

**The Impact and Relevance of Personal Branding in the Current Modern
Context: Theory, Practice and Perceptions in Building an Authentic Social
Presence**

SUMMARY

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Introduction

The doctoral thesis titled "The Impact and Relevance of Personal Branding in the Modern Context: Theory, Practice, and Perceptions in Building an Authentic Social Presence" addresses a highly relevant topic in today's context, where personal and professional identity are increasingly influenced by online presence. The study lies at the intersection of communication sciences, sociology, psychology, and marketing, exploring how individuals, particularly emerging adults in Romania, build and manage their personal brands in the online environment.

The thesis is structured into two main parts: a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part consists of four chapters that detail the fundamental concepts of brand, public relations, personal branding, and the manifestation of personal branding in the public space as discourse.

The first chapter offers an overview of the evolution and introductory notions of the concepts of brand and public relations, highlighting their history and essential characteristics. The second chapter focuses exclusively on personal branding, analyzing its importance in various professional and social contexts, as well as the differences between personal branding and reputation. The third chapter explores how personal branding manifests in the public space as discourse, emphasizing the impact of social networks like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. The final chapter of the theoretical part discusses the perspectives, directions, and current trends in personal branding, including the role of emotions and authenticity in consolidating a strong social presence.

The empirical part of the thesis employs three research methods to analyze perceptions and strategies of personal branding: content analysis, interviews with specialists, and a sociological survey applied to emerging adults in Romania. These methods were chosen to provide a complex and detailed understanding of how personal branding influences identity, social perception, and professional opportunities. The content analysis focuses on posts from Instagram, identifying communication strategies and successful patterns in personal brand construction. Interviews with

specialists from fields such as education, communication, nutrition, and the corporate environment provide a multidimensional perspective on how personal branding is perceived and managed in various professional contexts. Interviews conducted with specialists in fields such as psychology, sociology, personal branding, and public relations offer a coherent scientific perspective on the impact and relevance of personal branding in the current modern context. The sociological survey, conducted on a sample of emerging adults, explores their perceptions of the concept of personal branding and its relevance in daily and professional life.

The research highlights the importance of a strategic and authentic approach in building and managing a personal brand. In a digitalized and interconnected world, personal branding is no longer a luxury but a necessity for those who want to maximize their visibility and professional impact. The thesis emphasizes that the success of a personal brand depends on the coherence and authenticity of the messages conveyed, as well as the ability to effectively manage the challenges posed by social pressure and public perception. Thus, the study contributes to the specialized literature by offering an integrated perspective on personal branding, both theoretically and empirically, and provides valuable recommendations for developing an authentic and influential online presence.

Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive analysis of how branding and public relations have developed and adapted to the contemporary needs of the market and society. The history of branding is presented from its ancient origins, when symbols and signs were used to differentiate products, to the complexities of modern branding, where visual identity, values, and promises play a central role in building a successful image. The concept of a brand is explored as being more than just a logo or label; it represents a set of perceptions, emotional associations, and values that differentiate a product, service, or individual in a competitive landscape.

The chapter examines the detailed process of building a brand, highlighting essential steps such as defining identity and values, market positioning, and coherent communication of brand messages. Branding is described as a dynamic process that requires a well-thought-out strategy tailored to the needs and expectations of the target audience. The chapter emphasizes the importance of authenticity, relevance, and consistency in all aspects of branding, from the design of visual identity to the experience offered to customers. In this context, it highlights how brands must

manage their reputation and respond to the challenges of a constantly evolving digital environment, where consumers play an active role in defining and interpreting brand image.

Public relations are analyzed as a crucial pillar in supporting and amplifying the brand image, playing the role of building and maintaining a solid connection between organizations and their various publics. The chapter highlights how public relations have evolved from simple communication activities and crisis management to a complex set of strategies designed to influence public perception and build trust. These are presented as essential not only for crisis management but also for creating a positive public image and improving relationships with stakeholders. The analysis underscores the diversity of tactics used in public relations, from media communication and press management to corporate social responsibility campaigns and public events, each aiming to strengthen the connection between the brand and its audience.

The chapter emphasizes that, in the current context, brands and public relations cannot function independently; they are interdependent and mutually reinforce each other in creating and maintaining a positive and authentic image. Public relations facilitate continuous and transparent communication with audiences, contributing to building a strong brand and managing perceptions strategically. This section lays the theoretical foundation for the subsequent understanding of personal branding and how branding and public relations principles can be applied at an individual level, providing an essential framework for the following chapters.

Chapter 2, titled "Personal Branding," provides a detailed analysis of the concept of personal branding and its relevance in a society dominated by digitalization and online communication. This chapter begins by defining personal branding as a deliberate manifestation of an individual's identity, combining personal values, skills, passions, and unique experiences to create a distinctive public image. This construction not only targets how the individual is perceived externally but also how the individual chooses to communicate essential elements through behavior, discourse, and online presence, thus becoming a strategic tool for personal promotion.

The chapter examines various techniques used for building and managing an effective personal brand, emphasizing the importance of a clear and coherent positioning strategy. Positioning plays a crucial role in highlighting strengths and differentiators, essential for establishing how the individual wishes to be perceived compared to other professionals or influencers in the same field. It also discusses the use of narrative archetypes inspired by Carl Jung's psychology, which provide

a framework for shaping identity and personal stories in a way that deeply resonates with the target audience. These archetypes, such as the Hero, the Sage, or the Explorer, are used to create a strong emotional connection and communicate the essence of the personal brand in an engaging and memorable way.

Another key aspect addressed in the chapter is the importance of authentic social presence, which involves consistent alignment between personal values and how these are communicated to the public. The chapter emphasizes that authenticity means not just being honest but embracing vulnerability and building a relationship based on trust with your audience. Presence on social media platforms is described as an opportunity to showcase personal competencies and values in a visible and accessible manner. This section also discusses the importance of consistent and relevant content, which not only attracts followers but also fosters loyalty within the community built around the personal brand.

The chapter also addresses the differences and interconnections between personal branding and reputation, highlighting that while both influence how an individual is perceived, they are built on distinct foundations. Personal branding is largely controlled and actively managed by the individual through strategic communication, whereas reputation is the result of accumulated perceptions from direct or indirect public experiences with that individual. The chapter argues that a strong personal brand can guide and influence reputation but cannot entirely control it, especially in the online environment where public feedback and comments play a significant role in shaping public opinion.

Therefore, Chapter 2 highlights the importance of developing an authentic and strategic personal brand, not just as a means of self-promotion but also as a way to influence social perceptions and open up new professional opportunities. In an era where every individual has the potential to become a brand, this section underscores the necessity of investing time and resources in building a coherent and compelling digital identity that reflects the true value of the person and resonates with the expectations of their audience.

Chapter 3, titled "The Manifestation of Personal Branding in the Public Space as Discourse," analyzes how personal branding is manifested and constructed through digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. These platforms are presented as essential tools for developing an authentic social presence, allowing individuals to communicate directly

and consistently with their audience. The chapter emphasizes that these media are not just communication channels but spaces where public identity is built and negotiated, making them fundamental for the development of a successful personal brand.

A central component of the chapter is the analysis of the importance of authenticity in public discourse. Authenticity is considered the cornerstone in building a sincere and lasting connection with the target audience. Unlike traditional marketing strategies that rely on persuasion and manipulation, personal branding emphasizes transparency and the communication of messages that genuinely reflect the individual's values and personality. This authenticity is crucial for creating a credible and sustainable personal brand, as the modern audience, constantly exposed to diverse information and messages, can discern between authentic and fabricated or exaggerated content.

The chapter also explores the role of public discourse in consolidating personal branding. Public discourse, in this context, refers not only to public speaking but to all forms of expression, including posts, comments, videos, and direct interactions with the audience. These elements contribute to shaping social perceptions and building a trust-based relationship with the audience. Through coherent and authentic discourse, individuals can influence how they are perceived by their community, creating a personal brand that not only attracts but also retains audience interest and loyalty.

An essential aspect discussed in the chapter is managing interactions with the audience. Social platforms allow for rapid and direct feedback from followers, providing opportunities for dialogue and real-time adjustment of communication strategies. This bidirectional interaction is vital for building an active and dynamic relationship with the audience but also poses challenges, such as managing criticism or negative comments. The chapter emphasizes the importance of a prompt and sincere response to feedback, which can turn a potential image crisis into an opportunity to strengthen the personal brand.

The chapter also addresses the risks associated with the excessive use of manipulation in public discourse. Manipulation, even when it has seemingly harmless purposes, can undermine audience trust and lead to a loss of credibility for the personal brand. In the digital age, where every action and word can be easily verified and scrutinized by the public, maintaining authentic and

transparent discourse becomes not just a successful strategy but a necessity for the long-term survival of the personal brand.

Chapter 3 highlights that the manifestation of personal branding in the public space must be an authentic expression of the individual's identity and values. Through the strategic use of digital platforms and public discourse, personal branding can become an influential force capable of shaping perceptions and building lasting relationships with the audience. Authenticity, coherence, and openness in interactions are presented as the fundamental pillars for creating a credible personal brand capable of withstanding the constantly changing digital environment. This section thus underscores that success in personal branding does not solely depend on social media presence but on how it is managed to reflect the true identity and intent of the individual.

Chapter 4, titled “Perspectives, Directions, and Trends,” explores current perspectives, directions, and trends in personal branding, with a particular focus on the role of emotions and decision-making processes in the construction and management of personal brands. This chapter emphasizes that emotions play a central role in how people perceive and interact with personal brands. In the context of digital communication, emotions are not merely auxiliary elements but become the main drivers in building an authentic connection with the audience. Personal brands that succeed in creating a strong emotional bond with their audience have a higher chance of long-term success and loyalty.

The chapter addresses affect theory, which explains how emotions influence not only purchasing decisions but also how a personal brand is perceived. Positive emotions, such as joy, confidence, and inspiration, are strategically used by those who build their personal brand to attract and retain their audience. Conversely, negative emotions, such as fear or anxiety, can have a strong impact but must be carefully managed to avoid damaging public perception. The chapter also highlights how the use of vulnerability in communication can humanize the personal brand, facilitating a deeper and more authentic relationship with the audience.

Another aspect discussed in the chapter is the distinction between branding, public relations, advertising, and marketing. Although interconnected, these fields have different roles and functions within the overall communication strategy. Personal branding is described as a process of self-definition and self-representation that transcends traditional marketing and advertising activities, focusing on authenticity and the creation of a personal story that resonates with the

audience. The chapter emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach, where all aspects of communication contribute to forming a coherent and attractive image of the personal brand.

This chapter also focuses on emerging trends in personal branding, such as the use of advanced technologies, the growing influence of social media platforms, and the importance of personalized content tailored to each platform's specifics. The cultural and social impact of these trends is discussed, highlighting the need for continuous adaptation of personal branding strategies to new digital realities. In an era of rapid communication changes, adaptability and the ability to innovate are presented as crucial for maintaining the relevance of a personal brand.

Additionally, the chapter explores the challenges associated with personal branding, including the risks of overexposure and the pressures related to maintaining a consistent public image. These challenges are discussed in the context of a highly competitive digital market, where every action can have significant consequences on public perception.

Chapter 5 provides a synthesis of the theoretical conclusions on the concepts of branding, public relations, and the manifestation of personal branding, integrating the information from the previous chapters to highlight the importance of these elements in the modern context of communication. The chapter concludes that branding is not just a set of marketing techniques but a complex process of self-definition involving the construction of a coherent and authentic identity. Personal branding is highlighted as an essential tool in defining social and professional identity, with the capacity to influence public perceptions and open new opportunities.

The chapter recapitulates the importance of public relations in managing image and communication with relevant audiences, emphasizing their role in maintaining a close and transparent connection between individuals and their communities. Public relations are described as a vital element in personal branding strategy, providing the framework through which messages are effectively and coherently conveyed to the target audience. The chapter concludes that, in a dynamic digital environment, strategic communication management is crucial for the long-term success of personal branding.

Another key aspect addressed in the theoretical conclusions is the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach in building and managing personal branding. Building a personal brand is not limited to marketing or public relations but involves elements of psychology, sociology, and

symbolic communication. This complexity requires a deep understanding of social dynamics and how perceptions are formed and influenced. The chapter emphasizes that the success of a personal brand depends on the individual's ability to combine these disciplines to create an authentic and sustainable presence.

Chapter 5 also discusses the social and emotional impact of personal branding on the individual and the community, highlighting that personal branding is not just a self-promotion strategy but also a means of building relationships and influencing social dynamics. Through authentic communication and careful management of public image, personal branding can become a positive force contributing to social and professional integration. The conclusions highlight the importance of balancing authenticity and strategy, suggesting that long-term success is ensured by a coherent and ethical approach to managing personal branding.

Finally, the chapter underscores the relevance of integrating theoretical knowledge into practice, demonstrating that an in-depth understanding of branding and public relations concepts can guide individuals in building a strong and recognized identity in the online environment. It concludes that investing in personal branding, based on authenticity, strategy, and adaptability, not only enhances an individual's public image but also significantly contributes to personal and professional success in a complex and constantly changing digital landscape.

Chapter 6 details the research plan used in this study, aimed at investigating the impact and relevance of personal branding in the online environment. The research was strategically structured to address the formulated questions and hypotheses, employing a mixed-method approach that includes three main methods: content analysis, interviews with specialists, and sociological surveys. These methods were chosen to provide a complex and detailed view of how personal branding influences identity, social perception, and professional opportunities among emerging adults in Romania.

The research was guided by four key questions:

1. What is the perspective of emerging adults in Romania on the concept of personal branding?
2. What are the advantages that personal branding brings to the professional space in Romania?

3. What online personal branding strategy creates increased consumer engagement?
4. How do the consequences of building a personal brand reflect on the individual both personally and professionally?

The formulated hypotheses aimed to identify the level of awareness among emerging adults about personal branding, the professional advantages of a well-managed personal brand, the effectiveness of authentic promotional strategies, and the dual impact of personal branding on individual identity:

1. Emerging adults in Romania are partially informed about the concept of personal branding and tend to underestimate both this concept and the relevance of their behavior in the online space.
2. Romanian individuals who have developed a personal brand online experience significant advantages in the professional field, such as increased visibility, enhanced credibility, and greater access to professional opportunities.
3. A personal branding strategy that is authentic, consistent, and tailored to the specifics of online platforms generates a higher level of engagement from consumers compared to less personalized promotional strategies.
4. Building a personal brand has a dual impact on the individual, enhancing self-perception and personal confidence, as well as professional opportunities and recognition, but it can also generate pressures or challenges related to maintaining consistency between public and private identity.

The research methods were chosen to comprehensively address these questions. The content analysis focused on Instagram posts from personal brands in various fields, such as education, communication, lifestyle, and health, providing insights into communication strategies and content types that generate engagement. Interviews with specialists included professionals from psychology, sociology, public relations, and personal branding, who provided a qualitative analysis of how personal branding is perceived and managed. The sociological survey, conducted through two questionnaires administered to emerging adults in Romania, aimed to assess perceptions and behaviors related to personal branding, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data on awareness levels, interests, and challenges faced by this demographic group.

Sampling was done through convenience methods, considering the accessibility of subjects and their relevance to the research objectives. The sample for content analysis included active personal brands on Instagram, selected for the diversity of fields and their influence in the online environment. Interviews were conducted with recognized specialists in their respective fields, offering a multidisciplinary perspective on personal branding. The sociological survey included an average of 500 respondents, emerging adults, selected by distributing the questionnaires in online communities and specialized groups, providing a solid basis for analyzing perceptions of personal branding. The research instruments were developed and adapted to extract relevant information and capture both general perceptions and specific details related to online behaviors and branding strategies.

The choice of methods and samples was motivated by the need to obtain a comprehensive and nuanced picture of personal branding, reflecting both the perspectives of experts and ordinary users. This mixed approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon and provided a solid foundation for interpreting the results, highlighting the importance of personal branding in the modern context and the challenges associated with maintaining an authentic and strategic identity in the digital environment.

Chapter 7 examines how the identity of personal brands manifests on Instagram through content analysis of 360 posts from subjects in various fields. This method was selected to highlight the communication strategies and behavioral patterns that contribute to the building and reinforcement of personal brands. The analysis revealed a preference for diversified content, with a balanced distribution between photos and videos (reels), emphasizing the necessity of a dynamic mix to maintain audience interest. The results indicate that posts conveying positive emotions and employing storytelling and controlled vulnerability generate the highest engagement, suggesting that authenticity and consistency are fundamental to a successful personal brand.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrated that interaction with the audience is crucial, both in terms of comments and likes, indicating active interest and direct involvement from followers. The emotions expressed in posts were predominantly positive, contributing to the consolidation of an optimistic and appealing image. The use of storytelling was identified as an effective strategy in creating a strong emotional connection with the audience, turning each post into an opportunity to

communicate values and inspire. This approach not only attracts the public but also fosters loyalty, contributing to the development of a dedicated community around the personal brand.

The chapter concludes that diversifying content formats and leveraging vulnerability are essential elements in consolidating a personal brand on Instagram. Communication strategies must be tailored to the platform's specifics and audience preferences, requiring a delicate balance between authenticity and careful management of presented emotions. The analysis highlights the importance of a coherent online presence that not only captures short-term attention but also contributes to the sustainable development of a personal brand image in the long term.

Chapter 8 presents insights from interviews with specialists across various fields, such as education, communication, lifestyle, nutrition, and corporate environments. These interviews provide valuable perspectives on the construction and management of personal brands in diverse professional contexts. Experts highlighted common themes, including the critical role of authenticity, the importance of relevant and valuable content, and the need for strategic management of public perception.

The interviews revealed that authenticity is universally recognized as the cornerstone of a solid personal brand. Specialists agreed that audiences value transparency and sincerity, and a personal brand that successfully communicates these values is perceived as credible and trustworthy. This theme was consistently emphasized by professionals across all fields, including educators who stressed the need for authentic communication with their communities, and communication experts who underscored the necessity of managing feedback effectively.

The chapter also explores the dual impact of personal branding on individuals. While a well-managed personal brand can enhance self-perception, boost professional recognition, and open up new opportunities, it also brings significant challenges. Maintaining consistency between public and private identities can create pressure, as highlighted by psychologists and sociologists who noted the psychological toll of continuously managing one's image. The chapter concludes that, while personal branding offers substantial advantages, it requires careful and strategic management to balance authenticity with the demands of maintaining a public presence.

Chapter 9 presents the findings of the sociological survey conducted with emerging adults in Romania, examining their perceptions of personal branding. The survey results provide a

nuanced view of how this demographic perceives and engages with personal branding concepts. A significant majority (76.6%) expressed interest in personal branding, highlighting a growing awareness of the importance of maintaining a coherent and appealing online identity. However, 71.7% of respondents indicated that they do not feel sufficiently informed to construct and manage their personal brands effectively, underscoring a need for greater education and awareness in this area.

The chapter further details the diverse approaches and attitudes of users toward personal branding. While some prioritize authenticity and spontaneous online presence, others carefully craft their content to influence follower reactions. Preferred platforms such as Instagram and TikTok were identified as crucial spaces for building and managing online identities, reflecting current trends in digital communication.

The findings emphasize the complexity and diversity of perceptions and practices among digital users, pointing to the need for ongoing research and education to help individuals optimize their online presence responsibly and effectively. The chapter concludes that while personal branding is increasingly recognized as essential, there is a significant gap in knowledge and skills that must be addressed to empower individuals in constructing their authentic and strategic personal brands.

Chapter 10 identifies and analyzes the methodological and contextual limitations of the research, highlighting their impact on the validity and generalizability of the results. Among the main limitations are the use of a convenience sample, which may affect the representativeness of the results, and the exclusive focus on Instagram, thus limiting the applicability of the conclusions to other social networks. Additionally, the rapid dynamics of the online environment and constant changes in platform algorithms can influence the long-term relevance of personal branding strategies, suggesting the need for longitudinal studies to track the evolution of the phenomenon over time.

The chapter also emphasizes the limitations of the subjectivity of participants' perceptions, influenced by personal and contextual factors, which can lead to variable interpretations of concepts such as authenticity and personal success. These aspects highlight the importance of more diverse and comparative approaches in future research, including different cultural and social

perspectives, to obtain a more comprehensive view of personal branding across various environments and societies.

Proposed future perspectives include expanding research to other demographic categories and social platforms, integrating advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence for analyzing public perceptions, and investigating the psychological and emotional impact on personal brand creators. These directions are essential to better understand the complexity of the phenomenon and to develop effective support strategies that help individuals build an authentic and resilient digital identity.

Chapter 11 synthesizes the main findings of the study, integrating theoretical and empirical conclusions to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact and relevance of personal branding in the modern context. The research confirms that a well-managed personal brand can bring significant benefits, both personally and professionally, but also highlights the challenges associated with maintaining authenticity and consistency in front of a diverse audience. Authenticity, well-thought-out communication strategies, and continuous education are identified as essential factors in building and managing a successful personal brand.

The chapter concludes that personal branding is not just a marketing practice but also a complex form of self-representation that influences social and professional perceptions. The research results highlight the need for more accessible educational resources and support strategies to help individuals navigate the challenges associated with personal branding in the digital environment. Furthermore, the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to understanding and applying the concept is emphasized, to ensure an authentic social presence and lasting impact.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study “The Impact and Relevance of Personal Branding in the Modern Context: Theory, Practice, and Perceptions in Building an Authentic Social Presence” makes a significant contribution to understanding the complexity of personal branding in the digital era. Through an integrated approach that combines theoretical analysis and empirical research, the

study emphasizes the importance of building an authentic and strategic identity online. The results confirm that personal branding is not just a self-promotion tool but a crucial element for professional and social success, capable of influencing public perceptions and opening new development opportunities.

The research highlights that, although there is a growing interest in the concept of personal branding, there are also significant challenges related to the lack of knowledge and the difficulty of managing a coherent image between public and private identity. Continuous education and support resources are essential to help individuals, especially emerging adults, develop an effective and authentic online presence. Moreover, the study underlines the necessity of a well-grounded personal branding strategy that combines authenticity, consistency, and effective communication to attract and maintain a loyal audience.

The research limitations, such as the use of a convenience sample and the focus on a single social media platform, indicate the need for more extensive and diversified future investigations. Future studies should include a broader range of platforms and demographic groups to provide a more complete perspective on the dynamics of personal branding. Additionally, the integration of advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence, could improve the understanding of public perceptions and the emotional impact of branding strategies.

Ultimately, the research lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of how personal brands can be effectively managed in the modern digital landscape. Through a multidisciplinary approach and a focus on authenticity and adapted communication strategies, the study offers valuable insights for individuals who wish to build a strong and influential online presence. This not only opens new opportunities for academic exploration but also provides practical recommendations for the effective management of personal identity in the ever-evolving digital environment.