

Personal Branding: A Systematic Literature Review

Alex Osei Bonsu¹ & Koryoe Anim-Wright¹

¹ Insel Communication Limited, Ghana

² University of Professional Studies, Accra Ghana

Correspondence: Koryoe Anim-Wright, Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Studies, University of Professional Studies, Accra Ghana.

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Abstract

Personal branding has attracted significant interest from researchers and practitioners in the last decade. There have been numerous scientific studies covering different facets of personal branding. However, studies covering the scope of the interest need to be more comprehensive. The paper analyzes various research papers on personal branding, encompassing theoretical underpinnings, the strategic nature of personal branding, and future research opportunities identified by the different articles. The review identified four major themes: personal branding skills and attributes, the strategic nature of personal branding, personal branding, and personal branding, politics, and social media. These findings give a broader view for further research and practical application.

Keywords: personal branding, personal brand, human brand, systematic literature review

1. Introduction

Personal branding research has significantly increased and received attention from professionals in the last decade. However, the scope of research and practice needs to be adequately documented. Even though the terms “personal branding” and “human brands” are relatively new, the practice of branding individuals is as old as human interaction and society as a whole (Braudy, 1997). Personal branding is linked to product and service branding, emphasizing differentiation and an attempt to distinguish individuals from competitors based on their unique abilities and characteristics (Boztepe, 2019). It starts when individuals view their identities or professional brands as commodities. Various researchers have expanded the idea of personal branding into different fields of study, such as politics, health, entertainment, social media, and the job market (Sugihara et al., 2019; Gander., 2014).

Although these scholarships add to the increasing body of work that explains personal branding, personal branding strategies, and its domain, drivers, and outcomes, they must tell a coherent story to comprehend the topic comprehensively. Thus, we conduct a systematic literature review to offer valuable insights into personal branding research and practices across disciplines. The central research for this study is “What are the trends in personal branding research?”

We examined 897 papers on personal branding published in journals and covered the topics of personal branding’s influences, applications, and case studies to answer this question. The paper analyzes various research papers on personal branding, encompassing theoretical underpinnings, categories, strategic nature of personal branding, and future research opportunities identified by the various papers. We synthesized and grouped the various studies under themes of which personal brand was applicable.

1.1 Developing a Personal Brand

There are multiple ways to build a personal brand. Building a personal brand requires strategy, capability, differentiation, audience, and performance (Shafiee et al., 2020). Having a clearly defined personal goal and brand identity, as well as a strategy for personal brand positioning and competitive advantage, is essential for successfully creating a personal brand. This includes appropriately recognizing oneself, staying committed to personal goals and plans, being trustworthy to the brand's audience, and maintaining a consistent program approach. Additionally, developing a personal brand involves having the appropriate talents and interests in a profession, being an expert in the field, following the correct strategy for self-introduction, aligning positioning efforts with brand quality, believing in one's brand, adhering to ethical standards, and having harmony between

behavior, speech, and performance (ElMassah et al., 2019; Rangarajan et al., 2017; Ledbetter & Meisner, 2021; Kondor et al., 2018). Kondor, Takacs and Takacs (2018) identified three core components to managing the personal brands of CEOs. These are competence, morality, and humanity. The study suggested that competence allowed a CEO level of knowledge in its broadest sense and was crucial in personal brand management and efforts. This finding is supported by Frendika et al. (2018), who identified that the competence of expatriates increased their brand over local employees. Morality, as it has been defined, confirms the widely held belief that leadership is about more than just skills; it also involves the goals a leader is trying to accomplish using his or her capabilities and how a leader accomplishes these goals. One's brand is related to ethical behavior (Shafiee et al., 2020).

2. Method

We conducted a systematic literature review to create an up-to-date overview of current research on Personal Branding scholarship following these steps: (a) a structured search through the specific online database using different sets of search queries and screens that defined my inclusion criteria; (b) a preliminary relevance check of all research papers; (c) the second screening of publications, chapters, and academic papers; and (d) a finished in-depth audit of complete articles, chapters, and research papers.

Table 1. Online academic database search results

Data Type	Documents Dates	Documents n=	Database/Source
Article	2022–1991	491	Scopus
Book Chapter	2021–1998	110	Scopus
Editorial	2016–2000	179	Scopus
Review	2018–2004	15	Scopus
Short Survey	2009–2004	20	Scopus
Conference paper	2022–2002	82	Scopus
Total number of papers resulting from keyword search		897	
Total number of papers screened		810	
Number of papers excluded		723	
Number of papers to be reviewed		87	

2.1 Electronic Database and Search Terms Structure

We conducted the research using Scopus as the central database. Scopus provides credibility to the papers deemed pertinent to this research as it has a rigorous screening and selection criterion for relevant and authoritative research, reliable data, metrics, and analytical tools. We used “Personal Branding*” as the search term as it is the focal point of this paper. We also considered papers that use the term human branding, but This keyword helped us to filter the sources and produce relevant papers for this review. Table 1 shows the number of papers retrieved.

2.2 Inclusion Criteria

We concentrated on papers that matched the following requirements for this review:

(a) exclusively English, (b) Personal Branding theme, (c) peer-reviewed, and (d) All Years.

The inclusion criteria from the current study are listed in Table 2.

We purposely kept the dates open to guarantee the inclusion of various viewpoints on the subject. The selected papers span from 2010 to 2022 as they were relevant to current practices, trends, and interests.

2.3 Selection and Coding Process

Using the critical appraisal approach, we collected data from various sources and reviewed the references to develop a more narrowly focused body of literature. Following the trilevel structure of this quality control support, we (a) scanned the abstracts and article bodies to assess relevance to the study; (b) collated the articles with pertinent abstracts and compared notes over relation to the study, study objectives, design of the study, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and conclusions; and (c) read the remaining pieces in-depth to assess reliability and validity of the studies.

Table 2. Inclusion criteria

Included articles discussing Personal Branding with a focus on various dimensions it affects.	
Inclusion was based on the following:	
a.	English Only
b.	Personal Brand theme
c.	Peer-reviewed
d.	All Years

We read each article in its entirety before analyzing it for criteria for inclusion or deletion. We then wrote down the questions on the participants, methodologies, frameworks, findings, and applicability of each paper while conducting the analysis. Next, we used this procedure to gather data before deciding which papers to include in the study and adhere to several criteria to assess the study's rigor and quality. Using these criteria, we found 39 articles fit for the study's final analysis. We examined each paper to identify the patterns to evaluate and synthesize them.

3. Results

The search produced 897 results, which we then cross-checked by title for duplications based on the database and search phrases used. Eighty-seven duplicates were identified and removed from the records. The records were reduced to 810 different results and deemed worthy of further screening. Seven hundred twenty-three were excluded for not meeting the requirements. Some papers mentioned personal branding briefly, while others provided little to no research data on personal branding.

Thirty-nine references passed the screening procedure through an abstract review pertinent to the study based on the standards above (see Figure 1 for PRISMA [Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses] flow diagram. The 55 eligible articles were vetted by reading the various abstracts with the following filters applied: (a) only English, (b) Personal Branding theme, (c) peer-reviewed, and (d) year range. Of the 39 selected articles, fourteen were quantitative, ten were qualitative, eight were mixed methods, and one used quasi-experimental research (posttest and pretest). Figure 1 summarizes the methods used to select the articles for review.

Four critical themes served as our framework for synthesizing the literature on personal branding: personal branding skills and attributes, the strategic nature of personal branding, personal branding and social media, and personal branding and politics.

3.1 Personal Branding Skills and Attributes

Gander, Harris and Rae (2011) proposed utilizing personal brand attributes offline and online to find a job and manage career progression. Girard, Pinar and Lysiak (2020) listed several essential qualities for developing a successful student personal brand, including self-motivation, a strong work ethic, verbal communication, problem-solving, self-discipline, social skills, critical thinking, a graduate degree, leadership, and critical reasoning.

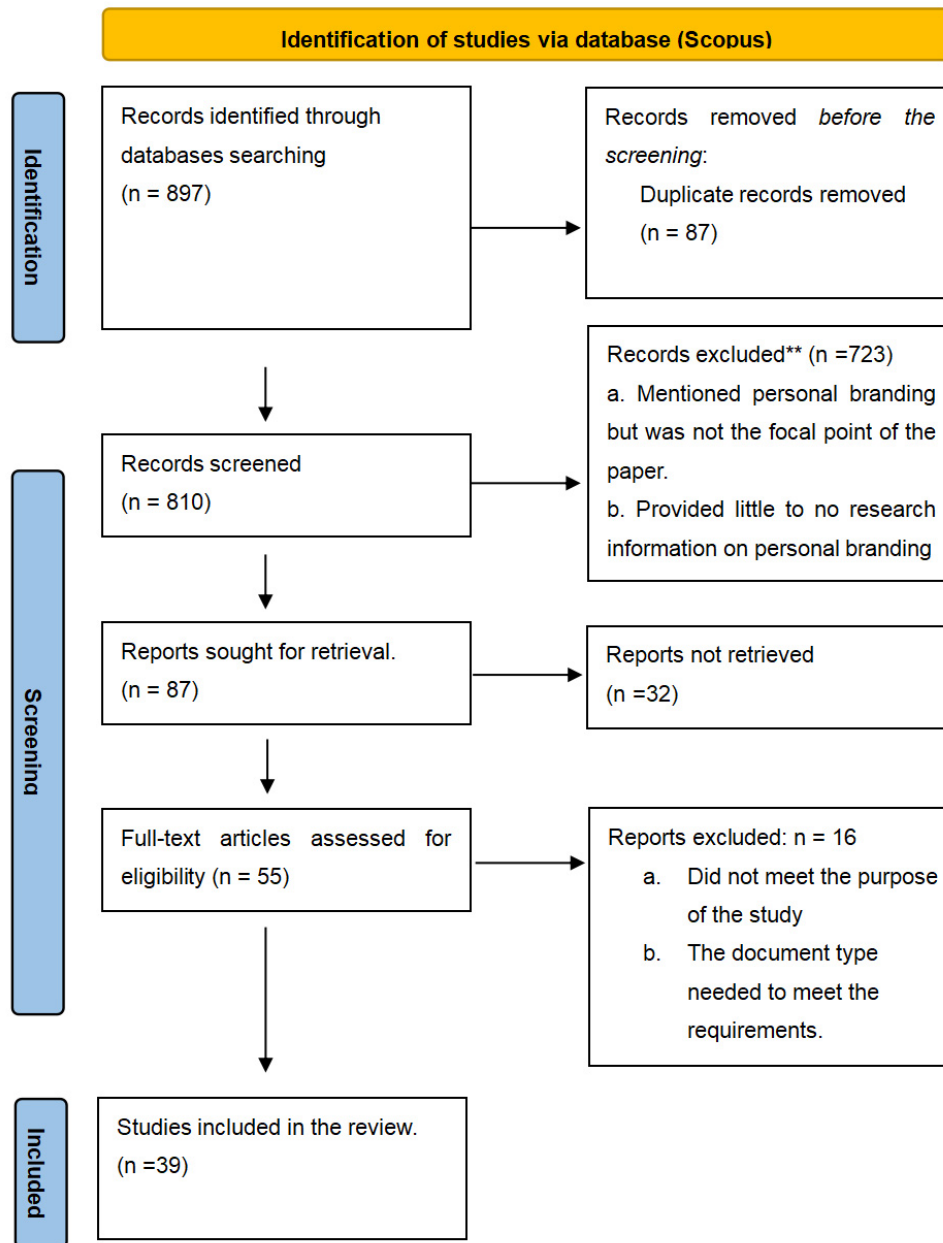


Figure 1. Flow chart of the search protocol using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses framework.

These qualities are transferable to the professional job market, for example, by encouraging self-efficacy in personal branding management to create, position, and uphold a distinctive combination of qualities that provide a brand promise to the target audience. Additionally, authenticity is essential for newly hired professionals and graduates, and students who authenticate their brands improve their career prospects by being viewed favorably. (Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2018; Allison, Blair, Jung, & Boutin, 2020). Harris and Rae's (2011) findings concur that it is essential to be authentic; hence, personal branding is built on a superficial level, for example, based solely on ego, spin, or piggybacking off the efforts of others, which will not last. They further stated that an authentic personal brand provides a track record and promises continuous value delivery.

3.2 Strategic Nature of Personal Branding

Building a personal brand can be likened to product and service branding, emphasizing differentiation, and requires media strategy to create awareness and attract attention (Boztepe, 2019; Gander, 2014). Personal brands require a defined strategy to stand out because it is about how people see the person and how they can influence

the audience's perceptions (Shafiee et al., 2020., Gander, 2014). Some personal brands use online and offline media to increase brand awareness and attract employers' attention. A strategically crafted online profile may highlight a professional who embodies his employer's brand. This could be done by prominently displaying his employer's logo, following his employer's organization, publishing client logos, or posting a wide range of company or product-related links.

McCool's (2019) study on sustaining a personal brand in multiple media revealed that the subject could use multimodal composing and transmedia storytelling techniques by sharing smaller narratives across different media and inviting participants to engage. This is supported by Shafiee et al. (2020) and Gander (2014), who found that personal brands evolve organically because of excellent communication, a feeling of purpose, and the person behind the brand repeatedly backing up the brand's promise. This brand management strategy may be developed to advance the organizational ladder and influence the audience's perception (Shafiee et al., 2020; Gander, 2014).

In their study, Anto et al. (2020) discovered that trainees were familiar with and enthusiastic about the online personal brand. Still, an optimistic attitude must adequately persuade participants to engage in online personal branding. These personal branding tactics and attributes increase employment prospects (Kushal & Nargundkar, 2021). Developing and sustaining a personal brand is becoming a significant differentiator between employed and unemployed graduates. The success or failure of an individual in the job market can be traced to their brand (Khedher, 2019). In today's competitive job market, where everyone is evolving to stand out among the crowd, it is paramount that one develops an authentic personal brand in order to increase their worth (Allison et al., 2017; Khedher, 2019).

3.3 Personal Branding and Social Media

Social Media have become a valuable tool for developing and curating personal brands (Jacobson, 2019). It is used across varied fields and demographics, supported by diverse scholarship. They frequently share details about themselves on social media, demonstrating a close relationship between social media use and a personal brand. (Boztepe, 2019).

In their study, Kunkel, Doyle and Na (2020) showed how athletes could improve consumer perceptions of their brands and tighten consumer relationships through social media. Social media also help a personal brand reach a wider audience, disseminate important information, and engage in effective political marketing and positive communication (Sugihart & Aras, 2021; Chen et al., 2021). Personal brands could increase their visibility to research funders, governments, and higher education institutions with a positive personal brand digital footprint (Kalbande, 2019; Eke, 2012). However, any negative expression on the platform remains forever, which can affect the brand in the future (Jacobson, 2019).

3.4 Personal Branding and Politics

Personal branding has been studied in the context of political marketing. Sugihara and Aras (2021) researched how two politicians in Indonesia's Sumedang District could win various political seats owing to the strategic implementation of their brands on social media. Their study considered the three aspects of personal Branding by Montoya and Vandehay: personality, promise, and relationship. The politicians positioned themselves as intellectual and earthy characters by implementing the personality aspect. The politicians made the promise aspect evident as they posted and shared content about ongoing development online, which positioned them as having the ability to fulfill their campaign promises.

This argument is consistent with Harris and Rae (2011), who concluded that an authentic personal brand delivers a track record and a promise of continuous value delivery. Sugihara and Aras (2021) also revealed that the Sumedang politicians implemented relationship aspects by publishing content about hosting guests of honor or attending an invitation from public authorities at home and abroad, giving the impression that the pair is attempting to increase Sumedang's visibility throughout the world. Hendrayana (2019) made complementary findings in his study on how beginner voters decided in Indonesia's West Java governor elections. First-time voters examine personal traits (beliefs, environment, and education), mass media, political parties, and contestants. A solid personal brand revolving around the numerous variables beginner voters assess before voting can favor one's campaign for a political seat. Hendrayana's findings are consistent with the Sumedang politicians' strong personal brand efforts, which were distinct, relevant, and actively disseminated desirable material on social media, portraying them as trustworthy (Sugihart & Aras, 2021). Buana et al. (2019) revealed that having explicit knowledge of one's brand is critical in positioning oneself in voters' minds.

3.5 Theoretical Underpinnings of Personal Branding Studies

Various theories have been applied to study personal branding. The major ones include social learning, motivation, practice, behavior, impression, and network ties. Allison et al. (2020), for example, leveraged Bandura's (2000) theory of self-efficacy to comprehend better the practical application of personal brand management efficacy on self-actualization among students and prospective employees. They provided additional support for their study using the social cognitive theory, which contends that people shape. Lo and Peng (2021) used Ryan and Deci's (2000) internal and external motivation theory to explore the internal and external factors that explain why internet celebrities build successful brands. Khedher (2019) used Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice to show how all behavior is socially motivated to create and uphold a favorable impression on others.

Nolan (2015), to determine what branding strategies were deemed appropriate for executives' personal branding, referred to Goffman's (1967) face theory. Fendika et al. (2018) also took on Schwartz's (1977) theory of fundamental values to evaluate personal and cultural.

Table 3. Theoretical underpinnings

	Theoretical Framework	Author(s)
1	Internal and External Motivation Theory	Lo & Peng (2021)
2	The Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin's Systematic Approach	Zakerian et al (2022)
3	Personal Branding theory by Montoya & Vandehey	Sugihart & Aras (2021)
4	Environment-Strategy-Performance (ESP) framework	Zhang, Yan, Wang & Chen (2021)
5	Uses and Gratification Theory	Confente & Kucharska (2021)
6	Theory of self-efficacy	Allison, Blair, Jung & Boutin (2020)
7	Neo-Liberalism theory	Ekdale (2020)
8	Social identity theory	Kunkel & Na (2020), Kucharska (2017), Kunkel, Doyle & Na (2020)
9	Social world's framework (Becker, 1974, 1982)	Dumont & Ots (2020)
10	Symbolic interactionism	Jacobson (2019)
11	Theory of Practice	Khedher (2019)
12	Dramaturgical theory	Khedher (2019)
13	Uses and Gratifications Theory	Boztepe (2019)
14	Theory of self-presentation and impression Management	Chen et al.
15	Schwartz's theory of fundamental values	Frendika et al (2018)
16	Face Theory	Nolan (2015)

Competence in the formed personal brand of employees from a different country. Table 3 captures the most widely used theories in the personal branding literature.

3.6 Gaps and Thematic Areas of Research Opportunities on Personal Branding

The literature review identified limitations and future research opportunities. Although many studies have assessed the factors influencing personal branding, research is still needed to address the topic thoroughly (Lo & Peng, 2021; Ledbetter & Meisner, 2021; Kucharska, 2017; Nolan, 2015). For instance, researchers are invited to fully comprehend the antecedents of internet celebrities' successful personal brands (Lo & Peng, 2021). Studies are required to explore how the audience's negative experience with a personal brand can affect the brand (Blair et al., 2020).

Another under-researched area is the consequence of personal branding. Although studies have examined the impact of personal branding on employment-related outcomes, additional research is required to confirm the impact of personal branding on graduate employability (Khedher, 2019), the consequences of personal branding on authenticity in job searching, and the role of social media (Allison et al., 2020). Studies are also needed to examine the effects of personal brand positioning characteristics (Shafiee et al., 2020). In political marketing, there is an opportunity for researchers to explore how personal branding affects election candidates differently (Chen et al., 2021).

Comparative studies investigating the efficacy of different social media in personal branding still need to be included. Furthermore, despite the numerous scholarships on the role of social media in personal branding, there are still opportunities for future research. Jacobson (2019) recommended research into the personal branding strategies of other social media-driven professions. Nolan (2015) suggested future research considering how

executives use Twitter to create awareness of their organizations. Studies may compare the effectiveness of Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook in building a personal brand to generate comprehensive results (Conference & Kucharska, 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, researchers can use impression management theory to examine how entrepreneurs' impression management tactics change over time (Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2018).

4. Conclusion and Limitations

The literature reviewed has given a broader view on the integration of conventionally individual-driven career efforts and political and social-driven human resource practices, which support individuals in creating advantageous personal brands that traverse various disciplines. There can always be more emphasis placed on the value of personal branding to individuals, society, culture, and the economy. As a result, research has developed in response, with numerous academic fields focusing on various facets of this topic over time. This paper provides systematic confirmation that personal branding is pertinent in our society.

Our research focused on extracting data from Scopus, only leaving databases such as EBSCO and Google Scholar. This practice is consistent with modern practices, but future research might also consider collecting data from different databases. The research did not adopt any theoretical model to guide the research due to the objective of this research. Future research could pair their data with specific theoretical frameworks to generate different findings.

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Obtained.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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