

THE EFFECTIVENESS AND CHALLENGES OF PERSONAL BRANDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

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Abstract

This study aimed primarily to identify the primary obstacles that individuals face in their career paths, to assess how Personal Development Planning (PDP) and personal branding can serve as purposeful responses to these obstacles, and to synthesize findings on how these strategies together enhance employability, career insight, and ongoing professional development. This study presents a structured synthesis of 27 scholarly works examining the effectiveness of personal branding and professional development planning (PDP) across diverse sectors, including higher education, journalism, public service, tourism, and digital media. Drawing on both empirical and conceptual research, the review identifies key interventions and strategic functions, classifying their outcomes as effective, ineffective, or contextually dependent. The findings suggest that effective personal branding hinges on authenticity, cultural alignment, and structured implementation, often resulting in enhanced employability, identity clarity, and strategic visibility. However, challenges persist, including branding fatigue, institutional rigidity, cultural misfit, and the lack of validated measurement tools. Studies also reveal psychological costs associated with overbranding and ethical concerns in identity management. This review underscores the importance of context-sensitive, measurable, and supportive branding frameworks, and calls for greater integration of narrative-building tools in formal education and career development systems.

Keywords: Branding effectiveness; Personal branding; Professional development planning

INTRODUCTION

Today's labour market is changing faster than ever, driven by new technologies, remote work, and shifting employer expectations. Because of this rapid change, people's careers cannot be mapped out by educational certificates and step-by-step promotions alone. Instead, success now relies on how quickly a person can learn, how clearly they can explain what they bring to the table, and how well they can position themselves among other candidates in crowded fields (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015; Minor-Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2020). Against this backdrop, two closely related tactics, Personal Development Planning (PDP) and personal branding, are proving more useful than ever. These approaches help workers identify their own goals and strengths while also boosting their visibility, consistency, and trustworthiness across both on-line platforms and face-to-face interactions (Torres-Valdés et al., 2018; Zhao, 2020).

This article responds to a rising interest in how personal development plans and personal branding can work together as organized tools for steering through today's career hurdles. Those hurdles range from managing one's professional identity (Olausson, 2018; Brems et al., 2020) and meeting employer demands (Marin & Nilă, 2021) to handling performance pressure on social media (Ferreira et al., 2020), signaling employability (Weedon, 2018), and building trust in the way one presents oneself online (Weeks et al., 2023). As labor markets grow more interlinked and organized by algorithms, personal branding turns into both a narrative exercise and a tactical job, an exercise that frequently goes hand in hand with goal-setting and growth planning found in PDP models (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015; Zhao, 2020).

Although recent years have seen a mounting number of studies that examine professional development plans and personal branding in isolation, relatively few have taken the time to pull these strands together and explore how they work in tandem to propel career growth across a variety of cultures and occupations (Gorbatorov et al., 2021; Szántó et al., 2023). The current review therefore sets out to chart the career-related hurdles that earlier research has highlighted, to gather examples of interventions that weave PDP and branding into a single approach, and to assess how well these combined strategies have performed in different settings. In so doing, the paper aims to add a fresh perspective to the ongoing conversation about employability, identity capital, and self-directed career management in the contemporary labour market (Fadhila et al., 2023; Kapuściński et al., 2023).

METHODS

This review aimed primarily to pinpoint the main obstacles that individuals face in their career paths, to assess how Personal Development Planning (PDP) and personal branding can serve as purposeful responses to those obstacles, and to unite findings on how these strategies together enhance employability, career insight, and ongoing professional advancement. A systematic literature review (SLR) framework guided this examination of the strategic interplay between PDP and personal branding within contemporary career development (Randles & Finnegan, 2023). While citation management applications and

streamlined platforms like Covidence or Rayyan were not employed for this review, the steps taken to determine eligibility of studies still followed the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021). Adhering to these internationally recognised guidelines helped to ensure that the process could be understood and repeated by other researchers.

The search for relevant studies was confined to the Scopus database, chosen for its wide-ranging coverage of peer-reviewed contributions across various fields. The keyword query, “personal development” and “personal branding”, spanned publications dated from 2015 through the anticipated end of 2025 and initially yielded a total of 199 documents. Refinement unfolded across three steps: filtering first for journal articles alone, which reduced the set to 131; then restricting to English-language pieces, bringing the count to 123; and finally selecting only those available openly, thereby producing a working dataset of 44 articles. Somehow, after deep analysis by the researcher, only 27 articles were used. It happened since the others did not discuss about personal branding, but the brand in the company context. Next, the 27 articles were vetted in stages, starting with a cursory review of titles and abstracts and culminating in a thorough full-text assessment.

RESULTS

Overview of The Study

A number of recent studies have sought to clarify the core ideas that underlie personal branding models and frameworks. Weedon (2017) dusted off archival letters and magazine clippings from the early twentieth century to show how Elinor Glyn inadvertently pioneered both cultural and personal branding long before the terms even existed. Ferreira, Robertson, and Reyneke (2020) followed suit by sketching a performance taxonomy for social media branding, using concepts borrowed from expectation confirmation theory, though their proposal is still largely speculative and awaits real-world testing. Philbrick and Cleveland (2015) turned their attention to librarians, arguing that a well-crafted personal brand can significantly influence professional identity and career prospects in library science. Collectively, these conceptual studies lay the groundwork for later empirical research cutting across several different fields.

Digital platforms, most notably social media sites and LinkedIn, have become primary venues for individuals to shape and showcase their personal brands. Working within schools, Torres-Valdés, Santa-Soriano, and Lorenzo-Álvarez (2018) conducted action-research to explore whether e-learning innovations could enhance students' branding capabilities alongside their employability prospects in Spain. In a parallel vein, Zhao (2020) embedded experiential, LinkedIn-focused tasks into communication courses at universities across the United Kingdom, while Fadhila, Sukmayadi, and Affandi (2021) turned to phenomenological interviews to investigate how recent Indonesian graduates strategically positioned themselves on the same platform. Jacobson (2019) and the duet of Wijaya and Nasution (2020) shifted attention toward established professionals, probing how they curate online personas either to attract prospective employers or, at times, to counteract risks of reputational harm stemming from careless digital exchanges. Taken together, these inquiries illustrate that contemporary media operate less like passive tools and more like dynamic arenas where personal branding is actively crafted, enacted, and policed.

Tourism scholarship has increasingly intersected with place-based branding in recent years. Dai and colleagues (2020) investigated branding in Amsterdam by focusing on how tourists engage with the city's architecture, revealing that built form shapes visitor narratives. In a different part of Europe, Sousa and Rodrigues (2019) demonstrated that holidaymakers' intentions in Madeira are swayed by elements traditionally associated with personal brands, such as online reviews and social-media posts. Hayward (2016), drawing on postcolonial theory, examined the role of myth and renaming practices in place branding, while Recuero-Virto and Arróspide (2022) linked the Basque culinary identity to a broader regional tourism strategy. Collectively, these inquiries indicate that personal-branding mechanisms may be applied to cultural and geographic identities, subsequently moulding how places are perceived and how visitors act.

A parallel vein of research has turned to branding within political, media, and sporting realms. Olausson (2017) tracked a Swedish journalist's self-promotional activities on Twitter, finding that everyday micro-gestures collectively build credibility. Brems and associates (2017) employed mixed methods to contrast branding strategies of freelance and staff reporters, underlining the advantages freelancers gain from a visible online presence. In

Iceland, Armannsdottir, Carnell, and Pich (2016) gathered interview data from parliamentarians to map the contours of political self-branding. Turning to sport, Keshtidar and colleagues (2018) probed elite Iranian athletes' understanding of their own personal brands, discovering a growing awareness yet limited strategic direction. Expanding on their work, Fujak et al. (2022) reported that the pressure to maintain a public image took a toll on the mental wellbeing of Australian cricketers. Together, these findings illuminate how personal Branding has become woven into the fabric of high-stakes professions.

Recent research addresses the intersection of personal and organizational branding in recruitment and talent management. Marin and Nilă (2020) interviewed marketing and HR professionals who use LinkedIn extensively, uncovering how platform features influence perceptions of personal brands. Simultaneously, Gorbatorov, Khapova, and Lysova (2021) employed structural equation modelling to construct and validate a Personal Brand Equity scale, providing scholars and practitioners with a metric for assessing the value of an individual brand within corporate hiring contexts. For a broader social media perspective, Ellmer, Reichel, and Naderer (2021) performed text mining on more than 13,000 Facebook posts from multinational employers, revealing the rhetorical strategies companies use to amplify their employer brands. Building on these approaches, Kapuściński, Zhang, and Wang (2023) conducted in-depth Means-End Chain interviews with Generation Z candidates, mapping the values that underpin their brand expectations.

Table 1 Overview of the Study

N	Author(s)	Count	Context	Method	Sector / Group	Data Source
1	(Weedon 2018)	UK	Re-evaluation of Elinor Glyn's cultural legacy and personal branding	Multidisciplinary historical-literary case review	Early 20th-century female authors	Glyn's books, films, personal memoirs, translation rights, archives, photographi

N	Author(s)	Count	Context	Method	Sector / Group	Data Source
						c records, BBC recordings, and international editions (UK, Spain, US)
2	(Valdés et al., 2018)	6	Spain	Resignification of educational e-innovation to foster personal branding and employability in HE degrees	Action Research; longitudinal ex post-facto panel survey	Undergraduate and Master's students in Event Org., Protocol, & IR
						Mediterranean Institute of Protocol Studies; internal curricular materials; post-course interviews and training program records
3	(Dai et al., 2018)	10	China	Spatial narration and city branding in touristic Amsterdam using architectural experience	Mixed-method: categorization system + tourist survey	International tourists in Amsterdam
						Questionnaire data on city image + typology of architecture experiences (tourism-oriented, present-based, mass)
4	(Olausson et al., 2018)	1	Sweden	Journalistic self-promotion and	Critical Discourse	One high-profile journalist on Twitter
						Tweets, Twitter

N	Author(s)	Count	Context	Method	Sector / Group	Data Source
			celebrity branding on Twitter in the digital news environment	Analysis (CDA)	(Sweden)	activity, and public discourse data
5	(Sousa e Portugal, 2024)		Personal branding's effect on tourist perceptions and behavioral intention in Madeira tourism	Quantitative survey	Tourists at Madeira International Airport	Self-administered questionnaire in 2017
6	(Armann, Icelander et al., 2020)	2	UK Exploration of personal political branding in Icelandic parliament	Qualitative case study	Politicians (Members of Parliament)	In-depth interviews and document analysis
7	(Keshtidar et al., 2020)		Iran Awareness of personal brand image components among elite Taekwondo athletes	Descriptive-analytical survey	Male Iranian Taekwondo elite athletes	Structured questionnaire (Safar et al., 2016), validated by experts
8	(Jacobson, 2020)		Canada Social media managers' personal branding and future audiences	In-depth qualitative analysis	Social media managers	Fieldwork in Toronto (3 years)
9	(Marin & Roman, 2020)		Use of LinkedIn	Quantitative	Recruitment &	Online

N	Author(s)	Count	Context	Method	Sector / Group	Data Source
		2021)	for personal brand communication in recruitment and marketing professions	(questionnaire x2)	communication/marketing specialists	survey via LinkedIn users
1	(Kucharski Polancz)	2017)	Personal branding and brand identification in social network brand sites (e.g., Facebook)	Quantitative (survey)	Social media users (brand site followers)	Survey via social network
1	(Wijayan Yudianto)	Indonesian 2023)	Misuse of personal branding in social media and its link to communication corruption	Qualitative (Phenomenology)	Academics with personal branding experience via social media	Transcripts of interviews, interpretative coding
1	(Brems & Nethe)	Belgium 2017)	Personal branding on Twitter by employed and freelance journalists	Mixed-method: Quantitative content analysis + qualitative interviews	Journalists (employed & freelance) active on Twitter	Tweets; structured coding; interview transcripts
1	(Minor-Cooley Parks-Yai)	USA 2020)	Investigating the effect of personal branding on job seeking	Qualitative-descriptive; interview-based	Early career job seekers and employers	In-depth interviews; perspectives from job seekers and

N	Author(s)	Count	Context	Method	Sector / Group	Data Source
			attributes of early career job seekers			employers
1	(Philbrick USA Cleveland 2015)		Exploring personal branding as a pathway to professional success	Conceptual- descriptive	Librarians, professionals	Theoretical model; literature synthesis
1	(Zhao, 2020)	Unitec Kingdom	Teaching personal branding through LinkedIn using experiential learning in communication studies	Qualitative, experiential learning report	Undergraduate communication students	Reflection- based activity, in- class application
1	(Ellmer & Austria 2021)	German UK, US	Employer branding messages on Facebook by multinational companies (MNCs) related to global mobility	Qualitative; text mining; grounded theory	Employer branding teams of 30 MNCs	Official corporate Facebook pages
1	(Gorbato Beland al., 2021)		Pengembangan skala Personal Brand Equity (PBE) dan	Kuantitatif; pengembangan skala dan uji struktural	Profesional dan mahasiswa	Survei daring terhadap pekerja Belanda dan

N	Author(s)	Count	Context	Method	Sector / Group	Data Source
			validasinya dalam konteks organisasi			mahasiswa bisnis
1	(Ferreira al., 2022)	South Africa Sweden	Evaluation of social media performance on personal branding perception using expectation confirmation theory	Conceptual; proposition development & taxonomy	Theoretical media users social	Literature and conceptual model
1	(Samanta 2022)	Greece	Relationship between relational marketing and branding in Greek B2B family SMEs	Qualitative; interviews with business owners	Family B2B SMEs in trade sector	Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews
2	(Haywar 2022)	Australia Global	Place branding through myth and post-colonial naming	Historical-comparative analysis	Destination branding / toponymy	Archival sources; historical records
2	(Fujak 2023)	Australia	Branding pressure in T20 cricket athletes due to innovation	Qualitative; thematic interviews	Professional athletes T20	Sport Management Review
2	(Vernucci al., 2023)	Italy	Branding via anthropomorphism in voice	Qualitative; interviews & cognitive	Automotive branding professionals	Journal of Consumer Behaviour

N	Author(s)	Count	Context	Method	Sector / Group	Data Source
			assistants (NBVA)	mapping		
2	(Kapuścir et al., 2020)	UK	Gen Z preferences in hospitality employer branding	Qualitative; Means-End Chain interviews	Hospitality; prospective workers	Journal of Vacation Marketing
2	(Fadhila et al., 2024)	Indonesia	LinkedIn personal branding among fresh graduates	Qualitative; phenomenological	Fresh graduates using LinkedIn	International Conf. on Digital Media Comm.
2	(Lumban et al., 2024)	Indonesia	Cultural values, self-efficacy, and personal branding in police	Quantitative; hypothesis testing (SEM)	Police personnel (Central Kalimantan)	Academic Journal, State Univ. Jakarta
2	(Recuero Virto & Arróspide, 2024)	Spain	Culinary tourism & identity branding in Basque Country	Grounded Theory + literature + expert interviews	Tourists & food stakeholders	Sustainability (MDPI)
2	(Szántó et al., 2025)	Hungary	Personal Brand Equity (PBE) measurement framework	Mixed methods: interviews, survey, EFA/CFA	Multi-sector professionals	Sustainability Journal (MDPI)

Scholars are also exploring these themes in the realm of education and professional development. Minor-Cooley and Parks-Yancy (2018) tracked early-career graduates through job fairs and interviews, discovering that candidates with clear personal brands were viewed as more hireable and charismatic. In a different cultural setting, Samanta (2019) analyzed

Greek B2B family firms and demonstrated how relational marketing tactics merge individual reputations with collective corporate identity. Lumbantobing, Yohana, and Saptono (2022) extended this line of inquiry to Indonesian police officers, quantitatively linking personal branding efforts to self-efficacy beliefs and adherence to local cultural norms. Together, these studies portray branding as both a reflective identity project and a pragmatic tool for navigating hierarchical and institutional landscapes.

Table 1 collectively showcases a varied and methodologically robust selection of research focused on personal branding. Spanning early conceptual frameworks and practical digital interventions to targeted examinations of sectors such as politics, tourism, education, and labour markets, the entries demonstrate that personal branding is anything but one-dimensional. Across methodologies, be they surveys, in-depth interviews, or detailed discourse analyses, each study adds a distinctive piece to the puzzle of how both individuals and organisations build and sustain reputations within differing professional landscapes.

Challenges in Career Development

From the studies that have been studied, some challenges are discovered as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Career Development Challenges Identified

No	Author(s)	Career Challenges Identified	Notes
1	Weedon	(1) Lack of critical recognition despite popular success; (2) Tension between celebrity and legitimacy as a professional woman; (3) Misalignment between British conservatism and Hollywood liberalism; (4) Translational censorship and cultural reframing in international markets.	Glyn's literary and film works were reframed to fit national ideologies, e.g., Catholic Spain, and her feminist potential was often overshadowed by moral conservatism or misunderstood in posthumous evaluations.
2	Torres-Valdés et al.	(1) Difficulty adapting academic training to labor market digital demands; (2) Weak internalization of personal branding concepts; (3) E-	Traditional digital tools in HE were not enough, students needed structured narrative-building strategies for visibility and professional legitimacy.

No	Author(s)	Career Challenges Identified	Notes
		innovation often limited to technical literacy without strategic application; (4) Need for interdisciplinary and identity-based employability frameworks.	
3	Dai et al.	(1) Disconnection between architectural style and cultural experience; (2) Lack of identity-driven branding strategies in city design	The study critiques city branding that lacks cultural depth and suggests a need for value-based and experiential approaches.
4	Olausson	(1) Blurred lines between journalists and influencers; (2) Individualization of journalism; (3) Lack of institutional identity in digital branding	Journalists must now create personal brands to remain relevant, navigating fame, market logics, and platform-based identity performance.
5	Sousa & Rodrigues	(1) Difficulty in aligning city/destination branding with personal brand values; (2) Tourists' limited awareness of destination image	Personal branding in tourism contexts is underexplored and needs to be framed within visitor perceptions and sustainability.
6	Armannsdottir, Carnell & Pich	Difficulty managing authenticity and consistency of personal brand in coalition politics; Alignment between personal and party-political brand; Underdeveloped frameworks for evaluating personal political identity	Highlights tension between personal authenticity and political affiliation
7	Keshtidar et al.	Lack of understanding of branding elements; Weakness in branding knowledge despite elite athletic status; Limited exposure to personal brand construction	Highlights gap between performance expertise and branding competence
8	Jacobson, J.	Navigating workplace uncertainty, branding for unpredictable audiences, maintaining employability	Emphasis on "always-on-the-job-market" mindset to appeal to "the future audience"

No	Author(s)	Career Challenges Identified	Notes
9	Marin & Nilă	Difficulty aligning self-presentation with hiring expectations; recruiters expect more than marketers provide	Reveals a perception gap between recruiters and communication professionals regarding LinkedIn branding
10	Kucharska, W.	Difficulty choosing brand sites aligned with personal branding goals and identity creation	CBI and CsnBI diverge based on platform and purpose; requires identity-driven decisions
11	Wijaya, B.S. & Nasution, A.A.	Normalization of deceptive personal branding in social media environments	"Hypoesthesia" of communication corruption reduces critical media literacy and creates ethical ambiguity in professional self-representation
12	Brems et al.	Balancing factual vs. opinionated content; professional vs. personal identity; engagement vs. self-promotion	Journalists struggle with managing authenticity, professional norms, and audience engagement expectations on Twitter
13	Minor-Cooley & Parks-Yancy	(1) Difficulty standing out in competitive job markets; (2) Misalignment between job seekers' personal brands and employer expectations; (3) Lack of clear strategies in presenting authentic self online; (4) Branding fatigue due to social media overload	Highlights generational gap and employer uncertainty in evaluating branding cues from applicants
14	Philbrick & Cleveland	(1) Difficulty defining one's brand identity; (2) Lack of clarity on existing brand perception; (3) Challenges in aligning digital and physical identity consistently	Emphasizes need for structured introspection and message alignment to manage professional reputation
15	Zhao, X.	(1) Difficulty articulating professional identity online; (2) Limited awareness of strategic branding for employability;	Highlights gap in practical application of self-promotion and employability signaling in students

No	Author(s)	Career Challenges Identified	Notes
		(3) Unfamiliarity with platform affordances like LinkedIn	
16	Ellmer, Reichel, Naderer	(1) Lack of consistent global mobility & messaging across countries; (2) Limited personalization in EB narratives; (3) Underuse of social-emotional messaging in US/UK-based MNCs	German MNCs emphasized global mobility more explicitly than US/UK-based firms; messaging was contextually institutional
17	Gorbatorov et al.	(1) Kurangnya instrumen valid untuk mengukur personal brand equity dalam konteks organisasi; (2) Belum jelasnya hubungan antara PBE dengan hasil karier seperti employability dan performance	Penelitian ini bertujuan mengisi kesenjangan dalam pengukuran PBE berbasis organisasi, bukan sekadar pemasaran pribadi umum
18	Ferreira et al.	(1) Dissonance between expectations and actual social media branding performance; (2) Difficulty for users in assessing personal branding effectiveness from content	Calls for a user-subjective performance evaluation framework
19	Samanta	(1) Differences in relational strategy between early and mature family businesses; (2) Maintaining brand identity and personal ties amid business growth	Personal ties of owners are critical for early-stage sustainability
20	Hayward	(1) Cultural appropriation and myth reinvention; (2) Sustaining symbolic meaning across time/space; (3) Incoherent branding strategy	Avalon myth use reveals complex, sometimes arbitrary identity projection
21	Fujak et al.	(1) Pressure to alter self-presentation; (2) Balancing performance vs entertainment; (3) Navigating innovation effects	Athletes face brand-authenticity tension

No	Author(s)	Career Challenges Identified	Notes
22	Vernuccio et al.	(1) Under-researched NBVA branding; (2) Managerial uncertainty on humanizing AI assistants	Highlights gap in anthropomorphic branding strategies
23	Kapuściński et al.	(1) Limited understanding of Gen Z motivations; (2) Difficulty aligning employer brand values with Gen Z expectations	Calls for Gen Z-specific value-based branding
24	Fadhila et al.	(1) Lack of work experience; (2) Difficulty in online professional image; (3) Minimal LinkedIn optimization support	Highlights strategic identity construction by young graduates
25	Lumbantobing et al.	(1) Internalizing cultural values; (2) Low self-efficacy; (3) Underdeveloped personal branding competencies	Critical in institutional and uniformed professions
26	Recuero-Virto & Arróspide	(1) Misunderstanding tourists' culinary motives; (2) Poor culinary identity use in branding; (3) Post-pandemic perception risks	Culinary branding must adapt to changing tourist behavior
27	Szántó et al.	(1) No standard metric for personal branding; (2) Difficulty assessing brand equity individually; (3) Internal vs external value gaps	Conceptual and methodological gap in personal brand measurement

Challenge 1: Tension Between Self-Image and Employer Demands

Numerous investigations point to a persistent gap between how people view themselves and the image that recruiters, institutions, or social-media audiences expect them to project. Philbrick and Cleveland (2015) note that many individuals find it hard to present a unified sense of self when moving between online platforms and face-to-face environments. Minor-Cooley and Parks-Yancy (2020) report that applicants become exhausted by the pressure to curate their profiles constantly, leaving employers unsure of what constitutes genuine authenticity. Likewise, Marin and Nilă (2021) find that

communication specialists often wrestle with the challenge of making their LinkedIn profiles satisfying to both job-hirers and to their own idea of professional credibility. Together, these studies imply that personal branding demands a precarious dance between being true to oneself and meeting external expectations, a dance that proves difficult for many.

Challenge 2: Insufficient Strategic Digital Literacy for Personal Branding

Across multiple studies, researchers are finding that many people are not fully equipped to build a strong personal brand in today's digital landscape. Torres-Valdés, Santa-Soriano, and Lorenzo-Álvarez (2018) report that while students can navigate social media and common software, they struggle to weave those skills into a coherent story that enhances their job prospects. Zhao (2019) and Fadhila, Sukmayadi, and Affandi (2023) echo this, pointing out that graduates often underutilise LinkedIn because they do not grasp how to turn the platform into an effective branding tool. Even in professional sports, Keshtidar et al. (2016) observe that top athletes remain unaware of fundamental branding concepts that could elevate their careers. Collectively, these findings highlight the urgent need for targeted educational programmes that teach learners how to craft and manage a purposeful online identity.

Challenge 3: Balancing Personal Authenticity with Institutional Expectations

Crafting a personal brand often forces individuals to navigate the uneasy space between staying true to themselves and conforming to wider institutional rules or social norms. Armannsdottir, Carnell, and Pich (2021) show that politicians serving in coalition governments routinely wrestle with this tension; to keep their parties united, they sometimes downplay aspects of their personal identity and, in the process, trade predictability for compromise. A similar dynamic arises in the world of sport. Fajak, Ewing, Newton, and Altschwager (2020) report that elite athletes are continuously urged to thrill fans with bold or flashy performances while still being seen as believable role models; the tug-of-war can dim the enjoyment they once found in competition. Jacobson (2016) adds that social-media managers live in almost constant public glare, curating their own personas for "future audiences" they cannot meet in person, which often splinters their sense of self and produces a low hum of branding anxiety. Across these fields, the evidence suggests that personal branding stretches far beyond tactics; it becomes an act of emotional labour,

requiring practitioners to broker uneasy compromises between what they genuinely believe and what others expect them to project.

A fourth difficulty concerns the scarcity of reliable tools for gauging how well personal brands are performing. Gorbatorov, Khapova, and Lysova (2022) point out that the common frameworks used to calculate personal brand equity (PBE) have not been rigorously tested in real-world workplace settings. Szántó, Papp-Váry, and Radácsi (2024) also draw attention to the gap between how insiders and outsiders perceive the same brand value, along with the lack of any meaningful benchmarks that apply at the individual level. Ferreira, Robertson, and Reyneke (2020) add that the indicators we do have do not capture the lived experiences of users who build their brands on social platforms. Taken together, these contributions highlight the pressing need for measurement tools that are both context-sensitive and solidly backed by data, so that personal branding can be evaluated fairly no matter the sector involved.

Incongruity between a brand's strategic vision and the cultural frameworks of its audience can severely undermine effectiveness. Weedon (2016) recounts that Elinor Glyn's novels were retouched for various national markets, often muting the text's original feminist edge so that it better echoed local ideologies. Lumbantobing, Yohana, and Saptono (2022) point out that many police branding campaigns overlook community-specific values as well as citizens' sense of self-efficacy, which hampers their attempts to cultivate positive public images. Recuero-Virto and Arróspide (2023) highlight similar shortcomings in recent gastronomic promotions for the Basque country, noting that campaigns ignore the motivations of post-pandemic tourists. Hayward (2019) extends the critique to place branding that invokes loose representations of regional myths such as Avalon, calling the approach incoherent. Collectively these studies express a clear warning: when branding ignores local meanings, it risks losing both legitimacy and persuasive power.

Challenge 4: Early-Career and Generational Gaps in Branding

Professionals at the start of their careers, particularly those from younger generations, frequently encounter substantial difficulties when attempting to establish a credible personal brand. Minor-Cooley and Parks-Yancy (2020) argue that recent graduates often struggle to communicate their unique value in online settings, a challenge intensified

when their self-presentation does not match the expectations set by prospective employers. Torres-Valdés et al. (2018) point out that, although students now have access to an array of digital platforms, they are typically ill-equipped to convert those tools into concrete job offers, largely because they lack both a theoretical framework and a methodical approach. Kapuściński, Zhang, and Wang (2023) add that many employer branding campaigns fall short of resonating with Generation Z, revealing a disconnect between corporate messaging and the values that drive this cohort. Taken together, these observations underline an urgent need for focused mentorship, updates to educational curricula, and customized branding strategies that genuinely support early-career professionals in today's multifaceted job market.

Challenge 5: Institutional Constraints in Employer and Media Branding

Across multiple industries, powerful institutional forces often place structural limits on branding efforts, making it difficult for organizations to craft personalized, flexible messages. Ellmer, Reichel, and Naderer (2021) point out that many multinational corporations struggle to deliver a coherent employer branding (EB) strategy, particularly around global mobility issues, which leads to inconsistent and diluted stories that confuse potential recruits. Similarly, Brems and colleagues (2017) highlight the predicament faced by journalists, especially freelancers, who try to marry their personal voice with the rigid professional standards and editorial requirements that govern platforms like Twitter, producing a hybrid form of branding that feels neither wholly personal nor fully corporate. Olausson (2018) extends this critique by noting the expanding overlap between traditional journalism and influencer culture, further muddying the waters and making it harder for reporters to stake a clear professional identity online. Together, these studies reveal a branding environment in which organizational cultures frequently resist individual personalization, leaving employees and creators caught in the middle, expected to meet institutional objectives while simultaneously cultivating their own unique public presence.

Effectiveness of PDP & Personal Branding

After studying the previous researches, some studies showed that PDP and Personal Branding effective, some said differently. Specifically, those researches are summarised like in Table3.

Table 3 Effectiveness of PDP & Personal Branding

No	Author(s)	Intervention	Strategic Func	Outcome Effectiveness	Results	Notes
1	Weedon	(1) Constructi authorial per (2) Creation platform	Legacy-based literary branding	Sustained per identity mediums	Historical infl a traceable in m media	Effective in hist context; generalizable
2	Torres-Valdés e	(1) E-innov curriculum redesign; (2) branding train	Higher educ PDP developm clarity	Enhanced bra clarity employability	Improvements student confic and self-image	Effective; supp by longitu outcomes
3	Dai et al.	(1) Ma architectural branding cues Tourist perce surveys	City branding space experience	Perception Amsterdam sh by spatial identi	Tourists assoc built environ with brand	Moderately effe empirical but li scope
4	Olausson	(1) Self-prom on Twitter journalists	Celebrity bra in journalism	Increased per engagement visibility	Social media m aligned branding intent	Effective in visi lacks longitu proof
5	Sousa & Rodrig	(1) Tourist s on destin branding	s Branding on behavior	ir Revisit to influenced by perception	inte Regression: branding corre with return i (p<0.05)	Statistically effe
6	Armannsdottir	(1) Interviews political figure	Political branding	per Increased perceived authenticity	trust Politicians storytelling to identity	Effective subjective perception; cor bound
7	Keshtidar et al.	(1) Survey athlete bra	Self-branding sports	Brand linked	perce 83% of rated brandin	Perceived effect elite sports dom

No	Author(s)	Intervention	Strategic Func	Outcome Effectiveness	Results	Notes
		awareness		performance	essential	
				motivation		
8	Jacobson	(1) Interviews social managers	Branding r algorithmic conditions	Adjusted to expectations	bra Managers aud output algorithm feedl	tai Effective based practitioner perspective
9	Marin & Nilă	(1) Survey LinkedIn usage	Online professional branding	Branding profile credibility	impr 79% reported h recruiter intere	Effective based on reported outcon
10	Kucharska	(1) Digital identity survey	Branding self-presentat	Clarity of predicted engagement rat	Regression: $\beta =$ (p < 0.01)	Statistically effec
11	Wijaya & Nasut	(1) study	Ethics in branding	Branding reduced trust	m Inauthenticity I user skepticism	Not effective branding is exce
12	Brems et al.	(1) Twitter interviews	Personal institutional branding	Freelancers more personal brandi	Employment assoc affected outcome	Effective tone freelancers; cor sensitive
13	Minor-Cooley Parks-Yancy	(1) Interviews jobseekers employers	Branding search	Branding interview confidence	impr Employers pref clear, auth branding	Effective in career transition
14	Philbrick Cleveland	(1) Framewor library branding	Identity and c development	Provides mode personal building	Conceptual framework; no yet	Potentially effe not yet tested
15	Zhao	(1) Self-bra via training	PDP Lin development	Improved presentation digital presence	Students sh increased bra report; statistical test	Effective by
16	Ellmer et al.	(1) Text employer FB p	mini Branding th content tone	Emotional increased engagement	Correlation with intera metrics	Effective in c media context
17	Gorbatorov et a	(1) PBE	Measuring	Four dimen	CFA = 0.91; $\alpha >$	Effective as

No	Author(s)	Intervention	Strategic Func	Outcome Effectiveness	Results	Notes
		development testing	personal equity	l confirmed statistically		measurement to
18	Ferreira et al.	(1) Propositional branding taxon	Conceptual of media brand	n Clarified user gaps	con expect dissonance proposed	Not empir n tested; theor only
19	Samanta	(1) Branding for trust among SI	Emotional branding in B2	Trust-based relationships enhanced loyalty	Owners emphasize brand tone emotion	Effective for branding
20	Hayward	(1) Analysis of cultural practices	Place-based branding through language	Postcolonial identity tied to cultural identity	n Increase in cu linked to origin	Effective for cu branding
21	Fujak et al.	(1) Interviews with elite athletes	Branding in profes sport	pre Branding stress and fatigue	ca Players m branding emotional burd	vi Ineffective for being; ca advised
22	Vernuccio et al.	(1) Voice tone assistants	Trust-building through branding	Calm increased user by 30%	Experimental supported impa	Effective controlled environment
23	Kapuściński et al.	(1) Gen expectations branding	Employer branding effectiveness	Value critical to appeal	align Authenticity preferred slogans	Effective for G recruitment
24	Fadhila et al.	(1) LinkedIn youth	Career expre al via self-brandi	Youth values more cle	articu Interviews enhanced clarity	sh Effective ide qualitative indic
25	Lumbantobing et al.	(1) Survey branding in force	Public branding	se Cultural predicted strength	align SEM $\beta > 0.6$; $t > 0.001$	Statistically effective
26	Recuero-Virto Arróspide	(1) Reg culinary brand	Gastronomy identity brand	Food regional distinctiveness	linked Experts symbolic associ	confi Effective in cu communication
27	Szántó et al.	(1) Brand	e Cross-sector	Structure confi	EFA and	Effective a

No	Author(s)	Intervention	Strategic Func	Outcome Effectiveness	Results	Notes
		model testing	framework	across sectors	supported valid	diverse contexts

Effective

Several studies demonstrate that PDP and personal branding interventions have had a meaningful impact on participants' career clarity, employability, and professional visibility. Torres-Valdés et al. showed that integrating self-branding into an e-innovation curriculum led to improved student confidence and narrative coherence in job searches. Sousa & Rodrigues and Vernuccio et al. found that branding strategies significantly influenced behavioral outcomes, such as tourism revisits or user trust in AI interfaces, based on measurable indicators. Similarly, Gorbatorov et al. developed a personal brand equity scale with strong statistical validity (CFA = 0.91; $\alpha > 0.85$), while Lumbantobing et al. confirmed that cultural alignment strengthens branding in uniformed professions ($\beta > 0.6$; $p < 0.001$). Across different sectors, from higher education (Zhao, Fadhila et al.) to journalism (Brems et al., Jacobson) and SMEs (Samanta), branding interventions were found to be effective when implemented strategically and authentically.

Ineffective

Conversely, a few studies highlighted that personal branding can be ineffective or even counterproductive under certain conditions. Wijaya & Nasution reported that excessive or inauthentic branding strategies decreased trust among audiences, particularly in social media environments prone to overbranding and misinformation. Fujak et al. revealed that professional athletes often experience emotional fatigue due to branding pressure, describing it as a burden that detracts from performance and well-being. These findings suggest that while personal branding is widely promoted, it can become a source of psychological strain and ethical ambiguity when poorly managed. In these cases, the effectiveness of branding diminishes as individuals struggle with internal dissonance or audience skepticism.

Mixed, Contextual, or Theoretically Promising

Some studies offered mixed results or indicated effectiveness only within specific contexts. Weedon illustrated the historical success of Elinor Glyn's branding through books and media, though its applicability today remains uncertain due to cultural shifts. Dai et al. and Olausson provided evidence of branding's impact on city identity or journalism visibility, but noted that these effects were limited in scope or lacked long-term evaluation. Philbrick & Cleveland and Ferreira et al. proposed conceptual models and frameworks for branding within libraries and media environments, but did not include empirical testing to support their efficacy. These interventions are promising in theory and contextually valid, yet require further empirical validation before broad generalization. Their contributions remain valuable for expanding the conceptual foundations of personal branding and career development planning.

DISCUSSION

In this study it is found that one prominent difficulty is the pressure to harmonise personal image with employer demands. Job seekers routinely wrestle with the challenge of crafting a professional persona that feels both authentic and acceptable to recruiters, hiring panels, or virtual audiences (Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015; Minor-Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2020). When these expectations do not mesh, branding fatigue quickly sets in, especially on social media and other online arenas where polished profiles frequently eclipse genuine self-expression. A related problem is that many young users, although highly adept at using digital tools, struggle to apply that fluency toward deliberate personal-branding efforts (Torres-Valdés et al., 2018; Zhao, 2019; Fadhila et al., 2023). This disconnect restricts their employability and underscores growing calls for formal education to incorporate systematic narrative-building exercises.

The challenge of balancing authenticity against the backdrop of institutional policy offers yet another hurdle. Professionals, athletes, or even public representatives often find themselves toning down personal beliefs to fit the stricter norms of the organisations they serve (Armannsdottir et al., 2021; Fujak et al., 2020). Such compromises can breed

emotional tension and render a unified long-term brand harder to sustain. Finally, branding efforts are frequently stymied by a lack of reliable measurement tools. Existing instruments for gauging one's personal brand value remain in their infancy, providing insufficient feedback for individuals and offering organisations little beyond impressionistic evaluations (Gorbatorov et al., 2022; Szántó et al., 2024). In the absence of concrete metrics, assessing the success of branding initiatives proves elusive and improvements scattershot at best.

Cultural misalignment remains a recurring challenge for contemporary branding initiatives. When a brand's messaging overlooks or directly contradicts the prevailing values and beliefs of a local audience, the result can be a noticeable disconnect or, at worst, outright rejection of the brand (Weedon, 2016; Hayward, 2019; Lumbantobing et al., 2022). For a brand to earn credibility and emotional resonance, it must exhibit an acute awareness of its cultural surroundings. Generational and experience-based divides add another layer of difficulty to the branding landscape. Many early-career professionals report feeling uncertain about how to craft a compelling personal brand because they have not yet developed the necessary skills or confidence (Kapuściński et al., 2023; Minor-Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2020). This scenario underscores the value of mentorship programmes and specialised workshops that provide guidance at precisely the moment it is needed.

Institutional constraints, finally, further hem in the ability of individuals to shape their own narratives. Norms and policies within media companies, academic departments, and corporate environments frequently privilege standardised messaging over personal storytelling, leaving little room for authentic voice (Ellmer et al., 2021; Olausson, 2018). Overcoming this structural rigidity requires organisations to experiment with more flexible and tailored branding frameworks that empower employees and scholars alike.

Next, Numerous investigations support the efficacy of personal branding and professional development plan (PDP) initiatives, yet their positive outcomes hinge on three interrelated factors: sincerity, situational fit, and deliberate orchestration. Evidence gathered by Torres-Valdés et al. (2018), Gorbatorov et al. (2022) and Lumbantobing et al. (2022) illustrates that bespoke programs, whether crafted within learning modules, tuned to specific cultural norms, or scaffolded by quantifiable benchmarks, typically enhance job-readiness, conceptual transparency, and participant confidence. The anticipated benefits,

however, evaporate when the branding effort is perceived as disingenuous or when it exacts a psychological toll. Research led by Wijaya and Nasution (2021) along with Fujak et al. (2020) cautions that relentless pressure to project an idealized self can provoke exhaustion, blur ethical lines, and ultimately undermine audience credibility, especially in environments saturated with competing media messages.

In addition, the literature repeatedly notes that the effects of branding are neither uniform nor universally applicable, often remaining confined to specific fields or theoretical models. Studies by Weedon (2016), Philbrick and Cleveland (2015), and Olausson (2018) reveal that past triumphs, clear frameworks, or intermittent visibility do not guarantee sustainable success across different sectors or over extended periods. These conclusions suggest that, while personal branding can yield significant advantages, its real-world viability is contingent upon contextual nuances, the degree of user control, and the preparedness of supporting institutions.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this review confirms that personal branding and professional development planning (PDP) have great potential to strengthen career opportunities, increase professional visibility, and build an authentic identity. However, their effectiveness is highly influenced by how well these practices align with local values, are supported by responsive institutional systems, and are built on the foundation of individual authenticity. Structured and evaluation-based interventions have proven to provide clearer development direction and maintain participant motivation. Conversely, approaches that overly emphasize image over substance can have negative psychological and social impacts. Challenges such as cultural misalignment, inflexible policies, and non-representative performance indicators are major obstacles hindering the optimization of personal branding. Therefore, success in professional development cannot be solely entrusted to individuals but requires systemic reform encompassing organizational cultural renewal, institutional policy adjustments, and strengthened cross-cultural support. To address future challenges, an authentic branding approach that is culturally sensitive and psychologically safe must be integrated within an adaptive and sustainable structural framework.

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