

Personal Branding: From the Marketing Concept to the Professional Dimension

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Abstract:

This study explores personal branding as a modern concept gaining prominence in communication and career management. It clarifies the theoretical foundations and traces its evolution from a marketing tool to a comprehensive professional approach linking identity, competence, and communication. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the study reviews classical and contemporary literature, comparing related concepts such as professional identity and self-marketing. Findings reveal that personal branding now serves as a strategic tool to manage professional identity by helping individuals create a coherent identity based on values, uniqueness, and reputation. The digital transformation emphasizes digital trust and authenticity as critical to personal branding's value in virtual spaces. Success depends on the alignment between one's internal identity and others' perceptions. The study concludes that personal branding is no longer optional but essential for professional growth. Investing in its development builds symbolic capital, enabling individuals to achieve success and distinction in a competitive, dynamic work environment. This underscores personal branding's role as a vital career management strategy.

Keywords: Personal branding; professional identity; self-marketing; reputation; authenticity; digital trust.

JEL Classification: M370 ; M310 ; L25

Introduction

Personal branding has become one of the most prominent concepts in modern literature on professional development and managerial marketing. In light of the transformations in the labor market and the growing importance of digital image and professional reputation, individual success is no longer measured solely by the amount of knowledge one possesses, but by how others perceive the individual as a source of trust and competence. Building a personal brand today represents a strategic tool that enables individuals to consciously shape their professional image, rather than having it constructed automatically through others' perceptions.

This concept first appeared with (Peters, 1997, p. 83) in his article "The Brand Called You", which laid the foundation for the idea that "every person is a brand in their own right," and urged individuals to adopt a corporate mindset in managing the self. The concept later evolved with (Montoya, 2002), who emphasized effective communication as a mechanism for shaping the mental image among audiences, while (Rampersad, 2009, p. 72) added the ethical and authentic dimension to personal branding, considering that "an authentic brand comes from within, not from external appearances". In more recent approaches, (Cybellium, 2024, p. 43) examined personal branding in the context of the digital economy, showing that it has become a process of building digital trust through authentic communication and consistent behavior .

From this standpoint, the present article seeks to study the conceptual evolution of personal branding from a critical scientific perspective, linking its theoretical development with its professional extensions.

Research Problem

The central problem of this article is posed in the following question: How did the concept of personal branding evolve from its marketing dimension, associated with self-promotion, to its professional dimension, based on building trust, authenticity, and professional identity?

Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis assumes that personal branding is not merely a self-promotional process, but rather a strategic construction of professional reputation and value-based identity. It requires self-awareness of one's value and authentic communicative behavior that reflects competence and consistency.

Research Objectives

The research aims to:

- Analyze the conceptual evolution of personal branding from marketing to professional management.
- Review the most prominent academic definitions of the concept in classical and modern literature.
- Derive a comprehensive synthetic definition that reflects the contemporary dimensions of personal branding.
- Clarify the essential differences between personal branding and related concepts such as self-marketing and professional identity.
- Highlight the ethical and digital dimensions in building modern personal branding.

Research Significance

The significance of this article stems from:

- The novelty of the topic in Arab studies, compared to the abundance of foreign literature.
- The need for a deeper understanding of the concept beyond superficial marketing applications.
- Providing a modern theoretical framework that can serve as a reference for future research on professional identity and digital reputation management.
- Its role in linking the value-based and communicative dimensions in constructing an individual's professional image.

Research Methodology

The article relied on the descriptive-analytical method, through:

- Reviewing classical and contemporary theoretical literature on personal branding.
- Analyzing and comparing definitions to extract their essential elements.
- Integrating the results within a synthetic model based on conceptual and critical analysis.

1- The Conceptual Framework of Personal Branding

This section constitutes the theoretical framework that prepares for a precise scientific understanding of personal branding in terms of its historical development and semantic and cognitive dimensions. By revisiting classical and contemporary literature, it becomes clear that this concept did not emerge all at once, but rather developed gradually as a result of the interaction between marketing, management, and organizational behavior. It transformed from a mere idea of “self-marketing” into an intellectual system aimed at building a comprehensive professional identity and managing personal reputation in changing professional and digital contexts.

This section seeks to trace the evolution of the concept from its emergence with Tom Peters (1997), through the approaches deepened by Montoya (2002) and Rampersad (2009), to the modern digital formulations presented by Labrecque et al. (2011) and Cybellium (2024). It also includes a comparative presentation of the most important classical and modern academic definitions, along with a synthetic analysis highlighting the shift from the marketing dimension to the professional value-based dimension, with the aim of formulating a comprehensive definition that encompasses these theoretical approaches.

1-1- The Emergence and Historical Development of the Concept

The concept of personal branding emerged in the 1990s, a period characterized by increasing competition in the labor market and a shift of focus from the institution to the individual as an economic actor possessing his or her own professional capital. Tom Peters (1997) is considered the first to clearly articulate the concept in his famous article “The Brand Called You”, published in *Fast Company* magazine, where he urged every person to treat themselves as a brand that should be developed and marketed with the same seriousness as commercial companies.

(Peters, 1997, p. 83) argued that “personal branding is the way individuals manage their image and reputation just as companies manage their brand names,” meaning that it is an individual marketing process based on self-awareness and distinction.

With the dawn of the new millennium, (Montoya, 2002, p. 52) developed the concept in his book *The Personal Branding Phenomenon*, considering that “personal branding is not what you say about yourself, but what others say about you when you are not present.” In this context, the concept shifted from a promotional character to social interaction, where the reputation formed in the minds of others became the essence of personal branding. (Rampersad, 2009, p. 72), in his book *Authentic Personal Branding*, added a new dimension represented by authenticity, affirming that the construction of a genuine personal brand cannot be achieved without consistency between personal values and professional behavior, and that authenticity is what grants the brand sustainability and credibility. Thus, the concept of personal branding became closer to an integrated system of values and communication, transcending promotion to the ethical and sustainable management of professional identity.

With the digital transformation of the last decade, the concept evolved once again to adapt to the electronic environment. (Labrecque et al., 2011, p. 39) argue that personal branding has become “a strategic

process for building reputation and managing impressions through digital media,” meaning that it shifted from the real-world dimension to the electronic space, expressing a professional digital identity that reflects both competence and credibility. In the most recent approach, (Cybellium, 2024, p. 43) presented a comprehensive vision of the concept in his book *Understanding Personal Branding: A Comprehensive Guide to Learn Personal Branding*, affirming that modern personal branding represents a deliberate construction of digital trust through authentic communication and consistent professional behavior .

1-2- Theoretical Classical and Contemporary Definitions of Personal Branding

Personal branding is one of the concepts that has gradually developed in contemporary managerial and marketing thought, as attention shifted from the institution to the individual, and from product marketing to competence marketing.

A number of scholars contributed to shaping this concept across successive stages, beginning with an initial marketing approach and culminating in a modern digital perspective.

1-3 Classical Theoretical Definitions

(Peters, 1997, p. 83) was the first to present the concept of personal branding in a clear marketing approach, considering it the process through which individuals manage their professional image and reputation using the same mechanisms by which corporate brands are managed. He argued that every person is like “a company in their own right” whose values and skills must be marketed intelligently and clearly in the labor market. From Peters’ perspective, personal branding is based on self-awareness, performance distinction, and the management of impressions left in the minds of others.

(Montoya, 2002, p. 52) considered personal branding to be a reflection of the impression formed by others about the individual through his or her behavior, communications, and daily interactions. He argued that a brand is not built by what the individual says about themselves, but by what others perceive in them. This view highlights the importance of professional relationships and social interaction in building personal branding, as it becomes a direct result of experience, behavior, and consistency between words and actions.

(McNally & Karl D, 2002, p. 47) defined personal branding as the overall impression formed by others, describing the complete experience of interacting with the individual. It is both a cognitive and emotional experience, through which the individual’s image and professional values are reflected. This definition emphasizes that personal branding is not

merely a form of promotion, but an experiential and affective process that expresses the human depth of professional relationships.

(Rampersad, 2009, p. 72) added an ethical and human dimension to the concept by defining authentic personal branding as “the harmony between the individual’s true personality and the image projected to others.” He argued that authenticity represents the solid foundation of any successful brand, as professional trust cannot be built without alignment between internal values and external behavior. In his view, authenticity is not an optional complement but a fundamental condition for sustaining credibility. (Shepherd, 2005, p. 594) considered personal branding to be a combination of performance, image, and visibility, used to build an individual’s professional reputation within the organizational community. He emphasized that personal branding is not achieved through image alone, but through actual achievement and professional productivity, which grant the individual legitimacy and distinction in the workplace.

In the same context, Labrecque, (Labrecque et al., 2011, p. 39) added a digital dimension to the concept at the onset of the technological revolution, considering personal branding a strategic process through which individuals express their unique professional value and manage it across both digital and non-digital media. This definition points to the inclusion of digital reputation management, or professional electronic identity (E-reputation), which reflects the individual’s presence and credibility in the digital sphere.

Through these classical definitions, it becomes clear that the concept gradually shifted from its marketing dimension toward a more human and interactive dimension, then toward an ethical and value-based dimension, and finally toward a digital and strategic dimension. Each stage added a new level of awareness to the concept: from “self-promotion” to “image management,” and then to “authentic expression of professional identity.”

1-4 Contemporary Definitions

With the evolution of professional practices and the growing importance of digital presence, modern approaches have reformulated the concept of personal branding in light of digital interaction and the construction of electronic trust. Among the most notable contributions is that of Cybellium (2024) in his book *Understanding Personal Branding: A Comprehensive Guide to Learn Personal Branding*.

(Cybellium, 2024, p. 14) defines personal branding as a deliberate process aimed at creating and managing the impression others hold about an individual’s professional identity and added value. It is a conscious and

strategic act by which a person directs their professional image in a way that reflects their true identity.

(Cybellium, 2024, p. 21) adds that personal branding is the strategic expression of professional self, of the values and principles represented by the individual, and of the ways in which their presence adds value to their professional and social environment. This definition shows that brand construction goes beyond external appearance to embody values and credibility through practical behavior.

(Cybellium, 2024, p. 43) further argues that personal branding in the digital economy no longer means mere visibility or fame, but has become the construction of digital trust through authentic communication, consistent behavior, and professional commitment. Reliability has become the symbolic capital that grants individuals their position in the digital labor market.

(Cybellium, 2024, p. 57) emphasizes that personal branding represents the convergence of three essential elements: reputation, authenticity, and communication. It is not a promotional façade, but an integrated system that combines internal values, external behavior, and communicative interaction, making it a true mirror of professional identity in both its human and digital dimensions.

Through these modern approaches, it is evident that the contemporary school has redirected the concept toward focusing on trust, credibility, and consistency rather than relying solely on image or visibility. The goal of building personal branding has become achieving balance between authenticity, communication, and accomplishment—bringing together what the individual “believes in,” what they “show to others,” and what they “actually achieve.”

1-5 Synthetic Analysis of Definitions

By reviewing both classical and contemporary definitions of personal branding, it becomes evident that this concept has never been static or one-dimensional. Rather, it has undergone profound development at both the theoretical and practical levels, leading to the crystallization of three fundamental approaches that represent the major stages in the evolution of the idea.

In the classical stage, as seen in (Peters, 1997, p. 83) and (Montoya, 2002, p. 52) personal branding emerged within a purely marketing framework. It focused on managing image and impressions among others, with the aim of distinguishing and promoting the self within a competitive professional environment. The central idea was that the individual resembles a product requiring careful promotional management to highlight strengths and render their image attractive in the professional marketplace.

This approach contributed to shifting marketing thought from the institution to the individual, yet it remained limited because it overlooked the ethical and value-based dimension.

The ethical-human stage, represented by (McNally & Karl D, 2002, p. 47) and (Rampersad, 2009, p. 72) restored the internal dimension of the concept, asserting that brand construction cannot be achieved without consistency between personal values and outward behavior. Rampersad emphasized that authenticity and internal coherence are the cornerstone of a strong brand, since credibility is not earned through persuasive discourse but through alignment between words and actions. Thus, the concept shifted from being merely a promotional tool to becoming a process of professional and ethical self-growth, rooted in the individual's true identity rather than their outward image.

The contemporary digital stage, crystallized in the works of (Labrecque et al., 2011, p. 39) and (Cybellium, 2024), confirmed that personal branding is no longer confined to the real-world environment. It now extends into the virtual sphere, where it is built and managed through digital platforms and professional networking sites. In this context, success is no longer tied to visibility alone, but to the individual's ability to manage digital trust and maintain consistent, credible professional behavior before a broad and shifting audience. (Cybellium, 2024, p. 43) stressed that modern personal branding is not merely visual presence, but a system of trust constructed through authentic communication, ethical commitment, and sustained professionalism.

This evolution—from the marketing approach to the ethical-human approach, and finally to the digital approach—highlights the transformation of personal branding from a promotional tool into a comprehensive system for managing professional reputation and digital identity. Today, the concept is concerned with showcasing the individual's true professional value within a network of professional and social relationships, relying on three essential pillars:

- **Authenticity:** the genuine expression of values and professional identity.
- **Consistency:** the continuity between discourse and behavior over time.
- **Trust:** the ultimate outcome, representing the symbolic capital of personal branding.

Based on this analysis, a comprehensive synthetic definition of personal branding can be formulated as follows: Personal branding is a

conscious strategic process aimed at building professional and digital trust through authentic and consistent communication that expresses the individual's true values and highlights their distinctive contribution within their professional and social environment.

This definition reflects the integration of the three schools into a unified vision that combines the marketing, ethical, and digital dimensions, linking self-identity with perceived reputation. Thus, the success of personal branding is no longer measured by visibility or follower counts, but by the individual's ability to achieve coherence between who they are in their professional reality, how they are perceived by others, and how they are reflected in the digital world.

2- The Professional and Digital Approach to Personal Branding

The professional and digital approach to personal branding represents a natural extension of the conceptual evolution of the term. The brand is no longer viewed merely as a reflection of image or individual ego, but rather as professional and strategic capital that contributes to guiding an individual's career path and enhancing their position within organizational and social environments—both in tangible reality and across the digital sphere.

2-1 Personal Branding and Human Capital

The concept of human capital refers to the sum of knowledge, experience, and skills possessed by an individual, enabling them to achieve professional distinction. (Rampersad, 2009, p. 74) emphasized that personal branding is not built in a vacuum; it is nourished by human capital, which forms the foundation of its value and the source of its sustainability. The higher the individual's level of competence, the greater the credibility and impact of their brand.

(Gorbatov & Svetlana N, 2018, p. 2242) argue that personal branding today serves as a means of managing human capital and directing it effectively within the professional market, by transforming individual capabilities into socially recognized and perceived value. This makes personal branding a strategic tool for career development and the planning of professional identity.

In this context, personal branding is not self-promotion, but a conscious translation of distinction and competence into a professional identity capable of communication and persuasion. (Shepherd, 2005, p. 595) affirms that the brand reflects actual professional performance, combining tangible action with perceived impression. It thus embodies the convergence of ability with image, and achievement with perception, granting the individual genuine professional legitimacy.

2-2 Personal Branding and Social Capital

Human capital is complemented by social capital, which refers to the network of professional and social relationships built by the individual. (McNally & Karl D, 2002, p. 52) argue that a strong brand is not based solely on competence, but on the trust that arises from continuous interaction with others. Every professional relationship added to an individual's network represents a deposit of trust that nourishes their reputation and expands their sphere of influence.

(Parmentier et al., 2013, pp. 373–387) highlight that personal branding in organizational contexts is constructed within existing social relationships, not in isolation from them. It reflects the individual's position within their professional network and their ability to transform relationships into symbolic capital that grants recognition and esteem.

In the digital age, as (Kucharska, 2020, pp. 819-824) notes, professional relationships are no longer confined to real-world interaction but extend to professional social networks such as LinkedIn, which have become arenas for building digital personal brands. Here, digital trust emerges as a decisive factor in shaping professional reputation within an open space where identities and discourses intersect.

2-3 Personal Branding as a Tool for Career Management

Modern literature underscores that personal branding has become an effective tool for planning and managing career paths, helping individuals identify their strategic position in the market and achieve competitive distinction. (Peters, 1997, p. 84) noted from the outset that professional success requires conscious management of one's image and identity, just as corporate brands are managed.

(Khedher, 2014) expanded this perspective by affirming that personal branding constitutes a strategy of employability and professional positioning, as it enables individuals to translate their skills into marketable value within a changing work environment. (Gorbatov & Svetlana N, 2018) further argue that personal branding helps individuals align their career goals with market expectations, making it a tool for both career guidance and self-development.

Managing personal branding is not a communicative luxury but has become a prerequisite for sustainable success in the globalized digital labor market, where professional value is determined by image, reputation, and trust (Schawbel, 2015).

2-4 The Digital Dimension of Personal Branding

Technological transformations have redefined the concept of professional reputation, making the management of digital presence as essential as actual competence. (Labrecque et al., 2011, p. 39) emphasized that digital personal branding represents a system for managing identity through electronic media, where digital publications and interactions contribute to shaping professional image.

(Kucharska, 2020, p. 823) pointed out that digital trust has become the primary determinant of the value of personal branding in virtual environments. Authenticity and consistency between real-world and digital behavior define the extent of an individual's reliability and standing within their professional network.

(Cybellium, 2024, p. 43) argues that personal branding in the digital economy has become symbolic capital, measured by the degree of harmony between internal values, outward behavior, and communicative interaction. Thus, the brand has transformed into a professional digital identity that combines competence, reputation, and trust, granting its owner visible and credible standing in the open digital space.

3- Comparative and Theoretical Discussion

The comparison between personal branding and related concepts such as self-marketing and professional identity reveals significant conceptual overlap in the literature. Yet this overlap does not eliminate the essential distinctions that differentiate each concept. These distinctions have enriched the theoretical framework of personal branding and clarified its professional applications.

3-1 Personal Branding and Self-Marketing

(Peters, 1997, p. 84) noted that personal branding initially emerged as an extension of self-marketing, focusing on the idea of "promoting the self" by showcasing competencies and achievements in an appealing manner. Later studies, however, demonstrated that personal branding goes beyond this promotional dimension. It is not merely a process of persuasion or skill marketing, but a system for building trust and credibility over the long term.

(Rampersad, 2009, p. 73) distinguished between the two concepts, stating that self-marketing emphasizes external image and social acceptance, whereas personal branding emphasizes internal consistency and value-based authenticity. Self-marketing seeks to satisfy the audience, while personal branding seeks to express the true self in a way that reflects competence and commitment.

(Cybellium, 2024, p. 57) further affirmed that self-marketing aims to influence others to convince them of an individual's value, while personal branding aims to create a lasting, consistent image that conveys trust and

respect. In other words, it shifts from a logic of persuasion to a logic of trust. Thus, self-marketing can be considered a component of personal branding, but it does not encompass it. Personal branding represents a broader, more sustainable, and strategic concept.

3-2 Personal Branding and Professional Identity

Professional identity is often confused with personal branding due to the similarity of their constituent elements. Identity expresses the individual's awareness of their professional self, values, and roles within their field, while personal branding represents the external face of this identity as perceived by others.

(McNally & Karl D, 2002, p. 49) argue that professional identity is an internal process beginning with self-awareness, whereas personal branding is an external process manifested in how the individual presents themselves to others. (Cybellium, 2024, p. 66) clarifies that professional identity answers the question "Who am I professionally?", while personal branding answers "How am I perceived professionally?"

From this perspective, personal branding is the communicative extension of professional identity—a behavioral and value-based translation of it in social and digital contexts. It has become essential today to achieve balance between identity and branding, as any gap between them leads to weakened credibility. An individual who projects an image inconsistent with their true values quickly loses the trust of others. (Rampersad, 2009, p. 75)underscores this point, affirming that consistency between "who we truly are" and "how we present ourselves" is the essence of authentic branding.

Thus, professional identity expresses the internal dimension, while personal branding embodies the external dimension. Professional success is achieved when the two are harmonized in complete alignment.

3-3 The Ethical Dimension in Building Personal Branding

Ethics constitute one of the central pillars in building personal branding, particularly in the digital era where professional reputation has become more fragile and closely tied to public behavior. (Rampersad, 2009, p. 76)argues that authentic branding cannot be built without a clear value foundation, since values serve as the compass of professional conduct. An individual who promotes themselves cleverly but without ethical commitment may achieve temporary fame, but will quickly lose trust.

(Cybellium, 2024, p. 43) emphasizes that professional success in the digital age depends on "digital trust," which results from the interaction between credibility and consistent behavior. Personal branding is not constructed through embellishment or exaggeration, but through

transparency, respect, and digital responsibility—reflecting the individual’s awareness of the impact of their image in the public sphere.

Thus, the ethical dimension is not a decorative complement but a structural element of personal branding. It guarantees the continuity of professional credibility and protects reputation in an open environment under constant scrutiny.

Conclusion

This study has shown that personal branding is no longer merely a promotional tool, but has become a comprehensive strategic system for managing professional identity. Through conceptual, professional, and comparative analysis, it was revealed that personal branding integrates competence, values, and communication, and that its success depends on harmony between the individual’s internal identity and the image perceived by others.

In the digital environment, personal branding has transformed into a professional digital identity built on trust and credibility, where an individual’s presence across digital platforms is a genuine extension of their real-world identity. Thus, personal branding today is not an intellectual luxury but a professional necessity, enabling individuals to secure their position in a competitive and shifting work environment, and to transform their values and competencies into symbolic capital and sustainable professional reputation.

Key Findings

- Personal branding has evolved from a promotional framework into a strategic system linking identity and professional reputation.
- Professional identity forms the internal structure of personal branding, while communicative image represents its external extension in both real and digital contexts.
- Trust—both real and digital—has become the primary determinant of the value and credibility of personal branding within professional networks.
- Ethical consistency and authenticity form the foundation of strength and distinction in building and sustaining personal branding.

- Personal branding has become a tool for managing and directing career paths in alignment with market demands and transformations in the digital work environment.
- The interaction between human, social, and symbolic capital constitutes the complete system that gives personal branding meaning and impact in professional contexts.
- The importance of personal branding is increasing in institutions that rely on competence and innovation, as it enables individuals to enhance their position and organizational image.

Recommendations and Future Perspectives

- Integrating the concept of personal branding into higher education and vocational training programs, enabling students to understand the importance of building a professional identity that is conscious and consistent with values and behavior.
- Encouraging organizations to develop internal strategies for managing employees' professional brands, given their impact on institutional reputation and leadership culture.
- Conducting quantitative and qualitative field studies on the impact of personal branding on employment opportunities, promotions, and professional integration, particularly in digital and creative sectors.
- Expanding research toward the relationship between personal branding and artificial intelligence, especially tools for managing self-image across intelligent digital platforms.
- Analyzing the cultural and social dimension of personal branding in Arab contexts, to understand how social values are reflected in the construction of professional brands.
- Finally, proposing a new integrative approach that combines communication studies, professional psychology, and human resource management, to frame personal branding as a multidisciplinary scientific field.

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