

Personal Branding in the Context of Generational Change

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Abstract

Aim: This article aims to determine the importance of building a personal brand and to identify and characterize selected tools offered on the Internet that serve this process, with an emphasis on social media used by Generation Z.

Methodology: The method of analysing the literature on the subject was used to achieve the assumed goal.

Results: The research found that personal branding strategies require conscious image management to achieve authenticity and recognition among recipients.

Implications and recommendations: The next stage will be survey research, analysing how Generation Z uses digital media to create its image, what strategies are most effective and what challenges they encounter.

Originality/value: Personal branding is one of the most important intangible resources of an individual's competitiveness, which concerns strategy and building a personal brand in the context of the development of social media and the Internet. Social media and websites have become key tools enabling individuals to build their identity and image in virtual space.

Keywords: personal branding, social media, Generation Z

1. Introduction

Building a personal brand in an age when technology and social platforms redefine the way individuals interact has become a necessity, especially for the young generation Z, which are increasingly involved in the online medium. A personal brand conveys an individual's identity and distinctiveness and it has become an important tool for young individuals that enables them to achieve success regardless of their status: they can be young professionals in search for a job, public speakers, bloggers, managers or entrepreneurs (Vitelar, 2019). In the era of digital transformation, shaping a personal brand is the foundation of professional achievements. Modern communication platforms offer a variety of tools that enable the effective creation of a professional image and the establishment of valuable professional relationships. Platforms focused on visualization provide an excellent opportunity to strengthen personal messages and stand out in a diverse online environment. A key element of effective image management is adapting publications to the specifics of individual social media, websites and mobile applications, which can be divided and classified in terms of their potential use in building a personal brand. Generation Z representatives can see a high level of awareness of using the Internet, particularly social media platforms, in building a personal brand. Young people raised in the era of ubiquitous digitalisation are aware that a personal brand is gaining enormous importance in the modern world dominated by the Internet and are taking actions related to personal branding on social media platforms in order to build trust, gain a competitive advantage and strengthen their advantage on the labour market.

The scope of the article includes an overview of online tools and social media that support the process of creating a personal brand. The importance of adapting activities to the specificity of various platforms and the impact of conscious image management on the positioning of an individual on the labour market were emphasized.

The article systematizes the concept of personal branding and discusses selected internet tools supporting the creation of an individual's image, paying particular attention to the role of social media, which are a key element of building a personal brand, especially for Generation Z.

The results of the conducted research allow for a more complete understanding of personal branding and the role of the Internet in building a personal brand and open the field for further exploration of publications and research.

2. Building a Personal Brand

Interest in personal branding appeared in our country relatively recently, but its scale is growing at an extraordinary rate. The concept itself is not new – some date its beginnings to the 1940s (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2016, p. 13).

Until recently, most knowledge of personal branding was confined to practitioner publications advocating the creation of a personal brand to access greater work opportunities (Dumont & Ots, 2020, p. 119). Personal branding in the knowledge economy is a key promotional device for pursuing self-realization in a context that reifies entrepreneurialism as the primary ideological stance (Gandini, 2016, p. 123). Personal branding becomes an investment in social relationships with an expected return for acquiring a reputation. This substantially equates self-branding with what social theory calls social capital, being instrumental in securing employment in the freelance-based labour market of the digital knowledge economy (Gandini, 2016, p. 123), which is why in the era of 'instant promotion', instead of advertising goods, we promote ourselves. The extension of this thesis is that we are goods (Murthy, 2012).

Building a strong personal brand is how people turn themselves and their careers into a recognizable brand. It aims to create a branded asset and equity related to a particular person or individual. An individual strives to manage his skills and experiences through personal branding. These accomplishments usually require extensive financial support to promote brand awareness and build loyalty (Shyle, 2022). Personal branding should be undertaken to convey one's unique value. Table 1 provides an overview of the definitions of personal branding.

Table 1. Classification of the definition of the concept of "personal branding"

Classification of the definition	Definition	Authors, year of publication
Personal branding as a marketing concept	Concept related to the marketing strategies that a person adopts in order to promote their major personal characteristics	Zarkada (2012)
	A way of auto-marketing similar to any product or company branding process	Gujarathi & Kulkarni (2018)
	A marketing concept similar to promoting products and services that has now been extended to people	Peter and Gomez (2019)
Personal branding as a process	Conscious process with a clear aim and goal	Khedher (2014)
	Long-term process, which varies for different individuals	Sidor-Rządkowska (2019)
	The entire process of establishing, maintaining, and developing an individual's human brand	Scheidt et al. (2018)
Personal branding as an image seen from various points of view	Individuals make investments to improve their public image	Ilies (2018)
	It involves capturing and promoting the strengths and uniqueness of your target audience	Khedher (2019)
	Conscious and intentional effort to create and influence the public perception of an individual	Wróblewski & Grzesiak (2020)

Source: (Muszyńska, 2021).

The analysis of the definitions shows that they emphasize slightly different aspects that constitute the essence of personal branding and emphasize that this concept can be considered in different categories. In the first part of the table, the authors consider personal branding as a concept. In the second part, they emphasize that it is a process.

In the third approach, the authors present personal branding from different points of view. They point to investing in oneself, promoting strengths and intended effort.

It can undoubtedly be said that personal branding builds a professional reputation through behaviour, communication, and presentation of one's career and skills. A personal brand includes functional and virtual elements. Building a personal brand requires authenticity and image consistency. It consists of building recognition, reputation and acquiring customers. Personal branding is important for everyone and allows one to establish credibility, increase online influence and develop a professional network. The personal image should be consistent with personal branding (Marzec, 2023).

According to Strawińska (2017, p. 365), the term 'personal branding' in marketing literature is used to describe the strategy of creating a personal brand through one's name, used especially by public figures, mainly politicians, journalists, actors, athletes, scientists and managers.

The idea of personal branding revolves around individuals curating and displaying their own unique persona to the public (Toma & Hancock, 2011).

According to the Premium Consulting study, in order to build a strong personal brand, first of all, you should the necessary know-how (84.3%), be authentic (74.2%) and be consistent (62.4%). In addition, have charisma (63.8%) and be brave (41.5%) (Business Insider, 2021).

From a management perspective and using basic functions management, the process of building a personal brand could look like this:

- personal brand planning consisting of defining the identity of the individual, personal brand identity, personal value proposition and professional goals,
- organizing the personal brand consisting of selecting methods of informing the labour market about the personal value proposition,
- self-motivation to take action in the field of building a personal brand,
- controlling the strength of the personal brand consisting of measuring the awareness and image of the personal brand (Wojtaszczyk & Maszewski, 2014, p. 458, cited after: Walczak-Skałeczka, 2023, p. 151).

The process of building a personal brand is a comprehensive set of elements that create a coherent strategy combining image activities (external image – clothing, gadgets), with marketing activities (communication strategy, e.g. quick responses to users), as well as personal development (coaching, psychology - what a given brand does, what real values it presents). Creating and maintaining a positive image of a personal brand through communication media is extremely important for developing a personal brand (Malinowska-Parzydło, 2015, cited after: Nowakowska, 2019, p. 28).

In order to increase recognition in the labour market, it is worth taking appropriate actions related to personal branding, aimed at strategic positioning of the individual, exposing their image and soft and hard skills. Personal branding should, therefore, be built on knowledge, experience, personality and values. Such a strategy will allow for the creation of an appropriate image and a personal brand reflecting the individual's unique values in the digital and real world. It plays a key role in establishing credibility, which in turn enables one to obtain attractive job opportunities, increase one's online influence, develop a professional network of contacts, and consequently ensure a secure career development.

3. Tools for Building a Personal Brand in the Digital Age

Due to the changes in the business and marketing space, as well as the development of new media and modern communication channels, the role of self-promotion and personal image is growing. Today, it is important not only what content the sender communicates but also how they do it (Piotrowska, 2020, p. 99).

Technology and social media have created a new space for identity creation, performance and management (Jacobson, 2020, p. 716). Social media, with its ideological and technological structure, allows individuals to be promoted as a brand relatively cheaply and efficiently (Shyle, 2022).

The evolution of personal branding can be largely credited to the widespread use of digital communication and the emergence of social media, which enable individuals to curate and enhance their self-presentation online (Albright & Simmens, 2014). How individuals present themselves influences electronic word-of-mouth (Pasternak et al., 2017).

Personal branding in social media is already essential to long-term career success (Shyle, 2022), while social media is a perfect modern tool for sustaining personal brand equity and creating a final value through the relational capital creation (Kucharska, 2018). Creating a personal brand requires implementing tools to create and maintain a positive and strong image, recognition, trust, and professionalism in the virtual world.

Developing a personal brand is an emerging characteristic of professional existence, which encourages you to reassess your self-identity, especially in relation to your social media presence

(Kampioni-Zawadka, 2014). The advancement of technology and the increasing number of social media sites have transformed careers into personal brands that require management (Gioia et al., 2014).

Currently operating social networking sites can be divided into four categories in terms of their potential use in building a personal brand.

The first group are sites typically focused on building a business image. These include LinkedIn. It is worth posting information about employers, tasks performed, skills, and completed courses on these sites. This information should be regularly updated. It is also worth collecting the opinions of former and current co-workers and employers about yourself. It should also be remembered to choose the right profile photo and to post other materials and comments thoughtfully.

The second group consists of services used to establish contacts with friends and search for thematic profiles and discussion groups (Facebook, X). People with profiles on these services should consider the information they publish about themselves, statements and photos they post (especially private ones). They are viewed just as often by recruiters and other people as other services, which many users forget. These services allow for limiting access to specific content to a group of friends; it is always worth considering this choice.

The third group consists of additional services that allow one to post graphic or video materials and present one's interests (e.g. Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest). The selection of carefully thought-out graphic and video materials can strengthen or weaken your brand built in other media. At the same time, they are good tools for presenting original interests or photographic and video skills.

The fourth group of tools consists of mobile applications (e.g. Snapchat) which do not have the character and form of a typical social networking service but can be used to send text and graphic information about oneself along with an indication of who may have access to the materials. The larger the group of potential recipients, the more it is worth carefully selecting the published content (Niedźwiedziński et al., 2016, pp. 345, 346).

The use of digital platforms is a widespread and almost totalizing branding activity. The vast majority believe that social media activity is very important or important for their professional success, while only a minority considers social media practice as scarcely useful or useless. Twitter and LinkedIn are the most utilized platforms, while Facebook (though with some exceptions) is largely perceived as a private social network. Frequency of usage varies significantly, from more than one posting of content a day to no less than one posting a week. Overall, social media is approached, managed and utilized as a shop window that serves to find or be found, being visible on a 24/7 basis. (Gandini, 2016, p. 129).

As Nowakowska states, it can be easily noticed that, at present, one of the most popular means of presenting a personal brand is the Internet. Thanks to social media, the brand creator remains in constant contact with their users. Creating a coherent and effective marketing strategy that clearly reflects the essence of a personal brand is a key factor in its success. The other half is creating and maintaining a positive image of the personal brand through direct contact with the customer, gaining their trust and striving for the user to tell their friends about the product. Effective marketing activities cause customers from the target market to decide to buy a product or use the services of a specific personal brand based on the recommendations they receive (Nowakowska, 2019, p. 28).

It can therefore be seen that widely available technology enables the creation of a coherent message on all platforms offered by the Internet in order to create a personal brand and present oneself. It has become crucial to understand that in the digital transformation era, tools for building a personal brand are essential for managing one's image and showing an individual's unique features, skills, experience, and values.

4. Building a Personal Brand for Generation Z on Social Media

In today's dynamic digital society, Generation Z (also referred to as Gen Z – people born between 1997 and 2012) (*Pokolenie Z...*, 2023) plays a key role in the revolution of building a personal brand, using the potential of social media. Gen Z individuals are conscious of their personal brand, and they believe that its development can help them differentiate in a highly competitive labour market. In the present society, where marketing efforts are driven by emotion, passion, storytelling, it is essential for individuals to take time to create and develop their personal brand. Therefore, it is necessary build long-term, powerful relationships through social platforms, which consequently become an integral part of the self-expression (Vitelar, 2019).

Representatives of Generation Z are people focused on carrying out professional tasks in an independent and often innovative way. This is a group of individualists who, by introducing their own principles, rebel against some of the existing fashions, trends and phenomena occurring in the organizational cultures of companies and institutions. However, this is creative, positive individualism, based on values that does not contradict the sphere of relationships with other people and does not weaken social bonds (*Pokolenie Z...*, 2023).

Social media is still a new, dynamically developing area (Hamala, 2014), and activities in social media require appropriate shaping of the communication method and proper selection of social media channels (Peszko, 2016) on which young people actively build their online image. The most commonly used include:

- Instagram is a photo-sharing application. Users take photos with their mobile devices, possibly apply some artistic filters to the photos, and then upload them. It is one of the most popular social networking tools (Golbeck, 2015).
- Facebook is social-sharing website established by Marc Zuckerberg in February 2004. Facebook was established with the aim of providing the opportunity for communicating with other people and sharing information (Ozdał, 2017).
- YouTube is defined as a video website. On YouTube, internet users from all over the world have the opportunity to upload their videos to the system. Furthermore, users have the opportunity to watch other videos uploaded by other internet users, rate the videos and make comments (Ozdał, 2017).
- LinkedIn is one of the most used social media platform, created and used for professional purposes. Here, indeed, the user can either apply for job positions or join professional communities to deepen his own knowledge and expertise and be always up to date in the interested field (Agazzi, 2020).
- TikTok, a short video-sharing social media platform, has quickly become one of the most popular apps. The platform offers a highly immersive and interactive environment, where users share original content and participate in challenges, duets, and other tasks. Even though TikTok is only a few years old, it has already been shaping the ways millions of people interact online and engage in artistic, cultural, social, and political activities (Miltsov, 2022).

To sum up the point, we can say that Generation Z are people who grew up with the development of subsequent digital innovations, which made the Internet an environment that allows them to integrate between the digital and real world, which they use for personal branding. One of the key tools used by Generation Z is social media platforms. This is where young people actively create a personal brand that reflects their personality, values, knowledge, and experience. They also use social media to discuss and establish contacts with professionals.

5. Conclusions

Technological innovations have led to the creation of tools that enable effective personal branding campaigns, resulting in the implementation of a well-thought-out and comprehensive promotional strategy to build a personal brand. In the context of a rapidly changing digital landscape, social media platforms such as YouTube have gained popularity in building a personal image (Chen, 2013).

In the context of the development of modern technologies, the use of activities in the media that provide very large opportunities in the field of personal branding has become important, which has become a very important factor in building a personal brand aimed at ensuring recognition and strengthening the position on the labour market. Building a personal brand should be a continuous, planned and constantly monitored process because the appropriate image can affect an individual's perception in the labour market.

Therefore, knowledge and orientation related to the knowledge of effective tools for promoting and creating a personal brand are important because, in times of dynamic development of the Internet and social media, potential employers look for information about candidates for a given job position there.

In the context of the development of social media and the Internet, personal branding has become a key tool enabling individuals to build their identity and image in the virtual space. A great awareness of using the Internet and especially social platforms to build a personal brand can be seen among representatives of Generation Z, as they are accustomed to using many communication channels and are aware that social media offer a wide range of possibilities in terms of personal branding and promoting their own image. To sum up, it can be said that in the era of modern technologies, the Internet is a very good tool for creating a personal brand.

The literature analysis shows that personal branding strategies require conscious image management to achieve recognition among recipients.

The article indicates the impact of modern technologies on shaping a personal brand, with particular emphasis on Generation Z, which grew up in a period of dynamic changes related to digitalisation, bringing new perspectives on the interaction between social media and an individual's identity and identifying key strategies for building authenticity in the digital era, which may constitute a foundation for future research.

The next stage regarding building a personal brand will be survey research, which will allow for a more detailed understanding of how representatives of Generation Z use social media, websites and mobile applications to build their image, what strategies are most effective for them and what challenges they encounter in this process. This research will also allow for the collection of opinions on their perception of their personal brand and their expectations of the platforms they use.

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***Personal branding* w kontekście zmiany pokoleniowej**

Streszczenie

Cel: Celem artykułu jest określenie znaczenia budowania marki osobistej oraz identyfikacja i charakterystyka wybranych narzędzi oferowanych w Internecie, służących temu procesowi, ze wskazaniem mediów społecznościowych wykorzystywanych przez pokolenie Z.

Metodyka: Do osiągnięcia założonego celu wykorzystano metodę analizy literatury przedmiotu.

Wyniki: Badania wykazały, że strategie *personal branding* wymagają świadomego zarządzania wizerunkiem w celu osiągnięcia autentyczności i rozpoznawalności wśród odbiorców.

Implikacje i rekomendacje: Kolejnym etapem będą badania ankietowe, analizujące, w jaki sposób pokolenie Z wykorzystuje media cyfrowe do kreowania swojego wizerunku, jakie strategie są najskuteczniejsze i jakie wyzwania napotyka.

Oryginalność/wartość: *Personal branding* jest jednym z najważniejszych niematerialnych zasobów konkurencyjności jednostki, który dotyczy strategii i budowania marki osobistej. W kontekście rozwoju mediów społecznościowych i Internetu. Media społecznościowe i strony internetowe stały się kluczowymi narzędziami umożliwiającymi jednostkom budowanie swojej tożsamości i wizerunku w przestrzeni wirtualnej.

Słowa kluczowe: *personal branding*, media społecznościowe, pokolenie Z
