
**Building an individual's personal brand
through the social media platforms**

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Abstract

In the current digital landscape, social media platforms have evolved into essential resources not only for the establishment of one's professional skills but also for personal identity. The abstract dives into the action plans and methods that individuals use to establish a unique digital identity that is in line with their both personal and professional aspirations. In addition to this, it investigates the impact that social networking has on individual branding, considering the budding and hurdles posed by a medium that is always evolving. This abstract offers insights into the evolving relationship between personal branding and social networking by exploring successful case studies and analysing the importance of authenticity, content curation, and engagement. In general, it highlights the impact of various social media platforms for creating personal brand that is valuable and has an influence in the present era. However, this study does not constrain itself to only these platforms. The purpose of the study is to make a significant contribute to the growing body of literature on personal branding by analysing the complex interplay of psychological, strategic, and technological elements that enable the formation of a meaningful personal brand through the use of social networking.

Keywords: *Digital landscape, Personal Branding, Individual Branding, Social Media Platforms*

Introduction

In this research, our contention is that the process of securing employment and navigating professional advancement now necessitates a comprehensive comprehension of contemporary networking mechanisms and the proficient utilisation of such networks, both in virtual and physical domains. The establishment and upkeep of an individual's personal brand is increasingly recognised as a crucial factor that distinguishes those who take initiative from those who simply respond to circumstances within society. Hence, it is imperative to ensure that the content that one presents online is conducive to fostering a positive impression on prospective employers,

rather than detracting from it. The present study utilises the findings from a continuous research endeavour which examines the utilisation of emerging technologies by entrepreneurs in the establishment and development of their own brands.

The discourse commences with an examination of the evolving characteristics of the contemporary work environment, followed by the introduction of the notion of personal branding. This paper elucidates the growing significance of branding for job searchers, particularly as individuals belonging to the "Generation X" progress in their careers and the "Generation Y" cohort becomes more entrenched within the professional sphere. The subsequent analysis incorporates the endeavours of select entrepreneurs examined in our case studies, illustrating the utilisation of diverse internet services, namely blogging and social networking, in the cultivation and augmentation of an individual's personal brand. The essay concludes by engaging in a reflection on the various problems individuals encounter when attempting to effectively manage their personal brand over an extended period.

The underlying justification of our argument is that the disparity in digital access between individuals who possess and those who lack resources in industrialised nations is mostly attributed to the disparity in knowledge and skills required for active engagement in the interconnected society, rather than mere access to the internet. Individuals who possess the necessary abilities, allocate sufficient time, and exhibit self-assurance in effectively navigating and overseeing the vast expanse of the internet realm, while concurrently cultivating a distinct personal image, will be able to avail themselves of novel professional prospects, locate receptive audiences for their creative output, and enhance the well-being of others. Individuals who lack such proactive behaviour face the possibility of experiencing marginalisation or being left behind. Nevertheless, in light of the abundance of freely accessible online information, individuals are no longer justified in being confined to the disadvantaged side of this digital divide, thereby depriving themselves of optimal job prospects.

Current Workplace Trends

According to Tapscott (2008), his extensive research on the behaviour of the "Net Generation" in the United States led him to conclude that comprehending this demographic is crucial for gaining insights into the next horizon. Diverse living styles and holistic feelings give rise to distinct , hopes and desired behaviour. The current dynamics in the workplace are witnessing a transition as Generation Y, sometimes referred to as the "Net" or "Millennial" Generation, born between 1977 and 1997, integrates itself into professional environments, while Generation X, born between 1965 and 1976, progresses in their career trajectories. Consequently, there is a discernible shift in the generational equilibrium. Based on the analysis provided by Christopher Lomas from Naked Generations (www.nakedgenerations.com), it is projected that the number of individuals belonging to the "Generation X" cohort will amount to merely 11 million, which falls short of replacing the 19 million retiring "Baby Boomers" (born between 1946 and 1964). Consequently, UK-based enterprises will likely endeavour to recruit approximately 8 million

individuals from the "Generation Y" demographic in order to address the resulting skills gap. The impending demographic transition has significant potential for proactive individuals belonging to Generation Y who are capable of distinguishing themselves from the masses at an early stage.

The nature and substance of numerous professions are undergoing fundamental transformations. Although advancements in technology may mitigate the need for extensive workforce replacements, the emergence of novel cultures, attitudes, and skills will also become imperative. According to Business Week in 2007, Deloitte was designated as the leading organisation in the United States for commencing a professional trajectory.

Progressive organisations, such as Deloitte, acknowledge that the imperative for change goes well beyond merely enabling social networking. The organisation has adopted a practise known as "reverse mentoring," when younger employees provide guidance and mentorship to their more senior counterparts regarding innovative methods of communication and collaboration. This approach facilitates the dismantling of conventional hierarchical barriers inside the workplace. A survey was recently done by Accenture (www.accenture.com) to examine the perceptions and utilisation of information technology among young individuals. The results emphasise the significance of organisations adapting to the technological expectations of their younger employees, a considerable number of whom are opting for alternative communication platforms instead of conventional enterprise technology tools such as email, which may not be officially approved by corporate IT. There seems to be an increasing disparity between the technological offerings provided by businesses and the evolving collaborative preferences of younger employees in the execution of their job responsibilities. According to Accenture's survey, a notable proportion of young employees acknowledged utilising some technologies for work-related tasks that have not been officially sanctioned. Specifically, 31% of respondents admitted to employing unapproved mobile phones, 23% acknowledged utilising unsupported social networking sites, and 20% reported using unapproved instant messaging (IM) applications.

Tapscott (2008, p. 141) concurred with this perspective, asserting that the Net Generation is inclined to actively engage and make valuable contributions to their workplace through the use of their social networking tools. Initially, the individual expresses astonishment upon realising that the technological resources employed by the organisation are of lower quality compared to those utilised during their secondary education. The firm maintains the perspective that the internet primarily functions as a medium for delivering material through websites, rather than recognising its potential as a Web 2.0 collaborative platform. The talent will likely become obsolete in the near future.

According to Shirky (2008, p. 304), there is a significant emphasis on the increasing significance of online collaboration in facilitating transformative outcomes. Additionally, Shirky highlights that individuals belonging to Generation Y possess an inherent inclination towards engaging in such collaborative endeavours. The utilisation of social media platforms by young individuals has improved. The utilisation of social technologies has significantly enhanced our capacity to

engage in sharing, cooperation, and joint actions. A significant transformation is occurring as individuals ranging from professionals in the field of biology to disgruntled airline passengers adopt these tools. Therefore, one might contend that the utilisation of novel tools enhances communication and efficiency within the professional setting, as well as fosters effective interaction among employees, partners, and clients. Based on recent study conducted by Aberdeen Group (www.aberdeen.com), firms that exhibit exemplary proficiency in partnership with the workers, which encompasses the utilisation of Web 2.0 technology, experienced an average reduction of 34% in project completion time. While certain enterprises aim to exploit these benefits, others raise concerns about the imagined privacy and security drawbacks linked to the technologies of Web 2.0. It is argued that these concerns could potentially endanger the organisation or make them hesitant in interacting with potentially crucial customers in a large setting. As a result of exercising prudence, there exists a potential disparity between the anticipated outlook of recently recruited staff and the limitations imposed by their employer. This implies that the reputation of the company as an appealing workplace, which aids in the recruitment of top-tier personnel, may be negatively impacted as these exceptional employees gravitate towards organisations that offer greater flexibility and proactivity.

Therefore, if individuals who possess a comprehensive comprehension of personal branding are successfully securing employment opportunities in innovative organisations, what valuable insights may be gleaned from these trailblazers to enhance one's own professional trajectory?

What is personal branding and why is it relevant?

According to Olins (2003), the concept of a brand can be defined as a symbolic representation that encompasses the important informations linked to a firm, service, or product. The idea of branding has undergone a transformation that extends beyond its initial commercial and corporate applications, encompassing entire nations (such as the case of Great Britain PLC) as well as prominent sports entities (such as Manchester United FC). This study focuses on the phenomenon of branding as it pertains to individual personalities. As per the analysis provided by Chris Brogan (www.chrisbrogan.com), an effective personal brand encompasses elements such as goodwill, faith, focus, and consideration. By cultivating a personal and individual brand, individuals are able to distinguish themselves amidst a vast array of comparable offerings. Fundamentally, you are establishing your unique position in relation to competitors. Scholars such as Li and Bernhoff (2008) and Barghara (2008) have extensively documented the increasing significance of digital marketing in relation to corporate branding. However, the role of social media in marketing for the establishment of an individual brand has got limited scholarly focus. Indeed, the utilisation of personal branding strategies was highly effective in the electoral victory of Barack Obama. Through adept engagement with his supporters and skillful management of detractors, Obama successfully employed a combination of online and offline platforms to raise substantial funds for his campaign.

Figure 1 depicts the most important instruments accessible today for enhancing a personal or individual brand.

In the subsequent para, we will conduct a more detailed examination of a number of these tools. Prior to proceeding, it is imperative to emphasise the need of vigilantly monitoring one's online presence for personal references, as a means of preemptively safeguarding oneself from unforeseen complications throughout the process of seeking employment. Based on a recent survey conducted by CareerBuilder, which involved a sample of over 31,000 firms, it was found that a significant proportion of employers, namely more than 20%, utilise social networking platforms as a means to evaluate job applicants. This information can be accessed on the official CareerBuilder website (www.careerbuilder.com). If a talent search agency were to conduct an online search using an applicant's name, what information would they likely uncover? It is possible that the retrieval of past Facebook photographs could potentially result in significant embarrassment. However, it is preferable that among the search outcomes, a photograph depicting the applicant receiving an accolade for his accomplishments from his educational institution, a hyperlink to his blog that highlights his areas of interest and expertise, or a hyperlink to his LinkedIn profile containing commendatory testimonials from individuals familiar with his character and abilities, would be prominently displayed.

Based on the findings of the CareerBuilder poll, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of employers, from 11 percent in 2006 to 22 percent, that utilise social networking platforms like as MySpace and Facebook as a means to examine the online conduct of potential applicants. According to a survey conducted among hiring managers that utilise social media platforms, it was revealed that 33% of respondents encountered information on these sites that led them to discontinue the evaluation process for a job applicant. Conversely, 24% of the hiring managers reported coming across content that influenced them to make a decision to hire a certain candidate. Based on the perspectives of these managers, it is suggested that individuals who have profiles in various social networking sites that project a dignified image and have positive references may enhance their prospects of securing employment. This is attributed to the notion that such accounts offer a comprehensive view of the individual, enabling a more accurate assessment of their potential compatibility with the organisation.

As to the findings of CareerBuilder, the subsequent domains of apprehension have been identified on social networking platforms:

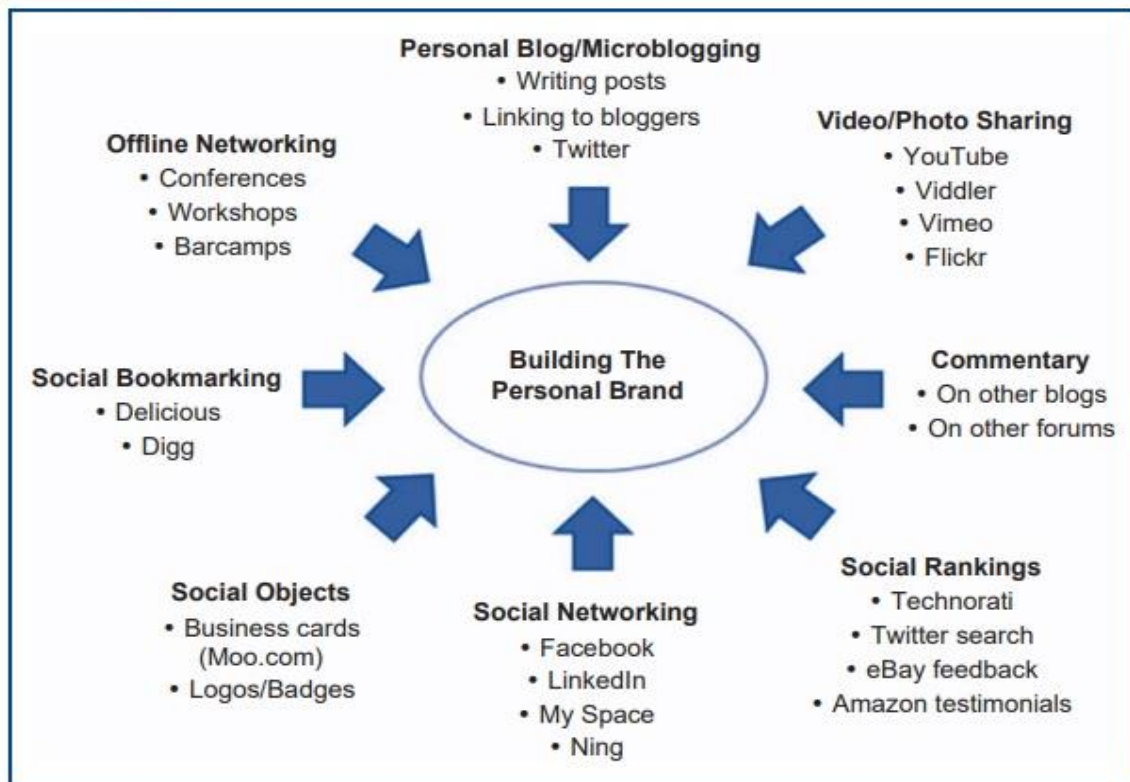
According to a survey conducted among managers, around 41 percent of them identified alcohol or drug usage as a prominent concern. The factors that contribute to negative impressions of candidates on social media platforms include the posting of inappropriate photographs or material (40 percent), inadequate communication skills (29 percent), the act of speaking negatively about former employers or colleagues (28 percent), the provision of inaccurate qualifications (27 percent), and the use of unprofessional screen names (22 percent).

Based on the findings of their report, it is recommended that individuals seeking employment do the following actions:

1. Eliminate any photographs, information, or connections that may convey an unfavourable impression to prospective employers.
2. Regularly update their social networking sites to showcase their most recent achievements.
3. It is advisable to implement comment filtering measures in order to prevent the dissemination of problematic content.
4. It is recommended to refrain from affiliating with groups that possess names that may deter prospective employers.
5. It is worth considering the option of configuring one's profile settings to private, thereby restricting access just to selected individuals within one's network.

The primary assertion is that individuals can optimise the prospects of cultivating their personal brand in a desired trajectory and mitigate the repercussions of any unfavourable content by proactively overseeing their internet presence. Undoubtedly, Google assumes a crucial role in this particular procedure. In the subsequent part, we analyse the progressively prevalent position assumed by Google in the establishment and administration of an online persona, utilising illustrations derived from our case studies.

Figure 1



The effective management of a Google profile

According to Chris Brogan, Google might be seen as a "reputation management system." In order to enhance discoverability via online search, it is imperative to ensure that a profile is prominently featured inside Google's search results. While it is true that there are alternative search engines, it is evident that Google holds a significant majority share in the search business, establishing itself as the prevailing player. There exist several strategies to enhance a Google profile:

1. It is advisable to promote the acquisition of backlinks to the webpage from reputable sites, particularly those which hold significance as prominent websites with a popular SEO rankings.
2. Establishing external links to superior material is recommended.
3. Ensuring regular updates to the content is crucial, as Google tends to favour organic growth, which entails gradual development over time. Any endeavour to artificially enhance ranking through the sudden posting of substantial content or new links is likely to yield adverse consequences.
4. It is advisable to submit the website for inclusion in prominent directories of websites.

One can effectively monitor newly available information by establishing a Google Alert using the individual's name as the search query (www.google.com/alerts). The aforementioned tool functions as an automated search agent, facilitating prompt email notifications regarding the discovery of fresh internet data containing a specified term.

The flowchart presented above illustrates the wide array of methods, encompassing both offline and online platforms that can be utilised to enhance one's Google profile. The particular emphasis placed on the tools utilised may differ depending on individual circumstances. However, in this context, we concentrate on the primary domains of social networking and blogging to offer insight into their potential for personal brand development.

1. The act of blogging

A blog has the capability to be included into a webpage or function independently as a tool of marketing, maintained by a specialised firm like Blogger (www.blogger.com) or Wordpress (www.wordpress.com). A blog can be distinguished from a webpage due to its engaging nature, utilisation of a "conversational voice," and regularity of updates. The potential effectiveness of viral marketing lies in the substantial number of individuals who provide backlinks to the content writer's posts. Blogs offer a platform for individuals to develop their personal brand by effectively communicating their expertise in certain areas related to their profession. Additionally, blogs provide possibilities for individuals to share their own narratives in a captivating and original manner. The phenomenon of a "network effect" might arise when other bloggers establish links to a certain blog post or when comments are generated on another individual's blog. This occurrence subsequently contributes to an amplified online visibility on

prominent search engines as time progresses. According to Seth Godin, blogs can be seen as effective tools for attracting attention from search engines, particularly Google.

Incorporation of audio and video elements is also feasible in the context of blog entries. Gary Vaynerchuk, through his consistent production of wine tasting video blogs and extensive participation in conferences and television appearances, has successfully contributed to the significant growth of a modest family enterprise into a multinational corporation generating \$50 million in revenue within a relatively short timeframe.

Andy Lopata has achieved a notable accomplishment by securing the top position on a United Kingdom Google search for the terms "business networking strategy." This feat is particularly noteworthy considering the competitive nature of these generic keywords. Lopata's blog, located at www.businessnetworkingstrategy.com, is highly regarded for its active engagement and provision of valuable information on networking.

2. The utilisation of LinkedIn for social networking purposes.

Professional networking platforms like LinkedIn have experienced advantages due to the prevailing unfavourable economic circumstances, as individuals increasingly rely on their online connections to seek employment opportunities.

Based on a report published in the Financial Times on October 26, 2008, LinkedIn has defied prevailing market conditions by securing further funding from investors, resulting in a valuation of \$1 billion and a global membership base of 30 million individuals. Furthermore, the site has recently experienced a significant enhancement in its functionality through collaborations with several companies that provide Web 2.0 based services. These services enable participants to: Collaborative activity can be facilitated by utilising the Huddle application's private workspaces, which enable users to share files within their network.

Users can engage in information sharing and stay updated with their network by utilising various applications. For instance, they can share details about their reading preferences by utilising the Amazon application, and keep their network informed about their vacation plans with the TripIt application.

Explore novel methods of self-presentation in the LinkedIn profile. For instance, the Google Docs programme enables the integration of presentations into a user's profile. SlideShare facilitates the forwarding and giving comments on presentations within a network. Additionally, WordPress provides the capability to showcase a blog.

Obtain valuable insights about a potential employer by utilising the Company Buzz feature, which facilitates the monitoring of talks pertaining to the company.

By consistently maintaining and updating a LinkedIn profile, the probability of one's profile being prominently included in search results when individuals are seeking potential candidates for employment or business collaborations on the platform is enhanced. The consistent act of adding new connections and keeping profile content up to date contributes to a person's "Google Juice." This is due to the permission provided by LinkedIn for making profile information

accessible for search engine indexing, and the platform holds a high ranking on Google. In order to enhance the prominence of the profile in the results of various search engines, it is advisable to utilise it across many web platforms. When providing comments on a blog, it is advisable to provide a hyperlink to the LinkedIn profile within the signature. This allows others who are interested in the content to conveniently access additional information by clicking on the provided link.

Instead of assuming the danger associated with collaborating with an unfamiliar individual, the majority of individuals tend to opt for working alongside individuals who are acquainted with and trusted by their own social circle. The inclusion of a comprehensive LinkedIn profile has increasingly become a mandatory requirement for numerous recruiters to forward job applications to the stage of interview. An "exhaustive" profile has three testimonials as minimum from previous recruiters, along with comprehensive information regarding the individual's career history, affiliations, and educational background. The inclusion of relevant keywords in one's profile can enhance the likelihood of getting discovered by recruiters who are actively seeking potential candidates within a specific field of interest. The individual being interviewed, Ellis Pratt, operates a company that specialises in the field of technical authoring. The individual in question possesses a substantial network of professional contacts on LinkedIn, exceeding a count of 500. Additionally, they have received a notable number of public endorsements from contented clients and business associates, totalling 42.

Individuals seeking employment who actively engage on LinkedIn have the opportunity to utilise the testimonial system to evaluate their potential supervisor, or alternatively, locate an individual who has previously occupied the very position they are applying for. The endorsement has played a crucial role in enhancing trust and mitigating the historically prevalent risk and uncertainty in the recruitment process, benefiting both the staff and the management.

3. Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging social networking site that facilitates the dissemination of concise messages, limited to a maximum of 140 letters or characters, via the internet or smartphones. Twitter enables account holders to "follow" specific individuals and get updates on their messages. Additionally, users can market themselves or their businesses to their own followers. While each "tweet" is less in length compared to an SMS message, it has the capability to include links to various multimedia content such as photographs, videos, job vacancies, or recommendations for certain blog entries.

The provided service enables individuals to stay updated on current trends and maintain communication with their contacts in a manner that would be challenging to imitate in face-to-face interactions. Twitter serves as an additional platform through which employers can establish connections between their present and prospective employees, thereby fostering a sense of loyalty towards the organisation. The utilisation of Twitter in an efficient manner

inherently requires a commitment of time and focus, therefore emphasising the significance of being discerning in the choice of individuals to follow, considering both their quality and quantity. When it comes to cultivating an individual's personal brand, Twitter can serve as a valuable tool for establishing oneself as a well-connected, knowledgeable, and personable figure. Additionally, it enables individuals to engage with other individuals who share similar interests, while also keeping them updated on potential job opportunities that may be brought to their attention by their network of contacts. An instance of an individual engaged in a consultancy enterprise, Nikki Pilkington, provides guidance to small-scale enterprises on optimising their use of social media platforms. At present, her Twitter account boasts a following of 5,610 individuals and has achieved a position within the top 1% of worldwide Twitter users, as determined by www.twittergrader.com. Nikki offers a service known as Tweet mentor, which delivers a daily compilation of suggestions and advice via email. This service aims to assist individuals who are new to Twitter in optimising its potential for their commercial endeavours.

Challenges in establishing and maintaining personal branding and final remarks.

Continuous dedication and investment of time and effort are necessary for the development and upkeep of online profiles, as well as for acquiring knowledge about new tools and determining the optimal timing for their integration into the overall strategy. Although the outcomes may not manifest immediately, it is possible to monitor progress by utilising Google Alerts, as previously mentioned. The importance of one-on-one brand building factors may not be overlooked. A study conducted by Harris and Rae (2009) has demonstrated that online networking and offline communication skills are not mutually exclusive. In other words, individuals who excel in online networking also tend to be proficient in offline communication. Similar to many aspects of life, the outcomes one achieves are directly proportional to the effort and dedication invested, ultimately resulting in the fruition of one's endeavours.

The importance of authenticity cannot be overstated. If personal branding is cultivated solely on a superficial basis, such as relying on ego, spin, or leveraging the accomplishments of others, its longevity will be compromised. A crucial factor that propels the advancement of online cooperation is the presence of a trust-based culture, an aspect that is often lacking in traditional settings. The words "Givers Gain" and "Paying it Forward" are commonly encountered in the context of social networking. One effective strategy for establishing brand impact over a sustained period of time is to cultivate a reputation as a provider of valuable and practical information and guidance. This approach has been successfully implemented by Chris Brogan on a worldwide scale, as well as by the firms included in our case studies at a more regional level. Over a temporal duration, it becomes evident that accomplished persons acquire a reputation and status derived from a blend of their proficiency and network, rendering them appealing to other participants within the same domain. An authentic personal brand has a proven history of delivering value and a commitment to continue providing value in the future.

Like any kind of marketing communication, this is crucial to customise the design and matter to suit the specific requirements of the target audiences. A significant number of employers continue to exhibit a preference for utilising conventional modes of communication. Consequently, it becomes imperative to conduct prior research in order to determine the most effective approach for engaging with such employers.

It is crucial to consider that personal branding has the potential to be excessively successful, particularly from the perspective of certain businesses that may perceive individuals who excel at building their personal brand as a source of concern. As an employee of a large and established firm, if one were to significantly enhance their personal brand profile, it may potentially give rise to scepticism and cynicism. This is particularly true if the individual's brand seems to overshadow those of higher-ranking superiors or even the overall corporate brand. Certainly, certain individuals who cultivate their personal brand have the ability to negatively impact the organisations they are affiliated with, as exemplified by the recent controversy surrounding Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). However, it is commonly observed that individuals who effectively cultivate a genuine personal brand are typically exceptional employees who are in high demand by the management. This is primarily due to their proficiency in leveraging their personal social capital to advance both the organization's interests and their own career growth. Consequently, there exists a genuine congruence between the intrinsic core beliefs of the organisation and the outward manifestation of the individual's brand.

Conclusion

"In conclusion, this research has delved into the significant role that social media platforms play in shaping and enhancing an individual's personal brand. Through careful curation of content, engagement with followers, and strategic use of various social media tools, individuals can effectively establish and promote their unique personal brands. Our findings emphasize the importance of authenticity, consistency, and relevance in building a strong personal brand online. By leveraging the power of social media, individuals can not only showcase their skills and expertise but also connect with a wider audience, establish credibility, and ultimately, advance their personal and professional goals. As social media continues to evolve, it is essential for individuals to adapt their personal branding strategies accordingly. Staying abreast of emerging trends and platforms, while remaining true to their brand identity, will enable individuals to maintain a competitive edge in the digital landscape. In summary, this research underscores the transformative potential of social media in building and nurturing an individual's personal brand. By understanding and harnessing the dynamics of social media platforms, individuals can cultivate a strong and influential online presence that resonates with their target audience, ultimately leading to greater opportunities for growth and success."

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