VNU Journal of Economics and Business

Journal homepage: https://jeb.ueb.edu.vn

Original Article

Building Personal Branding: The Impact of Self-Expression, Social Interaction, and Personal Value

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Abstract: The study utilizes PLS-SEM to examine the impact of self-expression, social interaction, and personal value on building personal branding in the Vietnamese context, a country with an emerging economy. By using a quantitative approach along with the participation of approximately 300 contestants, the study reveals that intrinsic factors such as self-expression, social interaction, and personal value have a significant effect on building the personal brand of Vietnamese Youth (18-24 years old). Notably, regarding perceived employability, the study also found a positive correlation between personal branding and perceived employability. In other words, personal branding is one of the key factors directly affecting the perceived employability of Vietnamese youths. The study thereby emphasizes the importance of personal branding as a cutting-edge professional strategy for enhancing one's own brand identification and achieving favorable career outcomes.

Keywords: Personal branding, self-expression, social interaction, personal value, Vietnamese youth.

1. Introduction

Building a personal brand is about figuring out what it takes to create a distinctive role for yourself - creating a message and a strategy to promote the brand called "You" (Gorbatov et al., 2019). Personal branding is not the same as marketing, self-promotion, or image (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015). The definition of personal branding has been centered around the concepts of products, goods, or services that a person communicates about themselves (Hood et al., 2014) so that the brand continues to stick in the minds of consumers with all of its unique qualities (Haroen, 2014).

Given the transitional context in Vietnam, characterized by diversity on cultural, geographic, and even economic levels (Amoako & Okpattah, 2018) as well as political, social, and demographic transitions and fast economic development, the study considers the influence of these backgrounds

on the correlation between building personal branding based on intrinsic factors and its impact on perceived employability. Personal branding is an effective way to increase visibility and create career success for youth in emerging economies, which is essential for business success (Shepherd, 2005).

Personal branding has been a fairly popular research topic in the world for a long time, but this topic is still new in Vietnam. Therefore, the article contributes to increasing readers' understanding of the topic of "building a personal brand" in this country. To clarify, most of the studies that approach personal branding on social media are still only focused on the United States (Holton & Molyneux, 2017). According to research by Han (2020), the research paper deals with the attitude of Vietnamese Gen Z toward influencer marketing. However, the developing economy in Vietnam and personal branding are not mentioned. Additionally, the article discusses the purchasing habits of young Vietnamese people in the growing economy when it comes to luxury items (Mai & Linh, 2017). Although the essay is aimed at young Vietnamese people and highlights the emerging economy, it does not discuss how to develop a personal brand for professional success. Secondly, there are some limitations on research on personal branding for the age of 18 to 24, as previous studies on personal branding, have mainly focused on celebrities. Thirdly, research concerning personal branding from the career success perspective is unclear. The subject of the causes and the effects of personal branding in the context of careers has not been adequately addressed by extant research (Gorbatov et al., 2019). While research on career success has increased, much of it has been done in the Western world, leaving much knowledge regarding career expansion in Eastern countries unexplored.

According to empirical evidence, establishing a personal brand holds significant importance for young individuals in Vietnam. The rationale behind this assertion lies in the fact that cultivating a personal brand enables individuals to gain a competitive advantage in job searching, facilitates businesses in connecting with discerning clientele, and propels their career advancement. The results of data analysis collected from 300 survey respondents suggest emphasizing the importance of personal branding as an advanced professional strategy to enhance one's own brand recognition and achieve favorable career outcomes.

By investigating the effects of personal brand development on the career performance of the Vietnamese Young Generation, this study aims to close this gap. The key research questions are: (1) How do the intrinsic motivations, including self-expression, social interaction, and personal value contribute to the building and development of a personal brand for Vietnamese Youth? (2) How does personal branding relate to Vietnamese Youth's perceived employability?

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Personal branding

The concept of personal branding, self-branding, or commodification of self is hotly disputed in the extant literature (Vițelar, 2019; Marin & Nilă, 2021). Dewan (2020) considered self-branding as the practice of promoting individuals and their careers as brands. Building and sustaining a person's reputation and impression is a continuous effort. Personal branding is a proactive work behavior that uses marketing strategies to advance one's career in three dimensions: strategic, differentiated, and technology-based (Gorbatov et al., 2019). It is an introspective process allowing one to represent their professional identity (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015). The idea of self-branding reduces the traditional idea of branding to a personal level, enticing employees nowadays to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset and continually practice the commodifying of selves as a way to stand out in a crowded job market (Whitmer, 2021).

Nowadays, the rise of new communication technologies in all spheres of human life and at work, changes in the labor market, and the evolving nature of the employer-employee relationship, collectively known as the "fourth industrial revolution," led to the appearance of personal branding as an intentional individual career behavior (Vallas & Christin, 2018). Personal branding not only pertains to

perception but also accentuates the value an individual can offer to any employer or corporation (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015). It can be seen that various definitions of personal branding were proposed, mainly focusing on the aspects of personal brand that helped individuals position themselves in the labour market. Extant literature has also looked at how people see the process of developing their personal brands, how it can help them in their personal life, and how they perceive it in the context of the digital age (Viţelar, 2019).

2.2. Hypothesis development

Self-expression is defined as an urge or need to express oneself and share personal experiences with others (Plume & Slade, 2018). Self-expression values are of focus more than ever as more people are turning to social media as a platform for positive self-expression (Orehek & Human, 2017).

Recognition of a person's personal brand is significantly influenced by how individuals' identities are expressed (Kucharska & Mikołajczak, 2018). In order to build a personal brand on social media platforms, influencers on Instagram use photos to express themselves, while those on Twitter express themselves verbally (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021). Either way, a personal brand's existence is based on a form of self-expression. Khedher (2019) found that the best candidates for a job are those that successfully employ self-focused strategies for self-expression to be perceived as amicable and professional. A key component of personal branding, which entails developing a persona and strategically revealing information to recruiters, is thus verbal self-presentation. In the Vietnamese context, there are increasingly more opportunities for young people to freely express their personalities and abilities through various online channels. People are realizing the importance of cultivating a consistent and authentic online identity as personal branding is gathering interest in the digital era. Thus, these young people are utilizing various types of self-expression to establish their own brands and gain presence in their fields, whether through well selected visual material on Instagram or articulate self-expression on Twitter (Vasconcelos & Rua, 2021). This study suggests the hypothesis:

H1: Self-expression positively impacts personal branding.

Social interaction in this paper refers to the exchange between individuals whether through an online or offline channel, using verbal or non-verbal communication. The value derived from social interactions and networks can be referred to as social capital, which can include trust, goodwill, and support received from others.

Self-branding is not simply performed for self-realization, or to stand out among competitors, but explicitly points to collaboration, interaction, and networking with contacts widely recognized as influential by peers in the industry (Gandini, 2015). It is also presented by Gandini (2015) that social interaction and self-branding have a close link, not to mention self-branding becomes an investment in social relationships with an expected return for the acquisition of a reputation. An individual who participates in online and offline contact with others, attempting to exert their impressions of themselves in others in order to get a certain advantage, is motivated by the need to form their own identity (Gorbatov et al., 2018). According to Jin et al. (2019), if followers of an influencer believe that they seldom interact, the personable qualities of celebrities' social media profiles will weaken. This situation does not only apply to social media influencers, as athletes are also able to develop their own distinctive personal brands through contact with followers (Park et al., 2020). Moreover, this study also suggested that people determine how to express themselves after deciding how to react to specific circumstances. Therefore, social interaction is seen as a dramaturgical performance. In Vietnam's collective culture, the power of word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals cannot be underestimated. Positive interactions, whether occurring in digital or physical spaces, are posited to contribute to the accumulation of social capital, leading to endorsements and support, consequently augmenting the reputation of individuals and strengthening their personal brand. This study suggests the hypothesis:

H2: Social interaction positively impacts personal branding.

Personal values are a special blend of talents, expertise, and skills that each person possesses. A survey with the participation of 75 immigrants from Korea, Japan, and China and 75 employees from Indonesia showed that personal values and cultural competence strongly influence the formation of personal branding of both expatriates and local employees (Frendika et al., 2018). Essentially, personal branding is an image that presents your promise of value and performance to your audience, and it can be viewed as a pathway to professional success (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015). The expression of personal values strongly impacts the recognition of a personal brand (Kucharska & Mikołajczak, 2018). These values will be extremely beneficial to the employers and will provide fulfillment to the individual with the brand as long as they are presented in the appropriate way (Khedher, 2019). Once again, considering Vietnam's collective culture, people are more likely to receive support and recommendations from others when they exhibit value in their interactions and teamwork, which helps them build their reputation as a personal brand. This study suggests the hypothesis:

H3: Personal value positively impacts personal branding.

Magnano et al., (2019) emphasize that perceived employability is the perceived possibility of maintaining current employment next to obtaining new employment. We suggest that making an effort to market oneself through personal branding will increase one's perceived employability. The more that a candidate's brand stands out to employers in a positive way, the more likely they are to advance in the hiring process (McCool, 2019). Gen Z perceives online personal brands as a crucial tool to gain more advantage in job markets (Trang et al., 2023). In line with the employability research, and with its focus on the individual positive assessment of his/her marketability on the external and internal job markets, we propose that efforts made in promoting oneself through personal branding will lead to higher perceived employability (Gorbatov et al., 2019). Personal branding as an intentional individual career behavior emerged in response to the increasing emergence of new communication technologies in all parts of people's lives and work as well as the changes in the labor market and the employer-employee relationship (Vallas & Christin, 2018). Personal branding is constructing the desired professional image of self, and there is evidence that clarity of professional self positively impacts employability (Gorbatov et al., 2018). Hence, if one can build a sound personal brand, various benefits will be yielded, from increased relationships and confidence to getting good jobs and earning more money. This study suggests the hypothesis:

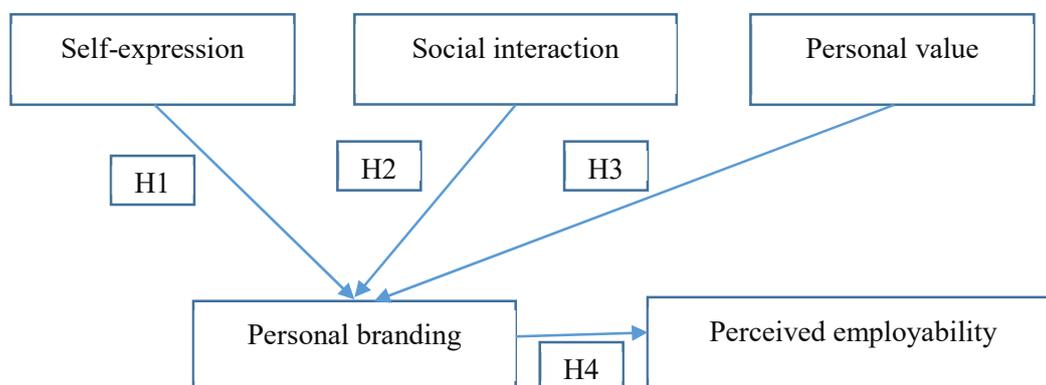*H4: Personal branding positively impacts perceived employability.*

Figure 1. Theoretical framework of building personal branding for Vietnamese Young Generation
Source: Authors' suggestion.

The Figure 1 provided the proposed framework about the impact of self-expression, social interaction, personal value on personal branding and perceived employability.

Table 1: The measurement scale

Construct	Items	Sources
Self-expression	You decided to change your major to a field that your parents would not approve. You keep your opinions to yourself. You freely volunteer information or opinions in class or workplace discussions. In a small seminar, the professor made a statement that you considered untrue. You express your feelings to others.	Galassi et al. (1974)
Social interaction	Equality, democratic participation in decision making. Active teamwork toward common goals, organizational unity. Individual financial success, personal prominence, and power. Protecting less able members, providing help when needed. Popularity and social success, being liked and admired.	Bales (1999)
Personal value	Achievements: personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards. Self–direction: independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring. Universalism: understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature. Tradition: respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides.	Schwartz (1992)
Personal branding	*Strategic:* I am making an effort to expand my professional network. I actively develop a professional image. I proactively adjust my professional image to manage the expectations of the target audience. *Differentiated:* I proactively seek the endorsement of others to promote the quality of my work. I make an effort to have a distinct profile compared to those in my professional area. I make my successes known to my professional network. I make sure that what I do is recognizable. *Technologically savvy:* I use data to estimate my impact on my professional network. I use online tools and metrics to evaluate how others see me professionally. I systematically analyze the effectiveness of my personal branding activities. I post online samples or descriptions of my work projects. I ensure that my online educational and/or professional profiles are complete (informative, engaging, and have photos).	Gorbatov, Khapova & Lysova (2019)
Perceived employability	Personal branding is positively related to career satisfaction. Efforts made in promoting oneself through personal branding will lead to higher perceived employability. Perceived employability mediates the relationship between personal branding and career satisfaction.	Gorbatov, Khapova & Lysova (2019)

Source: Authors' compilation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Measurement scale

Boote (1981) suggested that a 5-point scale was reliable. In general, scale simplicity is preferred when a new measurement is developed (Dawis, 1987). Hinkin (1998) advocated for using a 5-item Likert-type scale for such purposes as it allows for capturing sufficient variance in responses while increasing the number of scale points beyond five does not result in meaningfully greater coefficient alpha reliability. Therefore, all items in our questionnaire were answered using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Each answer in the questionnaire will be rated as important and is based on a scale of 0 to 5. For example, our questionnaire mentions the question "Overall, are you familiar with the term "Personal Branding?" or "What is your opinion on how to make yourself stand out from the crowd and stand out as a way to build a personal brand"? Participants can rate by scoring on a scale of 0-5 (Table 1).

3.2. Sample and data collection

For the purpose of this study, the research population was defined to be Vietnamese Youth aged 18-24 years old who are studying at university and have graduated for 2 years. Based on the rule of thumb proposed by Comrey et al. (1992) to guide multivariate analysis, a sample size of 300 observations was required (Comrey et al., 1992). In order to avoid selection bias while collecting and analyzing data, 300 questionnaires were randomly distributed to participants; of these, 276 valid questionnaires were received, giving a response rate of 92%.

The data in this paper was collected through a paper survey undertaken between February and March 2023. The data was then exploited to examine the proposed model. A paper survey was employed as it is easily accessed and is a popular tool (Fanning, 2005). The remaining questions were gathered after validation. Each participant received a concise explanation of the survey's context and terms. The study adhered to human ethical standards, guaranteeing that the participants' names were kept secret and anonymous.

3.3. Analysis method

This research uses SmartPLS 4 to analyze data processes. In the SEM model, there are two analytical techniques applied that are CB-SEM (Covariance-based SEM) commonly used in AMOS software, LISREL, and PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares SEM) used by the software. SmartPLS. Especially in the fields of strategic management, information system management, organizational behavior, and marketing research on satisfaction analysis PLS-SEM was used because it has superior advantages over CB-SEM (Nghi et al., 2017).

4. Results and findings

The reliability of the scale on SMARTPLS is assessed through two main indicators, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Following Fornell and Larcker's approach, evidence of convergent and discriminant validity was obtained. The outer loadings value should be higher than 0.70 and it should be considered for deletion if the removal of the indicator with outer loadings is between 0.40 and 0.70 and if it contributes to an increase in composite reliability and average variance extracted (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, indicators PE2 (0.684) and PV1 (0.618) were considered to be removed since outer loadings were below 0.7, allowing the model to be run again. The rerun model obtained provides the statistics presented in Table 2.

The metric used for evaluating a construct's convergent validity is the average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al., 2011). The average variance extracted (AVE) indexes for all studied constructs that exceeded the recommended threshold value of 0.50, which indicates satisfactory convergence. Although there is a construct that has a CR value beyond the 0.9 level, it is still acceptable because it is below the 0.95 level (Hair et al., 2011). The instrument is reliable and acceptable since Cronbach values are higher than the cutoff values of 0.6.

The Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015) is used to assess discriminant validity. All HTMT values were less than the threshold value of 0.85 (Clark & Watson, 1995; Kline, 2015), thus providing

evidence for good discriminant validity. As the reliability and validity of the studied constructs

had been ascertained, the structural model was then analyzed for hypothesis testing.

Table 2: Scale accuracy analysis

Research Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Construct reliability and validity		
		CR	AVE	Item loading
PB	0.869	0.939	0.884	0.939/0.942
PE	0.762	0.848	0.653	0.734/0.912/0.768
PV	0.528	0.809	0.679	0.827/0.822
SE	0.699	0.869	0.769	0.880/0.873
SI	0.761	0.863	0.677	0.870/0.802/0.794

Notes: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; PB: Personal branding;
PE: Perceived employability; PV: Personal value; SE: Self-expression; SI: Social interactions.

Source: Authors' compilation.

Table 3: Discriminant validity results

	PB	PE	PV	SE	SI
PB					
PE	0.166				
PV	0.396	0.138			
SE	0.526	0.050	0.308		
SI	0.490	0.114	0.183	0.558	

Notes: CA (Career aspirations); EX: extrinsic motives; PB: personal branding;
PE: perceived employability, PV: personal value; SE: self-expression; SEI: self-image;
SI: Social interactions; UI: Unique image.

Source: Authors' compilation.

Structural model testing

When evaluating structural equation modeling, the problem of collinearity being eliminated has to be confirmed. When the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is greater than 5, it means that there may be a collinearity problem between the dimensions (Hair et al., 2011). The VIF value of the structural equation modeling in this study is less than 5, indicating no collinearity among the study dimensions.

To measure the quality of the proposed research model, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), the coefficient of determination (R^2 value), and predictive relevance (Q^2 index) were considered. The SRMR value obtained was 0.076, which is less than the 0.08 threshold; this suggests a satisfactory theoretical model fit. Hair et al. (2011) and Hair et al. (2013) suggested in scholarly research that focuses on marketing issues, R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for endogenous latent variables can, as a rough rule of thumb, be respectively described as substantial, moderate or weak. The R^2 values of

the four endogenous variables, which are personal branding and perceived employability, were 0.259 and 0.021, thus demonstrating personal branding with the acceptable explanatory capability of the studied construct. In addition, the Q^2 values of the endogenous constructs were larger than the suggested level of zero, thus providing predictive accuracy of the structural model.

Hypothesis constructs

The PLS-SEM findings show that (H1) self-expression has a positive and significant impact on personal branding ($p = 0.027 < 0.05$). (H2) Social interaction and (H3) self-image similarly have a positive effect on personal branding with values of p equals 0.001 and 0.000 respectively, both below 0.05. Moreover, (H4) personal branding was proved to have a significant and positive correlation with perceived employability ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Thus, the direct relationships of H1, H2, H3, and H4 were all accepted. The findings indicate the positive and direct influence that self-expression, social interactions, and personal value have on personal

branding; as well as the positive relationship between personal branding and perceived employability.

Table 4: Hypothesis acceptance

	Hypotheses	Mean	STDEV	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	SE → PB	0.168	0.071	2.206	0.027	Accept
H2	SI → PB	0.190	0.055	3.412	0.001	Accept
H3	PV → PB	0.265	0.066	4.014	0.000	Accept
H4	PB → PE	0.272	0.055	4.877	0.000	Accept

Source: Authors' compilation.

5. Implications

5.1. Theoretical implications

Self-expression has many forms, such as posting pictures or videos on social media platforms; however, another aspect should be considered, namely, expressing emotion, which is one of the aspects of self-expression, by using non-verbal strategies such as using punctuation and emoticons (Bui & Tran, 2023). With the Vietnamese youth generation, in order to build and manage a personal brand effectively, expressing personal value or exchanging personal expression with others is one of the vital components. In other words, the way that Vietnamese youth use social media platforms to present their identities such as outstanding appearance, competency, and a positive image is simultaneously influenced by Confucian ethics, socialist ideology, and neoliberal global culture, as was indicated by Nguyen et al. (2020).

The work investigates that there is a positive correlation between personal branding and perceived employability which is in line with the claim of Trang et al., (2023) that Gen Z's awareness about building personal branding on social media platforms as a tool to gain more advantage in job markets is crucial. The correlation between Vietnamese students' perceived employability before going to internship and career development learning is mediated by the role of human capital (Ho et al., 2022). One of the factors affecting directly perceived employability is the learning environment in the higher education system in Vietnam. Although there are changes rapidly related to developing soft skills in the system, the lack of skill development due to the traditional teaching method and passiveness among students during university is a major barrier to the successful transition to the workplace (Tran, 2013).

These findings are in line with the theories of previous studies on personal branding and the association between personal branding and future careers. The definition of personal branding establishes it as a proactive work behavior that employs marketing strategies and tactics to achieve career benefits in three distinct ways: strategic, differentiated, and technology-based (Gorbatov et al., 2019). Secondly, our research also reinforces the correlation between personal branding and perceived employability, which has appeared in several previous studies. According to Valdés et al. (2018), the approach to building a personal brand has allowed favoring active participation of students in their training, stimulating autonomous and informal learning, and improving their employability opportunities and professional development.

5.2. Practical implications

Self-expression is one of the factors contributing to shaping personal branding. Firstly, many young Vietnamese individuals prefer to express their personal opinions through social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok, using video clips and posts. This is because they feel at ease and confident, and they believe that others are listening. By doing so, they are able to assert themselves, present their ideas, and cultivate their image to others. Secondly, Vietnamese youth possess a critical thinking approach and a keen interest in macro issues such as political activism and climate change. This is how they assert their own roles

and responsibilities in the community and society with a youth's image having understanding and knowledge.

Social interaction also plays an important role in building personal branding. Vietnamese Youth, in general, today have an open mind and respect for differences, and this is also one of the reasons they are making efforts to expand their network with an approachable image. Besides, in the working environment, Vietnamese young people aim for a common goal because they would like to assert themselves as an important part of a group. In other words, they want to receive recognition from others about themselves. From those assessments and comments, they will feel confident with their own image, knowing what is good and bad that needs to be improved to build a better personal image.

In regard to the correlation between personal value and personal branding, Vietnamese youth are known for their creativity, dynamism, and versatility. They engage in various competitions at school or work to showcase their skills and individuality. Additionally, young people in Vietnam display a high level of respect towards cultural, gender, and educational differences. This is because they maintain an open and objective perspective when evaluating objects or events. These behaviors and thought processes enable each young person to create a positive self-image while respecting and valuing others.

These people have the chance to develop their personal brands and stand out in order to attract potential employment now or in the future due to the emerging economy and the rapid development of social networks. Besides, they also have the ability to attract employers and even have chances to move up the career ladder. Due to the dearth of positions accessible in the current work market, having a strong personal brand might lead to doors opening up for various career chances.

6. Conclusion and limitations

Based on the findings, it was indicated that self-expression, social interaction, and personal value positively influence personal branding for the young Vietnamese generation. In other words, intrinsic motivation is one of the most notable factors directly related to the positioning of personal values for the public's attention in the context that Vietnam is an emerging economy in the South East Asia region.

The current study runs into a number of constraints. First, the absence of pretesting prior to the start of the questionnaires imposed additional restrictions. There would have been fewer issues if a pretest had been used, such as the necessity to reformulate or delete questions that turned out to be redundant or unsuitable or induced questions and guesses from respondents. In addition, the length of the questionnaire may have affected the participants' responses because they were impatient or preoccupied. As a result, some of them may have not responded under the best circumstances of focus, sincerity, and patience. The study deals specifically with youths from large and vibrant cities in Vietnam; as a result, its generalizability may be constrained when it may not be representative of all young Vietnamese or other groups outside this context. However, as the first study discussing personal brand building for the Vietnamese Young generation, this study may inspire additional research and provide valuable insight for future studies, as well as different stakeholders alike.

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