professional levels;
- Networking boosts your professional confidence; and
- Networking expands your visibility.

The five points mentioned by Perry (2023) are not only important for networking but contribute to opportunities to build a personal brand through networking.

Social Network Theory

A network is a structure between actors, either individuals or organisations. Social network theory views social relationships in terms of nodes and ties. Nodes are the individual actors within the networks and ties are the relationships between the actors. There can be many kinds of ties between the nodes. The network can also be used to determine the social capital of individual actors (Social Networks, 2023). Social networks, particularly social media networks are seen as the basic tool

individuals use to connect to society. Social networks are considered the primary building blocks of the interpersonal world (DeWeerd et al., 2024). Social media networks are a useful tool for developing a personal brand (Marin & Nila, 2021). Social media has enabled access to more networks because of the power of connectivity of social media. The power of social media is the ability to connect and share information with anyone on earth, or with many people simultaneously (Almond Solutions, 2019). The theoretical base for this study is Social Network Theory, which Liu et al. (2017) define as the role of social relationships in transmitting information, channeling personal or media influence and enabling attitudinal or behavioral change.

Social Media

Technology has enabled the development of a personal brand. The platforms, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, Tiktok, Twitter and Instagram play an important role in building a personal brand (Wiryananta et al., 2021). Digital social networks have become an integral part of career placement, advancement and professional networks (Valdez & Villegas, 2022). Digital media allow for the individual's brand to grow exponentially and for instantaneous viewing (Musch et al., 2023). The State of Social Media Report (2023) indicates that 66% of business leaders who were interviewed believe that social media has an impact on brand and reputation building.

In the context of online reviews, positive and negative reviews left by customers are analysed using various data mining techniques. The relationship between customer reviews and relative aspect terms are analysed using the associative network theory (Shama & Dhage, 2018). A study conducted by Mohanty (2018), on *Make*, one of the biggest brands created in India, used the associative network model to evaluate the brand association. The researcher portrayed the nodes collected in association to the brand in a diagram, which included both positive and negative associations.

Social networking services, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. are mainly based on creating value streams of great importance for all stakeholders (Mazurek, 2014). Harris and Rae (2011) propose that in the developed world, the digital divide, which refers to online access is not the problem anymore. The problem is how to actively participate in a networked society. The rise of the Internet has significantly changed the environment, creating a network economy (Kizilhan & Kizilhan, 2016). Networks connect people to each other. They create opportunities to build and maintain relationships, build your personal brand and establish your reputation (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). When individuals become part of a social network, they are provided with a variety of resources, also referred to as social capital (DeWeerd et al., 2024).

The Internet has given rise to social media platforms, which enable people to connect globally and network through sharing content (Steenkamp, 2020). Continuous enhancement of digital infrastructure and affordable data packages are some of the reasons for the worldwide increase in social media users. With the ongoing increase in smartphone usage and social media networking sites

reaching 3.96 billion users in 2022, social media presence remains very influential (Statista Research Department, 2021a).

The Internet and social media have enabled individuals other than professionals and celebrities, to establish a personal brand through self-presentation and reach a broader audience (Tarnovskaya, 2017). Web 3.0 is a network of meaningfully linked data, which would allow the use of the Internet to be decentralised, allowing users to be in control of their own data (Goel et al., 2022).

Online Personal Branding implies using an online platform, such as blogs and web pages and more recently social media, to demonstrate an individual's favourable attributes to stand out from others to achieve professional goals with relational aspirations (Muszyńska, 2021). Steenkamp (2020) emphasises that keeping up with digital sales channels via the Internet platforms is one of the trending ways to establish and manage a personal brand. The advantages of the Internet and technology are that branding can go global at the touch of a button without the need of a physical store in other countries (Steenkamp, 2020).

Seeking engagement and approval can be associated with self-presentation (Mun & Kim, 2021). Saad and Yaacob (2021) found that posts made about reputation, identity and conversations result in higher comment engagement. Pursuing approval has been proved to affect emotional well-being (Mun & Kim, 2021). If engagement and approval are mismanaged, it can lead to unhealthy mental and behavioural attributes. Posts that entail personal identity proved to stimulate high engagement (Saad & Yaacob, 2021).

Online Personal Branding's challenges and implications have been researched by Labrecque et al. (2011). These include the effects of changing or reshaping a personal brand, coherence between self-branding and information control, managing multiple online personas, achieving consistency and staying relevant as well as keeping up with trends.

Another challenging responsibility that comes with social media is the management of a personal profile, as there is a lot of noise on social media, which needs to be filtered (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The managing of unwanted tagging and offensive commenting from others can cause unnecessary damage to one's Personal Branding (Park et al., 2020). The continuous management of a social media platform is essential. Certain content and wrong actions on social media can result in negative outcomes (Labrecque et al., 2011). Posts that get poorly received and are insulting could negatively influence one's personal brand online (Park et al., 2020). Curated positive impressions of the self through personal branding should be developed. This is particularly relevant in an age of social media where individual experiences are increasingly being lived out online and the presentation of self includes a combination of online and offline experiences (Jacobson, 2020).

A method that can be used to measure social media engagement in relation to Personal Branding is through engagement. Engagement on social media strengthens a brand experience and the brand itself

(Edosomwan et al., 2011). Evaluating engagement through existing data and calculations can help an individual grow their personal brand to indicate what works. Social media engagement can be measured through emoticons such as likes, shares, tagging, comments and questions, hashtags and the number of subscribers or followers (Tarnovskaya, 2017). The most popular hashtag on Tiktok in July 2020 was entertainment, which had 535 billion views followed by dance, which was measured at 181 billion views (Statista Research Department, 2021b). Hashtags help establish and make their audience aware of their Personal Branding (Achmad & Ruhaena, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

The study was conducted using a quantitative methodological paradigm with a positivistic philosophy. The questionnaire was operationalised from the literature and the first section focused on demographics of the respondents. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of close-ended items that measured the independent and dependent factors related to the research. This was done using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) to Strongly Agree (5). The completion of this survey was voluntary and no personal information was collected.

A combination of convenience and snowball sampling were used and a total of 209 fully completed responses were received. A URL link to the survey package, Questionpro was sent to MBA students at the NMU Business School, in South Africa, who were asked to distribute the URL to their networks. The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, by the university statistical consultant. The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) split the dependent factor Personal Brand into two factors, Interpersonal Personal Brand and Intellectual Personal Brand.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to test the relationship between the Independent and Dependent factors:

- H_1 = Social media presence positively influences Interpersonal Personal Branding;
- H_2 = Social media presence positively influences Intellectual Personal Branding;
- H_3 = Social media presence positively influences Personal Branding.

4. Ethics

The University Research Ethics committee approved the study.

5. Results and Findings

The demographic details of the respondents namely, their age, gender, education level, marital status, employment status and household income are indicated in Table 1. The majority of the respondents

(50%) were in the age category 26 to 35 years old, followed by 24% in the age category 36-45. The majority of the respondents were female (60%), with 40% male respondents. Fifty-three percent (n=110) of the respondents were married and 34% (n=69) single. Eighty percent (n=165) were employed and 29 (14%) self-employed. Seventy-seven percent (n=159) had a degree or post-graduate degree and only 18 (9%) had a grade 12 (matric) or less. The household income was fairly evenly distributed with 45% (n=94) earning R50000 (+-€2,500 (EUR)) or more and 51% (n=104) between R10000 to R49999 per month.

Table 1: Demographics (n=206)

Age		Gender		Education level	
18-25	13 (6%)	Male	83 (40%)	Postgraduate	112 (54%)
26-35	102 (50%)	Female	123 (60%)	Degree	47 (23%)
36-45	50 (24%)	Employment status		Diploma	21 (10%)
46-55 & older	19 (9%)	Employed	165(80%)	Certificate	8 (4%)
Marital Status		Self-employed	29 (14%)	Matric and less	18 (9%)
Single	69 (34%)	Unemployed	6 (3%)	Household income (ZAR)	
Married	110 (53%)	Student	4 (2%)	> R90 000	36 (17%)
Divorced	14 (7%)	Retired	2 (1%)	R70 000-R90 000	20 (10%)
Widowed	2 (1%)			R50000-R69 999	38 (18%)
Living together	11 (5%)			R30 000-R49 999	62 (31%)
				R10001-R29 999	42 (20%)
				Less than R10 000	8 (4%)

The respondents were asked to indicate which social media platforms they used from the eleven options that were listed (Figure 1). The respondents who did not use social media chose the “I do not use social media” option. Over two-hundred respondents indicated that they used at least one social media platform as indicated in Figure 1 Error: Reference source not found. The most popular social media platform used was WhatsApp (n = 193), followed by Facebook (n = 170), YouTube (n = 152), Instagram (n = 138) and LinkedIn (n = 136). The two social media platforms that were used the least were Snapchat (n = 21) and Reddit (n = 16).

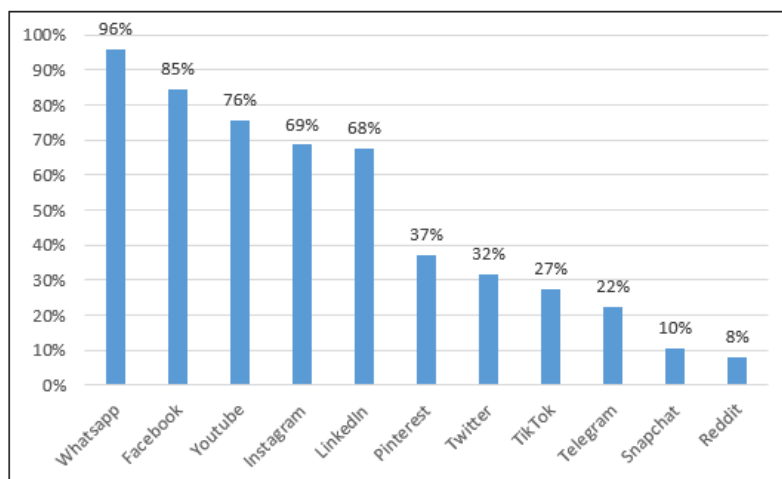


Figure 1: Social media platforms

Seventy five percent of users (n = 151) reported to use three to seven social media platforms. The average number of social media platforms used by respondents was five (n = 201). Respondents who had one (9%, n = 18) or two (15%, n=18) social media platforms and 15% of respondents (n = 31) indicated they used eight to eleven social media platforms. One respondent indicated that they used all 11 social media platforms that were listed.

Independent factor: Social Media Presence

The second section of the questionnaire measured the influence of Social Media Presence on Personal Branding. The frequency distributions for the eight items and questionnaire statements relating to Social Media Presence are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency Distributions: Social Media Presence - Items (n = 206)

Item Code	Questionnaire Statement	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
SM_01	I devote time to make posts that are consistent with the image I am portraying.	52	25%	52	25%	102	50%
SM_02	I regularly update my online profile.	113	55%	47	23%	46	22%
SM_03	Future employers can find my social media profile online.	28	14%	38	18%	140	68%
SM_04	I post about my professional life on my personal social media.	120	58%	38	19%	48	23%
SM_05	My social media accounts are set to private (only accepted friends can view my profile).	37	18%	23	11%	146	71%
SM_06	Only celebrities, politicians, influencers or professionals can have a brand.	186	90%	12	6%	8	4%
SM_07	I join new social media platforms before my friends and acquaintances.	134	65%	49	24%	23	11%
SM_08	I have profiles on various social media platforms to reach a bigger audience.	127	62%	37	18%	42	20%

Responses from the participants were widespread for the factor Social Media Presence. Ninety percent (n = 186) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that only celebrities, politicians, influencers or professionals can have a brand. This shows that respondents believe any individual can have a brand. The majority of the respondents are not early adopters to social media platforms with 65% (n = 134) disagreeing with item SM_07, whereby they do not join a new social media platform before their friends and acquaintances. The majority of the respondents (55%, n = 113) indicated that they do not regularly update their online profile.

Dependent factor: Personal Branding

The final section of the questionnaire included statements pertaining to the dependent factor, Personal Branding. Table 3 indicates the frequency distributions of the 11 items and questionnaire statements relating to Personal Branding. Most of the statements in this section scored high in agreement. Item PB_08 was rated 97% (n = 200) with almost complete agreement in the belief of being life-long

learners. This section indicates that respondents have very strong personal characteristics relating to self-motivation, work-ethics, verbal communication skills, problem-solving skills, discipline, interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, life-long learning, leadership skills as well as analytical thinking skills. It is noteworthy that PB_09 scored a low agreement score of 74% (n = 153) where respondents believe they have strong leadership skills. Only 43% (n = 89) of respondents believed that they have a prominent personal brand.

Table 3: Frequency Distributions: Personal Branding - Items (n = 206)

Item Code	Questionnaire Statement	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
PB_01	I have strong self-motivation.	6	3%	24	12%	176	85%
PB_02	I have strong work-ethics.	0	0%	9	4%	197	96%
PB_03	I have strong verbal communication skills.	8	4%	19	9%	179	87%
PB_04	I have strong problem-solving skills.	4	2%	13	6%	189	92%
PB_05	I am very disciplined.	7	3%	23	11%	176	86%
PB_06	I have strong interpersonal skills.	8	4%	33	16%	165	80%
PB_07	I have strong critical thinking skills.	4	2%	19	9%	183	89%
PB_08	I believe in lifelong learning.	0	0%	6	3%	200	97%
PB_09	I have strong leadership skills.	1 1	6%	42	20%	153	74%
PB_10	I have strong analytical thinking skills.	7	4%	21	10%	178	86%
PB_11	I have a prominent personal brand.	4 7	23%	70	34%	89	43%

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is used when a researcher is unsure how many factors may exist in a set of variables (Zikmund et al., 2010). Two techniques were used in this study, namely Eigenvalues, a technique used to measure how much variance is explained by each factor, as well as a Scree Plot, a graphical representation of the Eigenvalues. The minimum factor loading deemed significant for $p = 0.05$, with a sample size of 206 was 0.388. A factor loading of 0.55 is a common threshold or minimum factor loading for acceptability however, researchers should also consider the context of the study,

Independent Factor: Social Media Presence

The initial EFA for the independent factor, Social Media presence indicated a two-factor model by the Eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and the Scree Plot. Two items were however identified with an Eigenvalue scored below the minimum significant loading value of 0.388. The items *SMP_05: My social media accounts are set to private (only accepted friends can view my profile)* and *SMP_06: Only celebrities, politicians, influencers or professionals can have a brand* were not deemed significant. Thus, they were omitted and the EFA was re-run. Table 4 illustrates the six final items loaded for a one-factor model. These six items account for 44.8% of the total variance for Social Media Presence.

Table 4: EFA Loadings (One-Factor Model) - Social Media Presence (n = 206; Minimum significant loading = .388)

Item	Factor 1
SMP_02: I regularly update my online profile.	,794
SMP_08: I have profiles on various social media platforms to reach a bigger audience.	,741
SMP_01: I devote time to make posts that are consistent with the image I am portraying.	,660
SMP_04: I post about my professional life on my personal social media.	,641
SMP_07: I join new social media platforms before my friends and acquaintances.	,594
SMP_03: Future employers can find my social media profile online.	,556
Total % of Variance Explained = 44.8%	

Dependent factor: Personal Branding

The EFA evaluation for the dependent factor, Personal Branding indicated a two-factor model by the Eigenvalues and Scree Plot. The two-factor model (Table 5) accounted for a combined 54.3% of the variance for the factor Personal Branding. Factor 1 was named *Interpersonal Personal Branding* and Factor 2 *Intellectual Personal Branding*. Factor 1 indicates the interpersonal characteristics associated to an individual’s Personal Branding. This factor is made up of seven items: PB_06, PB_01, PB_03, PB_05, PB_09, PB_02, and PB_11. Factor 2 indicates the intellectual characteristics relating to Personal Branding. This factor is made up of six items: PB_09, PB_02, PB_07, PB_10, PB_04 and PB_08. It must be noted that items PB_09 and PB_02 are cross-loading across both factors.

Table 5: EFA Loadings (2 Factor Model) - Personal Brand (n = 206; Minimum significant loading = .388)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
PB_06: I have strong interpersonal skills.	,795	,024

PB 01: I have strong self-motivation.	,744	,229
PB 03: I have strong verbal communication skills.	,715	,232
PB 05: I am very disciplined.	,603	,359
PB 09: I have strong leadership skills.	,568	,445
PB 02: I have strong work-ethics.	,567	,438
PB 11: I have a prominent personal brand.	,423	,163
PB 07: I have strong critical thinking skills.	,193	,846
PB 10: I have strong analytical thinking skills.	,056	,837
PB 04: I have strong problem-solving skills.	,371	,698
PB 08: I believe in lifelong learning.	,186	,572
% of Total variance	28.1%	26.2%
Total % of Variance Explained = 54.3%		

Cronbach Alpha coefficients

The Cronbach Alpha coefficients verified the reliability of the measuring instrument as indicated in Table 6. All three factors reliability was above 0.70, indicating ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’ reliability.

Table 6: Cronbach Alpha Coefficients

Factor	Alpha Coefficient	Reliability Interpretation
Personal Brand	0,73	Good
Interpersonal Personal Branding	0,81	Excellent
Intellectual Personal Branding	0,78	Good

As indicated in Table 7, based on the statistical analysis, Social Media Presence had a p-value of $p = .001$ for Interpersonal Personal Branding, which is below the cut-off of 0.05, which meant that the hypothesis for this independent factor (H_1) is accepted. The Pearson’s correlation was $r=0.191$, which is greater than .137 but less than .300, meaning it is statistically significant, but not practically significant. It is therefore, established that Social Media Presence had a statistically positive effect on Interpersonal Personal Branding. However, Social Media Presence in relation to Intellectual Personal Branding and Personal Branding had a p-value of 0.86 and 0.57 respectively, which does not meet the cut off $p<0.05$.

Table 7: Social Media Presence Hypotheses

	Hypothesis Description	p-value	Pearson's r	Accept/ Reject
H_1	Social media presence positively influences Interpersonal Personal Branding.	.001	.191	Accept
H_2	Social media presence positively influences Intellectual Personal Branding.	.086	(-0.17)	Reject
H_3	Social media presence positively influences Personal Branding.	.057	.099	Reject

6. Managerial Implications

Manoli (2022) reports that managing a brand is no longer seen as a marketing function with strategic value but rather a strategic management function with significant potential to influence the success and profitability of an organisation. Personal branding is an extension of branding in marketing. Lessons learnt in marketing in terms of the management of a brand will apply to managing a personal brand. Effective personal branding contributes to individual outcomes such as self-evaluation, visibility, influence, employability, career advancement, social capital and financial gain and needs to be managed (Khedher, 2019).

In today's world, personal branding is associated with social media. The results of this study indicate that the use of social media had a statistically positive effect ($p < .001$, $r = 0.191$) on Interpersonal Personal Branding. The content created by individuals on social media networks can shape their brand and professional success (Parmentier & Fischer, 2021). Social media networks must be used to increase personal visibility and credibility (Venciute et al., 2024). LinkedIn (2024), one of the acceptable social media websites for personal branding offer the following advice:

- Consistency- create a coherent image of yourself;
- Over or under sharing- do not post too much personal information that makes you look unprofessional. Under sharing makes you look inactive;
- Ignoring feedback or criticism - it is a two-way channel so use feedback to improve;
- Copying or comparing- stay unique;
- Neglecting ethics and manners- respect the rights and feelings of others; and
- Forgetting the human element – social media is a tool for human interaction.

7. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

Personal branding and personal networking are important to create a unique identity, specifically in the networked world of today. Personal branding and personal networking using social media platforms can assist a person with personal branding and networking opportunities. Technology and the Internet have opened a gateway to social media platforms to connect, share information and collaborate (Poepelman & Blacksmith, 2014; Steenkamp, 2020). Individuals can use a number of social media network platforms to enable, develop and manage their personal branding (Scheidt et al., 2020; Steenkamp, 2020). Engagement on social media is also considered an important component to strengthen a personal brand (Edosomwan et al., 2011; Saad & Yaacob, 2021). Continuous management of social media, change or reshaping personal brand, keeping up with trends and lack of strategy have been challenges highlighted on the usage of social media platforms (Labrecque et al., 2011; Park et al., 2020).

Any individual can establish or become a brand regardless of their age, position, business or education (Peters, 1997; Poepelman & Blacksmith, 2014). A personal brand can be described as an attention seeking device, or self-marketing, for professionals to promote their uniqueness, competencies, experiences and stand out from the crowd through image building, appearance and status (Gujarathi & Kulkarni, 2018). Personal Branding can be associated with the Associative networks, which is marketing research that represents consumer knowledge associated to units or nodes of information in the form of brands, advertising and attributes (Lawson, 2002).

This study concludes that Personal Branding is made of up of two components: Interpersonal Personal Branding and Intellectual Personal Branding. Interpersonal Personal Branding involves characteristics associated with self-motivation, work-ethics, verbal communication skills, discipline, interpersonal skills, leadership skills and owning a prominent personal brand. These are considered behavioural characteristics associated to Personal Branding.

The second component is Intellectual Personal Branding, which involves characteristics associated with leadership skills, work-ethics, problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, life-long learning and analytical thinking skills. These are considered conceptual characteristics associated with an Intellectual Personal Brand. It must be noted that both leadership skills as well as work-ethics make up Interpersonal Personal Branding and Intellectual Personal Branding. The majority of the respondents perceived Intellectual Personal Branding important. It is thus, considered significant in developing and maintaining a personal brand. The appropriate social media networking platforms with the appropriate content need to be used to build an Intellectual Personal Brand.

The majority of the respondents used social media as a network platform with an average of five social media platforms per respondents. The popular social media platforms included Whatsapp, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and LinkedIn. This study contributes to the personal branding literature by extending the understanding of the positives and negatives of social media platforms as networks and their influence on Personal branding. There was a positive statistically significant relationship between Social Media Presence and Interpersonal Personal Branding ($r = .191$) but a negative insignificant relationship between Social Media Presence and Intellectual Personal Branding ($r = -0.17$). Individuals should be cautious of what is posted on certain social media platforms and not use non-professional social media platforms to build Intellectual Personal Branding.

Personal branding leads to a variety of beneficial outcomes, such as enhanced credibility, visibility, prestige, promotions or monetary rewards, if it is managed in the correct manner on networking platforms (Gorbatov et al., 2019). Research has shown the importance of engaging in networking behaviours for career and personal success (Jacobs et al., 2019). Social media has provided a platform where personal brands can be developed and maintained through social media networks. Peters (1997)

comments that the best network wins and that excellence is no longer vertical excellence, it is horizontal excellence through networking on social media (Arruda, 2019).

The limitation of the study is that it was conducted in one developing country, amongst MBA respondents at a single university, using snowball sampling. Future research must focus on obtaining a more representative sample in the country and focus on professional members of society who strongly rely on personal branding and networking. In addition, the study should be repeated in different countries, specifically developed countries with professional members of society.

REFERENCES

- Achmad, E. S., & Ruhaena, L. (2021). Adolescent's Personal Branding on Instagram. *al-Balagh Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi*, 6(1), 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.22515/al-balagh.v6i1.3138>
- Arruda, W. (2019). How Personal Branding Can Heal Humanity: A Conversation with the Legendary Tom Peters. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamarruda/2022/09/13/how-personal-branding-can-heal-humanity-a-conversation-with-the-legendary-tom-peters/?sh=22>.
- Avery, J. & Greenwald, R. (2023). New Approach to Building Your Personal Brand. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2023/05/a-new-approach-to-building-your-personal-brand>
- Bastos, W., & Levy, S. (2012). A history of the concept of branding: practice and theory. *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 4(3), 347-368. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17557501211252934>
- Baumeister, R. F. & Vohs, K. D. (2007). Associative networks. *Encyclopedia of social psychology*, 1, 53. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412956253.n30>
- Brandt, C., Pahud de Mortanges, C., Bluemelhuber, C., & Van Riel, A. C. R. (2014). Associative networks a new approach to market segmentation. *International Journal of Market Research*, 53(2), 187–208. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJMR-53-2-187-208>
- Busch, P. S., & Davis, S. W. (2018). Inside Out Personal Branding (IOPB): Using Gallup Clifton StrengthsFinder 2.0 and 360Reach. *Marketing Education Review*, 28(3), 187-202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10528008.2017.1367930>
- DeWeerd, D., De Scheeper, A., Kyndt, E., & Gijbels, D. (2024). Entering the Labor Market: Networks and Networking Behavior in the School-to-Work Transition. *Vocations and Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12186-024-09343-4>
- Edosomwan, S., Prakasan, S. K., Kouame, D., Watson, J., & Seymour, T. (2011). The History of Social Media and its Impact on Business. *The Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship*, 16(3), 79-91.
- Evans, W.D., Blitstein, J., Vallone, D., Post, S., & Nielsen, W. (2015). Systematic review of health branding: growth of a promising practice. *Translation Behavioural Medicine*, 5(1), 24-36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13142-014-0272-1>
- Ford, D. & Mouzas, S. (2013). The theory and practice of business networking. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42, 433-442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2013.02.012>
- Gino, F., Kouchaki, M. & Casiaro, T. (2016). Learn to Love Networking. *Harvard Business Review*. May 2016.
- Girard, T., Pinar, M., & Lysiak, L. (2020). Understanding Student Perception of Their Personal Branding in Higher Education. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 20(13), 136–146. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v20i13.3839>

- Goel, A. K., Bakshi, R., & Agrawa, I. K. K. (2022). Web 3.0 and Decentralized Applications. *Materials Proceedings*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/materproc2022010008>
- Gorbatov, S., Khapova, S. N., & Lysova, E. I. (2018). Personal Branding: Interdisciplinary Systematic Review and Research Agenda. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1-17.
- Gorbatov, S., Khapova, S. N., & Lysova, E. I. (2019). Get Noticed to Get Ahead: The impact of Personal Branding on Career Success. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02662>
- Harris, L. & Rae, A. (2011). Building a personal brand through social networking. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 32(5), 14-21. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02756661111165435>
- Indeed Editorial Team. (2023). The Benefits of Networking and How to Get the Best Results. Retrieved from <https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/benefits-of-networking>.
- Jacobs, S., DeVos, A., Stuer, D. & Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M. (2019). Knowing Me, Knowing You. The Importance of Networking for Freelancers' Careers: Examining the Mediating Role of Need for Relatedness Fulfillment and Employability-Enhancing Competencies. *Frontiers of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02055>
- Jacobson, J. (2020). You are a brand: social media managers' personal branding and the 'future audience'. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 29(6), 715-727.
- Johnson, K. M. (2017). The Importance of Personal Branding in Social Media: Educating Students to Create and Manage their Personal Brand. *International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 4(1). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313256001>.
- Jones. K. (2021). *The Importance of Branding in Business*. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2021/03/24/the-importance-of-branding-in-business/?sh=36c0ac1767f7>.
- Khedher, M. (2014). Personal Branding Phenomenon. *International Journal of Information, Business and Management*, 6(2), 29-40. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313256001>
- Khedher, M. (2019). Conceptualizing and researching personal branding effects on the employability. *Journal of Brand Management* 26 (2), 99–109. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0117-1>
- Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I., & Silvestre, B. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241–251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005>
- Kizilhan, T., & Kizilhan, S. B. (2016). The Rise of the Network Society - The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 7(3), 277-280.
- Labrecque, L. I., Markos, E., & Milne, G. R. (2011). Online Personal Branding: Processes, Challenges, and Implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 25, 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2010.09.002>
- Lawson, R. (2002). Consumer knowledge structures: Background issues and introduction. *Psychology and Marketing*, 19, 447–456.
- LinkedIn (2024). What are the common pitfalls of using social media for personal branding? Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/advice/1/what-common-pitfalls-using-social-media-personal>.
- Liu, W., Sidhu, A., Beacom, A.M. & Valente, T.W. (2017). Social Network Theory, Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0092>
- Manoli, A. E. (2022). Strategic brand management in and through sport. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2022.2059774>
- Marin, D., & Nila, C. (2021). Branding in social media. Using LinkedIn in personal brand Communication: A study on communications/marketing and recruitment/human resources

- specialists' perception. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 4(1), 100174. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100174>
- Maurya, U. K., & Mishra, P. (2012). What is a brand? A Perspective on Brand Meaning. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 4(3), 122-134. Retrieved from <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/EJBM/article/viewFile/1322/1244>.
- Mazurek, G. (2014). Network Value Creation through Marketing. *Management and Business Administration: Central Europe*, 22(4), 70-77.
- Mindrut, S., Manolica, A., & Roman, C.T. (2015). Building brands identity. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 20(1), 393–403. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(15\)00088-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00088-X)
- Mohanty, S. K. (2018). Stakeholder's Associative Network Memory Model Approach to Evaluate Brand Building of Make in India. *The IUP Journal of Brand Management*, 15(2), 46-60. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348743360>
- MSA. (2023). How networking can build your personal brand. Marketing Skills Academy. Marketing Skills Academy. Retrieved from <https://www.marketingskillsacademy.co.uk/blog/how-networking-can-build-your-personal-brand>.
- Mun, I. B. & Kim, H. (2021). Influence of False Self-Presentation on Mental Health and Deleting Behavior on Instagram: The Mediating Role of Perceived Popularity. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.660484>
- Musch, K. L. E., Tyler, L. S. & Vest, T. A. (2023). A personal brand strategy to elevate the new practitioner's career. *American Society of Health System Pharmacists*, 80(21), 1531-1534. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajhp/zxad162>
- Muszyńska, W. (2021). Personal Branding of managers in service companies. *E-mentor*, 5(92), 53-60. <https://doi.org/10.15219/em92.1540>
- Park, J., Williams, A., & Son, S. (2020). Social Media as a Personal Branding Tool: A Qualitative Study of Student-Athletes' Perceptions and Behaviors. *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*, 2(1), 51-72. <https://doi.org/10.25035/jade.02.01.04>
- Parmentier, M.A. & Fischer, E. (2021). Working it: Managing professional brands in prestigious posts. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(2): 110–128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242920953818>.
- Perry, E. (2023). What is networking and why is it so important? Retrieved from <https://www.betterup.com/blog/networking>.
- Peters, T. (1997). The brand called you, *Fast Company Magazine*, Issue August September. Retrieved from <http://www.fastcompany.com/28905/brand-called-you>.
- Philbrick, J. I., & Cleveland, A. D. (2015). Personal Branding: Building Your Pathway to Professional Success. *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*, 34(2), 181–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763869.2015.1019324>
- Poepelman, T., & Blacksmith, N. (2014). Personal Branding via social media: Increasing SIOP visibility one member at a time. *TIP: The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 51(3), 112–119.
- Raftari, M., & Amiri, B. (2014). An Entrepreneurial Business Model for Personal Branding: Proposing a Framework. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Business and Economics*, 2(2), 121–139. <http://scientificia.com/index.php/JEBE/article/view/21>
- Saad, N. H. & Yaacob, Z. (2021). Building a Personal Brand as a CEO: A Case Study of Vivvy Yusof, the Cofounder of FashionValet and the dUCK Group. *SAGE Open*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211030274>
- Sammut-Bonnici, T. (2015). Brand and Branding. *Wiley Encyclopaedia of Management*, 12(January). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118785317>

- Scheidt, S., Gelhard, C., & Henseler, J. (2020). Old Practice, but Young Research Field: A Systematic Bibliographic Review of Personal Branding. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*, 1809. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01809>
- Shama, A., & Dhage, S. N. (2018). Application of Associative Network Theory to Mine Relevant Aspect Terms from Customer Reviews. *International Conference on Current Trends towards Converging Technologies (ICCTCT)*, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICCTCT.2018.8551145>
- Shepherd, I. D. H. (2005). From cattle and coke to Charlie: meeting the challenge of self-marketing and Personal Branding. *Journal of Marketing Management, 21*(5-6), 589-606. <https://doi.org/10.1362/0267257054307381>
- Social Networks. (2023). Social Sciences Library. Retrieved from [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Introduction_to_Sociology/Sociology_\(Boundless\)/06%3A_Social_Groups_and_Organization/6.01%3A_Types_of_Social_Groups/6.1F%3A_Social_Networks?readerView](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Introduction_to_Sociology/Sociology_(Boundless)/06%3A_Social_Groups_and_Organization/6.01%3A_Types_of_Social_Groups/6.1F%3A_Social_Networks?readerView).
- State of Social Media Report. (2023). Retrieved from https://sproutsocial.com/insights/data/harris-insights-report-2023/?viewer=true&cp_status=error.
- Statista Research Department. (2021a). *Media usage in an online minute 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/195140/new-user-generated-content-uploaded-by-users-per-minute/>.
- Statista Research Department. (2021b). *Most popular categories on TikTok worldwide 2020, by hashtag views*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1130988/most-popular-categories-tiktok-worldwide-hashtag-views/>.
- Steenkamp, J. E. M. (2020). Global Brand Building and Management in the Digital Age. *Journal of International Marketing, 28*(1), 13-27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031X19894946>
- Tarnovskaya, V. (2017). Reinventing Personal Branding Building a Personal Brand through Content on YouTube. *Journal of International Business Research and Marketing, 3*(1). <https://doi.org/10.18775/jibrm.1849-8558.2015.31.3005>
- Ternès, A., Rostomyan, A., Gursch, F., & Gursch, G. (2014). Levers of Personal Branding to Optimize Success. *Journal of Business and Economics, 5*(1), 86-93.
- Valdez, C. & Villegas, J. (2022). Building a Personal Brand Using Impression Management in Social Networks. *Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings 2022, 29*. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/amp-tp-proceedings>
- Venciute, D., Yue, C. A., & Thelen, P. D. (2024). Leader's personal branding and communication on professional social media platforms: motivations, processes and outcomes. *Journal of Brand Management, 31*, 38-57. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-023-00332-x>
- Wiryananta, K., Safitri, R., & Prasetyo, B. D. (2021). The Importance of Self- Awareness in building Personal Branding of Brawijaya University Students through Instagram. *Technium Social Sciences Journal, 24*, 218-227. <https://techniumscience.com/index.php/socialsciences/index>
- Zarkada, A. (2012). Concepts and Constructs for Personal Branding: An Exploratory Literature Review Approach. *SSRN Electronic Journal, January*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1994522>
- Zikmund, W. G., Babin, B. J., Carr, J. C., & Griffin, M. (2010). *Business Research Methods*. (8th Ed). South-Western College Publication.