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Summary

The emergence of novel work arrangements, exemplified by the gig economy, and alternative employment relationships, such as zero-hours contracts, has reshaped what has been traditionally considered a career. In the modern labor environment, more people opt for frequent employer changes, self-employment, or gig work. Creating, positioning, and maintaining a desired professional impression – *personal branding* – has become an essential career competence, but our knowledge about what it is and what career outcomes it leads to is limited. Personal branding has become an important concept in management literature in recent years. This knowledge gap was the impetus for this Ph.D. dissertation. With more than 100 scholarly papers published on the concept to date, it has developed into a fragmented area of research with a diversity of definitions and conceptual boundaries. This heterogeneity of extant research impedes theoretical and empirical advancement.

Driven by the goal of shedding light on these novel concepts, I conducted several empirical studies, reported in the four empirical dissertation chapters that are written in collaboration with other authors, hence the use of the first-person plural ‘we’ in describing the results.

Chapter 2 reviews the extant literature and offers an integrative model of personal branding. Through a systematic literature review we identified the key attributes of the construct, established its clarity by comparing it with similar concepts in its nomological network, and suggested the definitions of *personal branding* and *personal brand* based on the reviewed literature. Further, we proposed a theoretical model of personal branding summarizing the findings from the reviewed papers. The proposed model outlines the trends conducive to personal branding, as well as its drivers, processes, and outcomes. Finally, we discussed ethical

implications of personal branding for both scholarly work and practice. In conclusion, we outlined a further research agenda for studying personal branding as a critical career and organizational behavior activity in contemporary working environment.

Chapter 3 looks at the factors that predict personal branding behaviors and its outcomes. In two studies ($N = 477$) across two distinctly different cultural contexts (Western and Asian) based on a newly developed and validated scale of personal branding, we examine the antecedents and outcomes of personal branding. The findings confirm that personal branding leads to greater career satisfaction, fully mediated by perceived employability. Career achievement aspiration was the strongest predictor of engaging in personal branding, while career feedback negatively related to personal branding intention and career self-efficacy positively related to personal branding but not to personal branding intention. These findings highlight the importance of personal branding as a contemporary career technique in promoting one's personal brand identity to achieve beneficial career outcomes.

In Chapter 4, we conceptualized and operationalized the concept of personal brand equity (PBE). This study attempts to close this gap by providing a definition of PBE and developing a 12-item scale to measure the construct. This chapter reports on the development and validation of the PBE scale in four different samples (total $N = 1,558$) and explores the mediating role of PBE in the relationship among self-promotion, career achievement aspiration, and perceived employability. First, exploratory ($N = 311$) and confirmatory factor analyses ($N = 706$) supported a three-dimensional structure of PBE (brand appeal, brand value, and brand awareness). In two samples ($N = 263$ and $N = 278$), we established the convergent and discriminant validity of the PBE scale. Finally, in a two-wave study ($N = 249$), we demonstrated that PBE fully mediates the relationship between career achievement aspiration and perceived employability, with career

self-efficacy weakening the relationship between PBE and perceived employability. Our scale offers new opportunities to understand and measure the career behaviors of contemporary employees by considering their personal brand positioning and their career-related outcomes.

Finally, in Chapter 5 we explored the role of massive online open courses (MOOCs), one of the learning alternatives that has become available to millions of people, in the job search process, linking the invested effort in obtaining a certification or completing several courses from the same specialization with the job seeking outcomes, such as getting a job. In a study of a marketing MOOC learners ($N = 278$) we explored the antecedents and outcomes of such invested effort through the lens of the signaling theory. The results indicated that school brand importance and self-promotion were important predictors of invested effort in MOOCs, while learning goal orientation towards MOOCs was not. The invested effort in MOOCs positively related to perceived usefulness of MOOCs in getting a job through both signaling of MOOC-related competencies and perceived employability. We complemented the quantitative data with 19 semi-structured interviews to provide nuances to the findings. Theoretical and practical implications of the role of MOOCs in the context of contemporary careers are also discussed.

This dissertation concludes with a discussion of the implication of the findings for theory and practice. To my knowledge, this work is the first attempt to define the constructs of personal branding, the personal brand, and personal brand equity following a meticulous review process of the extant literature. One of the key contributions of this work is the integration of the extant research on personal branding into a conceptual model, allowing some of the main relationships to be tested. I have established that personal branding is an important career competence in today's world of work, adding to the literature on the change in prerequisite skills required for contemporary career success. The second key finding of this dissertation is that personal

branding is context specific. There are meaningful differences between various industries and roles according to how conducive they are to personal branding behaviors. The third theoretical implication concerns the process of how personal branding happens in contemporary work environments. My conceptualization of personal branding presupposes that at least some portion of it will happen online. One of the key drivers for the increase in interest in the subject is technological advancement in general and social media proliferation more specifically.

In terms of practical implications, first, organizations should rethink their talent acquisition and talent management practices to account for the new career tendencies, such as an increase in personal branding activities and the emergence of novel tools to enhance employability. Second, career coaches and vocational counselors could make use of the definitions, models, and measurement scales developed in this dissertation to work with their clients in explaining how to build, deploy, and maintain their personal brand, and how such efforts lead to positive career outcomes. Finally, the practical implications of my findings for individuals center around a need to build and maintain an effective personal brand that can signal value to a target audience. My findings linking personal branding to subjective career success indicate that those who engage in personal branding feel more employable and, as a result, are more satisfied with their careers.

The results firmly establish personal branding in the field of career studies, demonstrating how it leads to a wide array of positive career outcomes. Having provided definitional clarity of the focal concepts and having developed the new scales to measure them, I hope that this work provides a stepping stone for future research on personal branding and its role in contemporary careers.