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“The Role of Personal Branding in Customer Experience &
Individual Career Growth”

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“The Role of Personal Branding in Customer Experience & Individual Career Growth”

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“Dedicated to my family, my husband and my baby boy who will soon be born who was my strongest motivation and my inspiration for the future.”

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα πτυχιακή εργασία εξετάζει την επιχειρηματική αξία του προσωπικού branding, καθώς και τη συσχέτισή του με τη συναισθηματική νοημοσύνη, την εμπειρία του πελάτη, την εμπιστοσύνη του πελάτη, την επαγγελματική εξέλιξη και την οργανωσιακή επίδραση. Η μελέτη λαμβάνει υπόψη την αυξανόμενη σημασία της επαγγελματικής ταυτότητας στο σύγχρονο εργασιακό περιβάλλον, όπου δεν αρκεί πλέον μόνο η τεχνική κατάρτιση, αλλά απαιτούνται επίσης αξιοπιστία, επικοινωνιακή ικανότητα, ορατότητα και συνέπεια. Για την επίτευξη των στόχων της έρευνας υιοθετήθηκε ποσοτική ερευνητική προσέγγιση, με τη χρήση δομημένου ερωτηματολογίου, το οποίο απαντήθηκε από 108 επαγγελματίες από διαφορετικούς κλάδους και οργανωσιακά επίπεδα. Όλες οι βασικές μεταβλητές της έρευνας αξιολογήθηκαν θετικά από τους συμμετέχοντες. Η επαγγελματική εξέλιξη και η οργανωσιακή επίδραση κατέγραψαν τις υψηλότερες συνολικές αξιολογήσεις, ενώ ακολούθησαν η εμπειρία του πελάτη, η εμπιστοσύνη του πελάτη, το προσωπικό branding και η συναισθηματική νοημοσύνη. Τα αποτελέσματα της ανάλυσης συσχετίσεων έδειξαν ότι οι βασικές μεταβλητές συνδέονται θετικά μεταξύ τους. Ιδιαίτερα σημαντική ήταν η θετική συσχέτιση μεταξύ της συναισθηματικής νοημοσύνης και του προσωπικού branding, καθώς και μεταξύ του προσωπικού branding και της επαγγελματικής εξέλιξης. Επιπλέον, διαπιστώθηκε θετική σχέση ανάμεσα στο προσωπικό branding, την εμπειρία του πελάτη και την εμπιστοσύνη του πελάτη. Με βάση τα ευρήματα, προκύπτει ότι το προσωπικό branding μπορεί να λειτουργήσει τόσο ως εργαλείο ατομικής επαγγελματικής ανάπτυξης όσο και ως οργανωσιακό πλεονέκτημα, συμβάλλοντας στην ενίσχυση της εμπιστοσύνης, της επαγγελματικής αξίας και της ποιότητας των εργασιακών και πελατειακών σχέσεων. Η εργασία ολοκληρώνεται με πρακτικές επισημάνσεις για τους σύγχρονους εργαζομένους και τους οργανισμούς.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Προσωπικό branding, εμπειρία πελάτη, εμπιστοσύνη πελάτη, συναισθηματική νοημοσύνη, επαγγελματική εξέλιξη, οργανωσιακή επίδραση.

Abstract

This thesis explores the business value of personal branding as well as its correlation with emotional intelligence, customer experience, customer trust, career growth and organizational impact. The study takes into account the increasing significance of professional identity in the world of work today, where more than just technical competence is expected, but also credibility, communication, visibility and consistency. The study adopted a quantitative research design, which involved a structured questionnaire that was answered by 108 practitioners from various industries and organizational levels. All of the key constructs were rated positively by the participants with career growth and organizational impact scoring highest overall, followed by customer experience, customer trust, personal branding and emotional intelligence. The results of the correlation analysis showed that the basic variables were positively correlated with each other, especially emotional intelligence and personal branding, and personal branding and career growth were strongly correlated. There was also a positive correlation with personal branding and customer experience and trust. Based on the results, it can be inferred that personal branding can be a tool for individual career and an asset for the organization, which can be used to build confidence and value in the workplace. The thesis ends with implications for today's employees and organizations.

Keywords: Personal branding; Customer experience; Customer trust; Emotional intelligence; Career growth; Organizational impact.

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Introduction

Background of the study

Today's working world is not the only one that has changed: evaluations of employees are no longer based solely on their skills, formal qualifications or job descriptions. Now more than ever, they are also evaluated on how they market themselves, communicate value and establish a professional brand. This is one process that is widely referred to as personal branding. Personal branding is the deliberate act of individuals to create and put forward a clear image, of what they are, what they stand for and what value they have to provide to their employers, customers and professional networks (Peters, 1997; Shepherd, 2005). It has taken on a new dimension in today's working world where competition, digital communication and customer expectations have altered the dynamic between employees, organisations and customers.

The concept of branding was traditionally connected with products, services and companies. In more recent times, however, branding has been extended to individuals as well. Employees can establish a professional tone in their conduct, communication, knowledge, online activities and interaction with others. In this context, personal branding isn't merely about self promotion. It also means consistency, credibility and being able to build trust (Montoya & Vandehey, 2009). A powerful personal brand can boost visibility, enhance professional reputation and make employees more attractive to employers or clients for the individuals. In the context of organisations, individuals who possess robust personal brands can make a positive impact on the customer experience, particularly in service industries where customers are directly facing employees.

A major theme of this study is also customer experience. It is the general impression that customers have as a result of their contact with a company, its staff, products and services (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In many sectors, the employee is the first (and often the last) face of the customer. Hence, the appearance, communication, problem solving and professionalism of employees can impact the customer's impression of the business. A positive employee image can lead to increased customer trust, satisfaction and loyalty.

Conversely, if communication is lacking or not professional, some customers might experience a negative customer experience despite having a great product or service.

This is why personal branding can be considered as a connection between employee development and customer perception. Having a clear professional identity can help make employees more confident, motivated and career oriented. Meanwhile, customers might be more inclined to favor workers who come across as knowledgeable, reliable and authentic. This is indeed a topic of research interest because personal branding can impact internal workplace development as well as impact external customer experience.

Research problem

While “personal branding” is a very fashionable term in the world of business, marketing and career development, the concept of personal branding can sometimes be elusive in the workplace. The definition of personal branding is something that many employees only know as promoting themselves online, for example via LinkedIn or social media. But personal brand is more than an online presence. It entails professional behaviour, professional communication, values, competence, reliability and the ability to make a consistent impression.

This study's research problem is the lack of understanding of the impact of personal branding on employees' career advancement and customer experience simultaneously. The debates currently swirling about usually revolve around the idea of personal branding to help individuals succeed in their careers or customer experience as a marketing- and service-management topic. The link between the two is not given a lot of attention. However, in real workplaces these areas are closely inter-related. By developing a personal brand, employees can enhance their own job prospects, and they may have an impact on how customers perceive the organisation.

This raises the question of whether personal branding is beneficial for employees' professional development, and if it can lead to an enhanced customer experience. As such, the study aims to concentrate on the correlation between personal branding, employee development and customer perception.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore the significance of personal branding in the workplace and to gain insights into the impact it has on employee career development and customer experience.

The aims of the study are:

1. Identify and describe what personal branding is and why it is important in today's workplace.
2. To explore ways that personal branding can help the growth and development of employees.
3. To investigate Customer experience and Customer perception in the work place.
4. To determine if employee's personal brands can make a difference in the customer's perception of a company or service.
5. To analyse the answers given in the questionnaire to find the key opinions and trends about personal branding, career development and customer experience.
6. To give conclusions and recommendations for employees/organisations.

Importance of the study

This study is significant as personal branding will be more and more relevant in the present day competitive labour market. Staff members should not only do their jobs well, but also articulate their strengths, establish trust and demonstrate professional value. With a strong personal brand, employees can be more visible, they can be more confident and more competitive. It can also help with long-term career development to help people understand what they're good at and to market that to their employers, colleagues and customers.

The research is significant for organisations as well. In many companies, particularly those in service industries, customer experience is heavily impacted by employees. Often, the professionalism and communication of employees are the indicators of how customers perceive a company, and their behaviour reflects this. Hence, it may be worth organisations to encourage positive personal branding among their employees, consistent

with the company values and image. This can help to enhance the service quality, customer trust and customer satisfaction.

Moreover, it advances the conversation in the academic community, linking three concepts personal branding, employee career growth and customer experience. All these concepts can be analysed in conjunction with each other to gain a larger perspective of the impact on internal career development and external customer perception.

Scope of the study

This study aims to narrow down the areas of personal branding in the workplace and its correlation with employee development and customer experience. The study will explore the perception of personal branding, if it is perceived as a tool for career progression and if it affects customer perception. The study will be based on the responses of the selected participants to the questionnaires.

The study is not designed to discuss corporate branding as a whole or to go into a comprehensive marketing strategy of organisations. Rather, it is personal branding of employees and how that can impact on their career development and the customer's experience of a service or organisation. The study also has the limitation of the number of respondents and the nature of the respondents because the findings will depend on the respondents who have participated in the study.

In general the chapter has: Provided the background for the study; Defined the research problem; Stated the aim and objectives of the study; Indicated the significance of the study and delimited the scope of the study. A literature review of the relevant literature related to personal branding, customer experience and career growth will be conducted in the following chapter.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 Personal Branding as a Strategic Business and Career Concept

1.1.1 The Evolution of Personal Branding as a Strategic Business Concept

Personal branding has grown from a very specific concept of "self-presentation" into a multi-faceted strategy that affects employability, customer experience, organizational behavior, and career sustainability. In the past, personal branding had a reputation management connotation, visibility and the conscious creation of a positive professional image. Today, however, the idea of personal branding is perceived more as a process of communicating, differentiating and providing value in a professional and/or organizational context. Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova (2018) view personal branding as a phenomenon that joins the areas of marketing, career studies, psychology and organizational behavior, where people are no longer passive with their skills but are active in the creation of their professional value. This change is especially significant in the current job market, where professional identity, credibility and apparent expertise can impact not only the job market, but also the way employees treat each other, their organizations and customers.

Personal branding as a business concept is a product of the evolution of the nature of work, communication and organizational value creation. Today, it is no longer a question of whether you have the necessary qualifications and skills, but of whether you can make it work in the workplace. Rather, people are expected to be visible, authentic, have relational skills, be adaptable and communicate value to multiple stakeholder groups. According to Khedher (2019), personal branding is a key factor of employability as it helps individuals to make themselves more visible and coherent with their competencies and values in the labour market. Likewise, according to Gorbatov, Khapova, and Lysova (2019), personal branding can make a difference in the career field, as it can help boost recognition, professional opportunities, and distinctiveness. The findings suggest that personal branding is no longer limited to creating an image and has become a strategic asset in the career field, which individuals use to try to improve internal recognition within organisations as well as external recognition in the labour market.

The growing digital communication platforms and professional social media have further enhanced the strategic nature of personal branding. The construction, assessment and circulation of professional identities have changed in online settings. Social media

professionals are more and more becoming what Jacobson (2020) describes as brands themselves, as a certain level of visibility is needed in the digital world and that demands a constant positioning in front of the current and future audience. Similarly, Chen, Rui, and Whinston (2021) show how social media personal branding can have an impact on career, indicating that digital self-presentation is not symbolic, but can have tangible professional implications. Smith and Fischer (2021) also theorize person brand building in the context of organized online attention economies where visibility, attention and credibility are increasingly limited commodities which individuals need to strategically manage. Hence, the development of personal branding is closely linked to the digitisation of the professional life: individuals are more and more required to communicate online their expertise, reliability, professional relevance in a consistent, differentiated and strategically significant manner.

Meanwhile, there has been new literature that has questioned the notion that personal branding simply is about selling oneself. Personal branding is not a matter of just visibility or impression management anymore, but building relationships, trust, and authenticity with stakeholders. Dumont and Ots (2020) note that personal branding is not something that can be created by the individual and is now deeply social and relational, which means that the personal brand does not exist only as the result of the action of the individual, but is co-created through social interaction and audience interpretation. Osorio, Centeno and Cambra-Fierro (2020) also state that human brands are built from relational, symbolic and experiential aspects, therefore, the value of a personal brand will be based on the perception and experience it generates in others. This is a relational approach that is especially applicable to business situations where employees, managers, consultants, service providers, and leaders are directly involved with customers or other organizational stakeholders. In these situations, the personal brand is not just a marketing tool; it is a symbol of trust, credibility, and professional confidence.

Personal branding is also strategically relevant to the business by the link to customer experience. According to customer experience research, value is created through the interactions, perceptions, emotions and meanings that arise over time over several touchpoints of the customer and organization (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). When someone at work is the main actor in the touchpoint, the personal attributes, tone, believability and presence of that actor may directly influence customer evaluation of the value proposition

of the organization. The need for strategic frameworks that can manage customer experience in complex environments has been stressed by Holmlund et al. (2020), and meaningful insights into customer experience need to focus on interactions and processes which are important to the customer as McColl-Kennedy et al. (2019) have pointed out. In this sense, personal branding can be seen as part of the human infrastructure of customer experience: competent people, who are emotionally intelligent, honest and reliable, could be the key to customer trust and satisfaction, thus making personal branding an asset for the organization.

Further, these changes in personal branding relate to organizational behavior: The personal brand of employees and leaders can affect identification, motivation, organizational integrity and credibility and so on. The personal branding of leaders on professional social media platforms is determined by their motivations for doing it, how they communicate, and what they are expecting to achieve, as demonstrated by Venciute, Yue, and Thelen (2024), which means that personal branding is becoming more and more relevant in the context of leadership visibility and stakeholder communication. This aligns with research on behavioural integrity that implies there is an impact on employee perceptions and behavioural outcomes when words and actions do not match (Ete et al., 2022). Likewise, Choi, Yoon, and Kim (2020) link leader behavioral integrity to employee performance, further highlighting that integrity and consistency are not merely ethical ideals but resources for organizations. Therefore, personal branding becomes strategic when it is based on behavior, constants of value and trust in relationships and not only on impression management.

Personal branding has become strategically relevant as it is connected to the competitiveness of the organization through individual career development. A sustainable career theory focuses on the interplay between individuals, organizations, and the wider context of the labour market, as well as on the individual's ambition (De Vos, Van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2020). Personal branding plays a role in this process as it enables professionals to communicate their strengths, define their value and create their reputation over time. Meanwhile, organizations can gain from the employees who possess personal brands that can be used to strengthen customer relationships, improve service quality, and bolster the credibility of the organization. The rise of personal branding is a sign of a larger shift in business philosophy: personal identity is not a matter of business identity

and business value, but rather it is connected and combined. However, personal branding must be analyzed not only as individual career practice, but also as a business concept that relates to professional reputation, customer experience, organizational behavior and value creation in the long term.

1.1.2 The Concept of Personal Branding

Personal branding is a conscious and conscious effort to create, communicate and manage the professional worth that a person brings to a targeted group. While many people think of personal branding in terms of visibilities, self-promotion, or digital reputation, personal branding is a more complex phenomenon according to the academic literature available today that it is a combination of identity, differentiation, credibility, relational value and strategic career behavior. According to Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova 2018, personal branding is an interdisciplinary phenomenon, which lies at the intersection of marketing, psychology, career studies, and organizational behavior. These interdisciplinary characteristics are significant because they signify that personal branding is not only a marketing tool used on personal entities, but a process whereby professionals construct the meaning of their knowledge, values, capabilities and behavioural attributes. In this aspect, personal branding is a two-way process – inside part (self-awareness, values, understanding of professional strengths) and outside part (communication, consistency, recognition by stakeholders).

One of the key aspects of personal branding is that it makes the person more of a labour market participant and more of a professional meaning constructor. In the traditional career concept, professional identity was defined by job titles, organizational affiliation, formal qualifications, or hierarchy. Personal branding, on the other hand, is about the individual's ability to communicate a unique professional voice that is present in both organizational and digital environments. According to Khedher (2019), personal branding is strongly connected to employability as it helps people to stand out in today's competitive job market in order to be more employable. This positioning is not just about stating the competencies; it's about making them visible, credible and relevant to employers, colleagues, clients and customers. Thus, personal branding also involves a conscious process of harmonizing the personal traits with the market demands and making sure there is consistency between what the professional says about him/herself and what the professional does.

It is a relationally rich concept. A personal brand is not simply an attempt by an individual to create a personal brand; it is a meaningful personal brand when it is recognised, interpreted and validated by others. Given the importance of relationships with stakeholders, Dumont and Ots (2020) note that personal branding is not something that is solely determined by the individual. This perspective is especially relevant as it confronts the limited idea of personal branding as a form of individual self-packaging. Rather, it frames the personal brand as a socially situated resource, relying on trust, reputation, credibility and relationship-building. Osorio, Centeno, and Cambra-Fierro (2020) also contribute in their analysis of human brands, which are built through symbolisation, relationality and experience. Personal branding, then, must not only be interpreted as what an individual says about himself, but also as the significance that stakeholders associate with him as a result of repeated experiences and interactions.

A key component of personal branding is differentiation. In a world of full employment, people have to prove they have the right stuff, that they have the right skills, but also that they have something different – a combination of skills, personality, values, and behaviour. According to Scheidt, Gelhard and Henseler (2020), personal branding is a young, but rapidly growing research area due to its relevance in today's professional competition and identity management. But differentiation is not about artificial uniqueness, or overstatement. Authenticity and consistency are key to developing a sustainable personal brand. When professionals convey an image that is inconsistent with actual behavior, it can lead to a loss of trust and loss of credibility. This is especially crucial in the organizational setting because your personal brand needs to be aligned with your actions. The study of behavioural integrity shows that integrity of verbal and nonverbal actions helps to shape the evaluation of reliability and ethical consistency of professionals (Ete et al., 2022). Thus, the conceptual underpinning of personal branding is not just visibility and differentiation but also the ethicality of the congruence of identity, communication, and action.

Personal branding has a much wider meaning and importance in the digital era. Professional identity is now more and more conveyed in online spaces such as social media, professional networking, and digital content systems. According to Jacobson (2020), social media managers are often forced to act as brands themselves as they have to control their visibility and how they are viewed by the public in the future. For instance,

Chen, Rui and Whinston (2021) find that SBP can influence career outcomes, suggesting that the digital presentation of the self can lead to quantifiable career consequences. It is important to note that personal branding is not only a digital phenomenon, but that digitalisation has increased the visibility, speed and reach of personal brand formation. Communication style, sharing of expertise, consistency of message, and engagement of the audience can contribute to the creation, maintenance, or undermining of a professional reputation in digital spaces. Smith and Fischer (2021) also propose that person brand building is happening in particular online attention economies; person brand is a valuable and scarce resource. In this new landscape, the idea of personal branding needs to incorporate the strategic management of visibility, in which professional audiences are constantly assessing signs of credibility and relevance.

Personal branding is also correlating with soft skills and personal capabilities, as professional reputation is not only built based on the technical skills. Self-awareness, emotional intelligence, motivation, communication skills and integrity are all part of the experience of a professional as seen by others. It is important to self-awareness in adult development according to Carden, Jones and Passmore (2022) adults should have reflective capacity to know their strengths, weaknesses and developmental needs. Emotional intelligence is also applicable because it is related to critical employee outcomes and career outcomes (Doğru, 2022; Pirsoul et al., 2023). From a personal branding perspective, these capabilities enable the individual to communicate effectively, build trust, manage relationships and adjust to various stakeholder expectations. Thus, a personal brand is more than a projection – it is a measure of the professional's ability to consistently deliver value by behaviour, interaction and emotional competence.

Personal branding can be viewed as a link between individual career development and value creation for the organization. According to Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova (2019), personal branding can support the success of one's career by making him/her known and appreciated in professional life. But it's not just about personal development. People in service-related or customer-facing roles have the potential to affect how customers feel and experience the service when it comes to their personal credibility, communication approach, and professional image. Customer experience research highlights that value is created in the interactions and touchpoints between the customer and the organisation (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). As the professionals build strong personal brands based on

trust, competence, and relational quality, they may improve their own career opportunities as well as the organization's ability to create positive customer experiences. “Personal branding” should therefore be considered as a strategic, relational and value creating process, which is connected to the personal identity, professional behavior, perception of the stakeholders and business result.

1.1.3 Personal Branding in the Modern Workplace

In today's work context, the construction, communication, and maintenance of one's value in highly dynamic organizational and labour market settings is increasingly achieved through the use of personal branding. Today's workplace is defined by increased competition, the requirement for electronic visibility, changing work career models and an expectation for employees to show a recognizable professional image. In this environment, personal branding is not reserved for entrepreneurs, celebrities or public figures; it's a topic of interest to employees, managers, leaders, consultants, and service professionals who need to stand out and gain trust among many stakeholders. Gorbатов, Khapova, and Lysova (2018) claim that personal branding is an interdisciplinary phenomenon, linking career development, psychology, marketing, and organizational behavior, making it especially relevant to the understanding of the functioning of a person in today's work environment. Thus, in the context of the modern workplace, personal branding is no longer a secondary reputation management tool, but a strategic practice that is part and parcel of daily professional life, professional choices and organizational life.

One of the main reasons why personal branding has become a big deal at work is because of the evolving nature of work. Traditional organisational careers tended to have characteristics of long-term employment, hierarchical progression, and fairly stable work based identity. In contrast, modern professions are more fluid, liminal and defined by ongoing employability, visibility, and adaptability. In fact, Khedher (2019) highlights that personal branding plays a part in employability as it allows people to define and express their professional value in order to resonate with those watching in the labour market. Especially in settings where workers are expected to develop themselves and stay competitive outside the confines of any given organization. In a similar vein, De Vos, Van der Heijden, and Akkermans (2020) put forward that the emergence of sustainable careers is the result of a combination of individual agency, organizational context and labour

market conditions. Personal branding falls under this umbrella, as it helps professionals actively craft their career story, highlight their talents and stay relevant in the long run.

Personal branding is also relevant in the modern company as it affects the perception of employees within the company. Competence, reliability, and potential are not only judged by objective measures of professional performance but also by the judgment of supervisors, colleagues, and others who make decisions about a person's professional status. Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova (2019), demonstrate that personal branding can aid professional success by creating the opportunity for people to be noticed and appreciated in career settings. This does not mean that performance is supplanted by personal branding, but rather that performance is frequently communicated, interpreted and socially acknowledged to derive career advantages. Those employees who can express their strengths, show consistency, and match their professional image to their employer's message may be more likely to be promoted, to be considered for leadership positions and to achieve career transitions. In this context, personal branding is used as a reputation capital, a link between skills and value.

With the digitalization of work, personal branding has become even more critical. The brand of a professional is no longer created just in person-to-person interaction but also via digital channels, social media, online content and on professional networks. Jacobson (2020) has claimed that today's social media managers are brands because they are required to deal with their visibility in front of both existing and future audiences. That observation can be made about many professionals who now have a digital identity that acts as an extension of their professional identity. This suggests that personal branding in social media can influence career-related variables, as shown by Chen, Rui, and Whinston (2021), which suggests that digital self-presentation is not just symbolic but also has tangible professional implications. So, employees are judged today not just by the formal organizational structures, but also by what they've done digitally to indicate their expertise, credibility and engagement. This not only offers career development opportunities, but also places a strain on professionals to be consistent with their online and offline identities.

But good personal branding in the workplace isn't just about being online or selling yourself. Recent studies highlight the relational character of personal brands in their embeddedness in the social sphere and their creation by stakeholders. According to Dumont and Ots (2020), personal branding is influenced by social dynamics and

stakeholder interactions, therefore individuals cannot completely control the meaning of their personal brand. Rather, the personal brand value is created by how others perceive, confirm and react to the person's professional actions. In the context of organisations, this relational understanding is particularly relevant as it is often in the way that employees interact with each other, collaborate and communicate, and build trust that their reputation is formed. Osorio, Centeno and Cambra-Fierro (2020) also note that human brands have symbolic, relational and experiential aspects. So personal branding in the modern workplace needs to be viewed as an ongoing process of relationships and not a static picture that can be sculpted and insisted upon by the individual.

Authenticity and consistency in workplace behavior is key to the credibility of personal branding. Within an organisation, it is frequently the case that staff and bosses are continually assessed based on how well their deeds match their claims and beliefs. This is particularly relevant to behavioral integrity research, which reveals that the gap between words and actions can have a significant impact on employee perception and workplace outcomes. Ete, Epitropaki, Zhou, and Graham (2022) observe that leader and organizational behavioral integrity may impact follower behavioral outcomes through identification process, and Choi, Yoon, and Kim (2020) argue that leader behavioral integrity may influence employee in-role performance. The lessons draw the conclusion that any personal branding that is to have lasting impact must be rooted in ethics. Expert, responsible or trustworthy professionals need to look like it and act like it. If not, the use of personal branding can end up being impression management which can lead to harming credibility.

Personal branding in the contemporary work environment is also closely related to soft skills, as many of these organizational values are generated through communication, cooperation, emotional control, interpersonal relations, etc. While technical skills matter, they often aren't enough for professionals to effectively communicate and collaborate with colleagues, handle customers, supervise employees, or persuade stakeholders. Self-awareness in adult development is crucial for personal branding as the professional needs to know what they're good at, what their values are, what they are not good at and what they need to develop before they can communicate their professional identity. The emotional intelligence also helps to be effective at work as Doğru (2022) demonstrates that emotional intelligence is related to various outcomes of employees and Pirsoul,

Parmentier, Sovet and Nils (2023) explain that emotional intelligence is related to outcomes related to the career. Based on these findings, it can be said that personal branding is a communication strategy, it is also a behavior and psychological ability which requires self-knowledge, emotional competence and interpersonal effectiveness.

But, from an organizational point of view, personal branding can shape employee engagement, leadership presence, and stakeholder trust. Venciute et al. (2024) demonstrate that leaders engage in professional social media platforms for the purpose of personal branding and have specific motivations, communication behaviors, and outcomes. This mirrors the broader trend of leaders being 'seen', 'heard', 'genuine', and 'strategically available' on various platforms. Thus, personal branding can help to enhance leadership influence by making the values, expertise and strategic priorities of the leadership more accessible to employees and other stakeholders. Meanwhile, personal branding is applicable for everyone — not just for top executives — when it comes to organizational value. When it comes to customer-facing employees, specialists and professionals can also help to build up the organization's reputation by exhibiting qualities of reliability, competence and service orientation in their personal brand. Within service settings, the employee is often the main contact with the organisation and thus there may be strong links between his/her reputation and the reputation of the organisation.

The link between personal branding and customer experience is very important in today's workplace where value is being co-created through interactions. According to Becker and Jaakkola (2020), customer experience is the result of customer reactions when they come into contact with the organization in a variety of contact moments. When employees are one of the most prominent and impactful of all touchpoints, their personal brands can influence customers' views on trust, professionalism, and satisfaction. McColl-Kennedy et al. (2019) stress the importance of gaining insight into customer experience that matters, and Holmlund et al. (2020) advocate the customer experience management as a strategic framework for complex data-driven environments. These views suggest that personal branding can be a part of the customer experience in order to improve the quality of human interaction. An individual who is known and identified as competent, trustworthy, emotionally intelligent and consistent can develop enhanced customer confidence and help bring about positive organizational outcomes.

1.2 Personal Branding, Human Resource Development and Organizational Value

1.2.1 Personal Branding and Human Resource Development

In addition to career and customer experience, personal branding is connected with human resource development because HR development concerns the development of employees' knowledge, skills, attitudes and long-term potential. In an organizational setting, personal branding can be understood as part of employee development because it encourages professionals to identify strengths, communicate value, build credibility and align behaviour with organizational expectations. This connection broadens the literature review, as personal branding is not only an individual marketing process but also a developmental process related to training, learning, talent management, career planning and employee engagement. Such elements are central to the development of human resources because organizations benefit when employees become more self-aware, motivated, emotionally competent and capable of creating value for internal and external stakeholders.

From a human resource development perspective, organizations can support personal branding through training programmes, mentoring, coaching, leadership development and career development practices. These practices help employees to understand their professional identity, improve communication skills, develop emotional intelligence and connect their personal goals with the objectives of the organization. Therefore, personal branding may contribute to human resource development by helping employees become more visible, adaptable and employable, while also improving service quality and customer relations. This is consistent with the idea of sustainable careers, where career development depends on the interaction between the individual, the organization and the wider labour market (De Vos, Van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2020).

The relationship between personal branding and human resource development is also important because employees are not only resources used by organizations, but people whose development can influence organizational performance. A strong personal brand can support talent retention, internal mobility, leadership readiness and professional confidence. At the same time, organizations must ensure that personal branding is aligned with organizational values, ethical behaviour and customer expectations. In this sense, personal branding becomes a bridge between individual development and organizational

development, since the improvement of employees' skills, reputation and relationships can strengthen both career growth and organizational impact.

1.2.2 Personal Branding and Customer Experience

Personal branding is now more relevant than ever in today's business world, especially in service-scentric, knowledge-driven and digitally disintermediated business settings where customers often rely on interactions with individual staff as their basis for judging the organization. Customer experience is not just created by the functional quality of a product or service, but is a combination of multiple cognitive, emotional, relational and behavioural responses customers have over a series of interactions with an organisation. Becker and Jaakkola (2020) suggest that customer experience is the customer's unconscious and unchosen reaction to stimuli, whether they be service encounters, communications, employee behaviour, brand signals or digital interactions, that are related to the firm. In that context, personal branding plays a significant role, as the employees or professionals may be seen as the organization's face. Their communication skills, authenticity, emotional intelligence, credibility, and professional image can directly impact the customer's understanding of the value and reliability of the organizational offering.

Personal branding is a factor that can affect customer experience by influencing the interpersonal aspect of value creation. In many business situations it's not the organization itself that customers are dealing with; it's the people who represent the organization, and the values, knowledge and service promise that they convey. For a professional who has a good personal brand, he or she can generate expectations of competence, reliability, and integrity BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER the customer interaction. Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova (2018) view personal branding as an interdisciplinary activity by which people create and communicate their unique professional identities, whilst Dumont and Ots (2020) highlight the sociality of personal branding and the influence of stakeholder relationships in the development of a personal brand. This relational interpretation is especially relevant for customer experience as customers are part of the key stakeholders that validate or invalidate the value of the personal brand of the professional. Thus the personal brand is not simply the perspective of the job market on the professional but is also a factor which influences how the customers perceive trust, confidence and relational quality during service encounters.

Another way of understanding the relationship between personal branding and customer experience is by way of credibility. When considering whether a professional or organization will deliver the desired results, customers look for indicators of expertise and trustworthiness. They can serve as a credibility cue for the professional in complex or intangible services, where it is not possible for the customer to evaluate quality before service. In the study of influencer marketing, Lou and Yuan (2019) find that credibility has an impact on consumer trust, in other words, people who convey their own credibility and expertise influence consumer reactions. Influencer marketing is not the same as the typical business service encounter, but the logic applies: When the person delivering the value proposition is trusted to be credible, knowledgeable, and authentic, a customer is more likely to trust him or her. In this context, as well, Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget (2020) have demonstrated that the elements of identification, credibility, and fit play a crucial role in endorsement scenarios, further strengthening the notion of person-based credibility influencing consumer perceptions. Thus, in an organisational context, employees with a positive personal brand might increase customer trust by making the organisation's promises more human, tangible and credible.

Research into customer experience further reveals that value is no longer a one-way street but is co-created as part of the interactions between the business and its customers. According to McColl-Kennedy et al. (2019), the goal of customer experience insights should be to concentrate on the interactions and processes that are important to customers, and Holmlund et al. (2020) see customer experience management as a strategic framework and thus emphasize the need for systematic understanding of customers, customer-related data, and mechanisms that create value for customers. In this context, personal branding can be seen as an element of the human infrastructure in customer experience management. Professionalism, responsiveness, emotional intelligence and ethical consistency of employees can lead to better customer interaction and more positive customer interpretation of the company. Their personal brand becomes an experiential resource because it not only shapes what customers receive, but how they feel, think, and react during the experience.

Personal branding has become even more critical with the digital transformation of the customer experience. Customers are interacting more and more with professionals via social media, digital content, online reviews, webinars, professional networks and other

mediated communication activities. New technologies are reshaping customer experience, changing how customers interact with companies, services, and information (Hoyer, Kroschke, Schmitt, Kraume, and Shankar 2020). Within this digital landscape, the distinction between what is employee, what is organizational, and what is customer is not as clear. According to Jacobson (2020), the professionals working in the social media environment are often seen as brands because they constantly have to deal with being visible and managing the expectations of their audiences. Similarly, as demonstrated by Chen, Rui, and Whinston (2021), social media personal branding can have a tangible impact on career; thus, digital professional identity can have measurable impacts. This means that, for customer experience, customers might start assessing professionals even before they get in touch with them through digital clues, perceived know-how, communication regularity and online reputation.

But if a company's personal brand strategy is not consistent with their actions or is not authentic, then it won't work for customer experience. When a professional's brand promise doesn't match with what their customers experience, it can lead to disappointment, distrust, and a tarnished reputation. This is closely related to the area of behavioral integrity; words and actions. Ete, Epitropaki, Zhou and Graham (2022) demonstrate that behavioural integrity can shape identification processes and outcomes for followers, and that Choi, Yoon and Kim (2020) link behavioural integrity to employee performance. In terms of customer experience, these findings indicate that when it comes to their personal brand, professionals need to exhibit behaviours that match their personal brand values and qualities. Empathy, expertise, responsiveness, or reliability, as personal brand should be verified by the customer's experience. Otherwise, it is impression management that has nothing to do with the reality of service.

Personal branding and soft skills play a special role in connecting customer experience. Often, customers assess the quality of the service based on nonverbal aspects like listening, empathy, confidence, responsiveness and emotional control. Doğru (2022) reveals that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and significant employee outcomes, and Pirsoul, Parmentier, Sovet and Nils (2023) shows the relationship between emotional intelligence and career-related outcomes. Emotional intelligence helps professionals understand customer needs, deal with challenging interactions, adjust their communication style, and provide customers with a sense of psychological safety in the customer

experience realm. Self-awareness also applies as professionals need to be aware of the impact of their behavior on others and what their professional identity is in interaction. Personal branding, as noted by Carden, Jones and Passmore (2022), is not just about self-promotion but self-awareness as a key part of adult development. So, if the personal branding is rooted in true interpersonal skills, it also ensures the customer experience.

1.2.3 Trust, Credibility and Professional Reputation

In this context, trust, credibility and professional reputation are key mechanisms by which personal branding becomes business value. Personal branding is not just about visibility, recognition, or differentiation; it's about the impressions made by stakeholders that the individual is trustworthy, competent, consistent, and able to deliver value. Trust at work or in professional life serves as the psychological foundation for building, sustaining, and expanding relationships. Credibility is the sense that the person has the knowledge, character and trustworthiness to deliver. Professional reputation, in turn, is the social judgment that is developed through multiple interactions, observed behaviour, communication and stakeholder experiences. These three constructs are hence closely interwoven. One can communicate and position a personal brand as a professional but in the long run, it will be a strong brand only if the other perceives the person as credible and trustworthy.

In the literature on personal branding, it is emphasized that professional reputation is not only shaped by the individual but also is socially produced by the interpretation given by the stakeholders. According to Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova (2018), the process of personal branding is interdisciplinary, it is about identity, differentiation and professional value communication. But that's not all about self-presentation; the key is whether or not the intended brand identity is recognized and validated by relevant audiences. Dumont and Ots (2020) too stress that personal brands are formed by the social aspects, pointing out that personal brands are not something that a person can fully control since they are created through the interactions with stakeholders. This relational perspective is important as it reveals that trust and credibility is a product of the interaction. Competence, authenticity, or ethical values can be communicated by professionals, but only when stakeholders get a consistent message through their repeated experiences of the professional's behaviour. Thus, professional reputation can be considered as the result of deliberate branding and social assessment.

In situations of uncertainty, credibility is especially critical when it comes to stakeholders. Often customers, colleagues, managers and employers cannot easily determine the extent of a professional's knowledge, intentions, or future behaviour. For this reason, they delve into cues like expertise, consistency, communication style, past performance, social proof and perceived integrity. Khedher (2019) links personal branding to employability since the individual is the one who uses personal branding to position itself in competitive labour markets. But success in the employment market isn't just about being visible, it's about being credible, too. A professional brand that's not seen as competent or consistent may draw attention, but not trust. A believable personal brand, on the other hand, can build trust with employers, clients, customers and organizational stakeholders, as it lessens the risk and improves the confidence of others in the person's performance.

It is also clear that the factor of credibility plays a role in consumer and customer research. Lou and Yuan (2019) show that credibility is a factor that influences consumers' trust and that audiences are more receptive to the communicator who is perceived as credible and valuable. While their work is centered around influencer marketing, there are also personal branding applications within a professional/organisational context. In both scenarios, people are carriers of meaning, and their credibility as sources has an impact on their stakeholders' response to the messages they convey. Also in endorsement contexts, the effect of identification, credibility and fit on the audience response is demonstrated by Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget (2020). In terms of personal branding, it means that credibility is not just about the knowledge, it is about the person, the message and the context. The relationship between the stakeholder, the communication and the role is a sense of coherence that will make a brand stronger.

Trust is also an integral part of customer experience. The customer experience is influenced by the reactions that customers form during their interactions with organizations at various interaction points (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). In many service situations, the employee/ professional is one of the most significant interactions that the customer has with the organisation. The professional's personal brand thus helps to shape the customer's perception of the reliability, competence and quality of service of the organisation. McColl-Kennedy et al. (2019) believe that the emphasis on customer experience insights should be on the interactions and processes that matter to the customer. With this in mind, trust is not an abstract concept, but rather an experiential result that is

created through communication, responsiveness, empathy, and consistency. An expert who is seen as credible can help ease customer uncertainty, build customer trust and confidence, and help lead to a more favorable evaluation of the company.

Behavioural integrity is also closely related to professional reputation. But behind the personal brand message, there has to be demonstrated consistency from words to actions, to be able to communicate trustworthiness. Choi, Yoon, and Kim (2020) reveal that leader behavioral integrity to be associated with employee in-role performance, and Ete, Epitropaki, Zhou, and Graham (2022) provide evidence that leader and organizational behavioral integrity impact follower outcomes via identification processes. The implications of these findings for personal branding are that credibility is not just a communication impact; it's a behavioural accomplishment. Stakeholders assess if the professional practices in a way that is consistent with values, promises and expectations. Trust is increased when the communication of identity is congruent with actual behaviour. Even if the person is still seen or they are still “technically” able, the personal brand can be hurt when there is a lack of congruence.

Trust, credibility and professional reputation become even more critical factors in a digital environment. Today, professionals build their personal brands and communicate online and posts, profiles, recommendations, networks and online interactions are evaluated. In social media settings, professionals may feel like they are brands as they need to control what they are visible to their current and future audiences (Jacobson, 2020). In addition, the use of social media personal branding can impact career outcomes, as demonstrated by Chen, Rui, and Whinston (2021), which indicates that online reputation can have tangible professional implications. But, there is reputational risk that accompanies digital visibility as well. Differences between the image that people project online and the way they behave offline can become more apparent and stakeholder assessments can rapidly circulate through networks. Person brand building in an online attention economy in which individuals compete for recognition is described by Smith and Fischer (2021). But trust doesn't come from attention alone. But to build a sustainable professional reputation, you must back up visibility with credibility, expertise and authenticity, and value creation.

Soft skills are important factors in establishing trust and reputation as they influence the quality of professional communication. Self-awareness will help people recognise the impact that their actions have on others and how to ensure that their own brand identity

matches with their true identity. Carden, Jones and Passmore (2022) state that one of the most important aspects of adult development is self-awareness, and this is pertinent as professionals need to be aware of both their internal and external effect. Emotional intelligence is also crucial, contributing to empathy, emotional regulation, and relationship management. Emporal intelligence is related to employee outcomes (Doğru, 2022) and is linked to career-related outcomes (Pirsoul et al., 2023). All of these abilities contribute to establishing trust as they shape the experience of stakeholders in communication, support, conflict resolution, and responsiveness.

1.2.4 Soft Skills as Elements of Personal Branding

A key part of personal branding is soft skills, as they will influence the way that professional value is expressed, understood, and accepted in social and organizational settings. Technical skills can define the necessary level of professionalism, but it is often the interpersonal, behavioral and ethical attributes that give a professional his/her personal brand credibility and sustain it. Personal branding is not only about being seen or self-promoting: it's about building a familiar, credible, professional identity, one that is backed up by consistent behaviour, relational skills, and trust from stakeholders. According to Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova (2018), personal branding is an interdisciplinary concept related to psychology, career development, marketing and organizational behaviour, thus its worth is not just a question of market positioning, but also a question of psychological and behavioural abilities. In this view, soft skills are not secondary abilities, but qualities that are fundamental to a professional reputation.

In today's modern work places, individuals' personal branding is more and more reliant on the individual's capacity to show skills of self-awareness, integrity, emotional intelligence, motivation, adaptability and communication competence. These attributes impact the way professionals are viewed by others, management, customers, and the professional community. According to Khedher (2019), personal branding is a factor that makes people employable, as it helps them to establish themselves by a unique and consistent profile. But, this only works if backed up by actions that validate claims made by the personal brand. If a professional projects himself or herself as reliable, ethical, customer friendly or intelligent, he or she needs to prove these attributes over time. Thus, soft skills are the behavioural matter of personal branding, and they are the actualization of what is projected by the identity.

When we talk about soft skills and relate that to customer experience and organizational behaviour, this factor becomes even more important. The interactions, perceptions, emotions and responses that happen at various touchpoints between customers and organizations create customer experience (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Often employees and professionals become the points of contact in which the client assess their competence, reliability and values of the organisation. The soft skills, therefore, impact on the quality of customer experience by impacting on listening, empathy, responsiveness, building trust and the perceived authenticity of the service encounter. Likewise, in an organization, soft skills help to collaborate, build trust and leadership, identify, and improve employee performance. Thus, personal branding based on soft skills can be of value, both at the individual and organizational level, in enhancing professional reputation, relationships with stakeholders and long-term career development.

1.2.4.1 Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is among the most basic soft skills for personal branding as it helps one to understand oneself, their brand and the perception of their brand by other people. Self-awareness is essential to prevent superficial, inconsistent, or non-authentic personal branding. Carden et al., (2022) describe self-awareness as the complex reflective process used by adults to identify their inner states, values, behaviours and the effect they have on others. This definition is very pertinent to personal branding since a credible personal brand is one with a clear sense of strengths and weaknesses, values, motivators, and developmental needs. If the professionals don't have such clarity, they may try to build a pretty but not real brand, which will make their brand's credibility weaker in the long run.

Self-awareness plays a role in branding oneself as it helps to facilitate authenticity and coherence. A meaningful professional brand is evident where there is congruence between the individual's self-concept, the identity he or she projects and the actions he or she takes. Gorbatov et al. (2018) highlight that personal branding is a strategic activity in developing and communicating professional value, which should start from the knowledge of the self. The person needs to be able to pinpoint the specific skills, values, and attributes that can be shared with stakeholders. Self-awareness serves as internal positioning for external positioning, in this regard. It enables professionals to express their brand in a way that is both unique and psychologically authentic and behaviourally relevant.

Self-awareness is also crucial in today's workplace, as working identity is constantly assessed in interaction. There is formal and informal feedback from the manager, colleagues, customer, and digital feedback. Someone who is self aware can take this feedback and interpret it in a constructive way and change behaviour without becoming incoherent. This is significant in the context of personal branding, as reputation cannot be entirely managed by the person concerned, it is co-created by the interpretation of stakeholders. According to Dumont and Ots (2020) personal branding is a construction of social relations and stakeholders, meaning that the sense of a personal brand is based on how others live and confirm the brand. Self-awareness is the ability for professionals to comprehend this relationship process and identify areas of possible discrepancies between intended identity and perceived identity.

Self-awareness is also a strategic dimension for career development. According to Gorbatov, Khapova, and Lysova (2019), personal branding can play an important role in achieving success when it comes to a person's career as it can help them gain recognition and stand out in a competitive job market. But getting noticed is only of worth when there is a clear and credible professional identity behind it. By being aware of self, people can determine what they are looking for in recognition and how their personal brand fits into their career aspirations over the long term. De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020) state that sustainable careers are affected by interaction with individual agency, organization context and labour market conditions. In this context, the self-awareness is a tool that helps sustain one's career as it allows people to make decisions about development, positioning, and identity management over time.

1.2.4.2 Integrity

Integrity is another critical part of personal branding as it makes up part of the way that a professional identity is seen as trustworthy and credible. Self-awareness is the foundation for knowing and saying about the personal brand, but integrity is the foundation for believing and maintaining the personal brand. Integrity is agreeing to values, projecting identity and living it, in relation to personal branding. A professional can talk about reliability, transparency, expertise or customer focus, but it's only when it's backed up by behaviours that it becomes meaningful. When someone lacks integrity, they may be engaging in impression management, looking good in the short term while harming their long-term reputation.

The behavioral integrity literature is of special relevance to this discussion. Choi, Yoon and Kim (2020) link leader behavioural integrity with the in-role performance of their employees, implying that employees are more positive in their work behaviour when they feel their leaders are acting in line with the values they have declared. Likewise, Ete, Epitropaki, Zhou and Graham (2022) demonstrate that there is a relationship between leader and organizational behavioral integrity on the behavioral outcomes of followers via identification processes. The results show that integrity has counter-proliferative implications in organizational life as it impacts trust, identification, performance and stability of the relationships. Applied to personal branding, behavioral integrity becomes the way in which professional claims are either substantiated or refuted.

In certain instances such as customer facing roles, the person who works in the organization is the one through whom the customer assesses the organization's integrity. According to customer experience research, customers make their perceptions based on firm interactions in various touchpoints (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). When a professional's personal brand says one thing and the customer experience says another, through competence, trustworthiness, or lack of it, through indifference or dishonesty, it can have a negative impact. On the other hand, if professionals practice what they preach, they can help to build trust with clients and boost the credibility of the organization. In this way, integrity is connected to customer experience because it represents the guarantee that the professional image which is portrayed to the market is verified in the real experience of the service.

Integrity is also the key to maintaining personal branding over time. While visibility will get attention, integrity will uphold reputation. According to Smith and Fischer (2021), person brand building takes place in structured online attention economies, in which people vie for attention and recognition. But just paying attention doesn't mean it lasts professionally. In digital and organizational contexts, stakeholders have the ability to look at claims and see if they match the action, and quickly evaluate credibility. Accordingly, professionals with personal brands based on integrity have more chances to create reputational capital which can withstand scrutiny. Integrity is the preserve of the personal brand from becoming performative, it is what makes it consistent, reliable, ethical, and responsible.

1.2.4.3 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is an essential soft skill in the personal branding field since it affects understanding, controlling, and expressing feelings in ways that help define others' perceptions. Today's jobs are not only judged by a person's skills and credentials but also by his or her ability to make people feel trusted, to handle relationships, to be able to handle complicated interpersonal dynamics, and to remain credible when needed. Emotional Intelligence from a personal branding point of view is a factor of the professional image that is seen as mature, reliable, socially competent and customer-oriented. Meta-analytic evidence in Doğru (2022) clearly shows that there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and some employee outcomes, which means that emotionally intelligent professionals are more likely to engage in behaviours that enhance their effectiveness in the workplace. This is especially true in terms of personal branding as a professional brand isn't just built on what people say about themselves, but on the impression they make on others in their actual interactions.

Emotional intelligence contributes to the enhancement of personal branding by allowing individuals to tailor their self-portrayal to fit the interpersonal landscape. The attributes of a personal brand that stresses expertise and leadership, empathy and compassion, or customer orientation are all underpinned by the capacity to identify emotional signals, adjust communication approaches and respond positively to stakeholder needs. Pirsoul et al. (2023) demonstrate that emotional intelligence is linked to career-related outcomes, indicating that emotional competence can facilitate employment, career advancement and professional development. This relationship is significant as a career and personal branding are tightly connected. EI professionals can more effectively manage their impressions ethically, communicate with confidence, read the feedback and relate in a way that reinforces their reputation capital. In this context, emotional intelligence is an internal asset and external branding tool.

Personal Branding and Emotional Intelligence are even more apparent when linked to customer experience. Customers judge the quality of a company based on not just the technical result of a service, but also the emotional aspect of the interaction. Thus, Becker and Jaakkola (2020) suggest that CX results from customer reactions to stimuli related to the firm through various touchpoints. Among these touchpoints, the most influential ones are the employees or professionals, particularly in service settings. Professional behavior

that is empathetic, patient, emotionally regulated, and responsive enhances customer trust and satisfaction. This is because, on the other hand, bad emotional control can diminish the personal brand of the individual, as well as the perception of the organization in the eyes of the customer. Thus, emotional intelligence connects personal branding with customer experience as it can influence the affective and relational aspects of the service relationships.

Emotional intelligence also plays a key role in personal branding, ensuring that your actions are both authentic and consistent. According to Gorbatov, Khapova, and Lysova (2018), personal branding is a process of interdisciplinary identity, differentiation, and communication of professional value. But when it is backed up with behaviour which stakeholders perceive to be “seemingly sincere” and emotionally fitting, then the communication of value becomes credible. When a professional presents a brand as a leader or as someone who is to be trusted, he or she needs to be calm, empathetic and aware of the relationship when disagreement, pressure or uncertainty occurs. In this, emotional intelligence helps to guard against superficial self-promotion in personal branding. It allows the professional to convey the attributes that the personal brand conveys.

In the organizational setting, emotional intelligence also aids in collaboration, in building leadership credibility, and in identifying stakeholders. Personal branding is one that is socially constructed, that is, its value is co-created by the perceptions and interpretations of others (Dumont & Ots, 2020). It is in this regard that emotionally intelligent professionals can better grasp these perceptions and make the necessary behavioural changes without losing their authenticity. Especially in today's workplace, where you work alongside a variety of colleagues, customers, managers, and digital audiences. Emotional intelligence thus improves the social effectiveness of the personal branding by assisting people to establish relationships that verify and reinforce their professional image.

1.2.4.4 Motivation

Motivation is another core aspect of personal branding, as it influences the way, the means, and the authenticity of professional behaviour. A personal brand does not only represent an external image, but also the values, aspirations, objectives and internal motivations that drive someone's actions over time. Professionals may or may not work on their ability, market their value, stay consistent, and strive for long-term growth depending on their

level of motivation. Van den Broeck, Howard, Van Vaerenbergh, Leroy and Gagné (2021) state that work motivation is not solely a dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and should be seen from a multidimensional perspective. It is also pertinent to personal branding, as what might be an employee's personal brand goals could be distinct from another employee's personal brand goals, whether that is career, recognition, contribution, autonomy, belonging, or value creation for customers and organizations.

Sustainable personal branding is particularly important with regards to intrinsic motivation. Authenticity and coherence of the personal brand is more likely to be perceived when professionals are motivated by a genuine interest, personal values, learning, or meaningful contribution. On the other hand, if an individual's personal branding is solely motivated by external rewards, status or visibility, it can take on a performative and unstable character. Personal branding can also play a role in the success of one's career by being recognized and appreciated in the professional environment, as demonstrated by Gorbatov, Khapova, and Lysova (2019). But, recognition isn't sustainable without ongoing development and value creation. Motivation is a psychological source of energy for this process. It challenges workers to improve their skills, learn from others, and react to the demands of work and retain a professional image in a fluctuating world.

Personal branding is also related to motivation, employability, and career sustainability. In his opinion Khedher (2019) states that personal branding can improve the employability of the person to improve his position in the competitive labor market. But that's a position that must be worked hard, continuously. It is important for professionals to be aware of shifts in their field, to acquire new skills and to share their newfound worth with the right people. De Vos, Van der Heijden and Akkermans (2020) stress that sustainable careers are not just the product of the individual, but rather the result of a interplay between the individual, the organization, and the labour market. Motivation is a key component of this engagement as this is what helps people to accept responsibility for their own career development and adjust to the needs of their organisation and environment. If you're a motivated professional, you'll be more inclined to take your personal branding beyond a single act of self presentation, to a continual process of growth, reflection, and strategic positioning.

Motivation also has an impact on organizational behaviour and customer experience in the modern workplace. Motivation of staff to provide high quality service, behave in an

honorable way and grow professionally is more likely to generate positive interactions with stakeholders. The studies of customer experience show that value is created by various interactions and touchpoints between customers and organizations (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). These touchpoints are impacted by motivation as it impacts the effort, attention and emotional engagement that professionals provide in their customer relationships. A professional with a personal brand of commitment, responsiveness, and excellence should be driven to be committed, responsive, and excellent all of the time. The personal brand can be aspirational rather than behavioural if it is not motivated.

There is also a relationship between motivation and credibility as stakeholders ascertain if a professional's actions seem purposeful and consistent. Personal branding is an ongoing process in both the online and offline worlds. Person brand building happens in an attention economy, where visibility and recognition need to be managed all the time, as explained by Smith and Fischer (2021). But visibility without motivation can result in the lack of consistency and cohesion in branding. Motivated professionals with clear values and visions are more likely to be consistent in all communication channels, roles in the workplace, and relationships with stakeholders. This consistency builds trust and bolsters the brand's authenticity.

Emotional Intelligence and Motivation are key soft skills that enhance the strategic importance of personal branding. Emotional intelligence helps professionals to interact with clients, other employees, and build trust, and motivation keeps them moving forward to grow, stay consistent and develop in their careers. When combined, these skills can make personal branding more than a communication tactic and into an ongoing professional competency. In today's organizations which demand that people add value by their performance and also by their relationships, the emotional intelligence and the motivation are contributing to make the personal brands visible, credible, authentic and valuable....

Chapter 2: Methodology

Research Purpose

The purpose this study is to investigate the relationships among Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact among professionals working in different organizational environments.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the levels of Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact among professionals?

RQ2. What relationships exist among Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact?

RQ3. Are Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact associated with age and years of professional experience?

RQ4. Do Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact differ according to gender and direct customer interaction?

RQ5. Do Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact differ according to educational level, business sector, and current organizational position?

The above are further analyzed in Table 1.

Table 1. Research questions, citations and questions used to analyze each one

Research Question	Questionnaire questions used	Citation
RQ1. What are the levels of Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact among professionals?	Section B: Emotional Intelligence, B1-B16, Section C: Personal Branding, C1-C10, Section D: Customer Experience and Customer Trust, D1-D10, Section E: Career Growth and Organizational Impact, E1-E10	(Wong & Law, 2002; Labrecque et al., 2011; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Weng et al., 2010; Gorbatov et al., 2018)
RQ2. What relationships exist among Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact?	Composite score of Sections B, C, D and E	(Wong & Law, 2002; Gorbatov et al., 2018; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Weng et al., 2010)

RQ3. Are Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact associated with age and years of professional experience?	Section A: Age, Years of Professional Experience, Composite scores of Sections B-E	(Gorbatov et al., 2018; Weng et al., 2010; Wong & Law, 2002)
RQ4. Do Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact differ according to gender and direct customer interaction?	Section A: Gender, Direct Customer Interaction, Composite scores of Sections B-E	(Wong & Law, 2002; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002)
RQ5. Do Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact differ according to educational level, business sector, and current organizational position?	Section A: Educational Level, Business Sector, Current Position, Composite scores of Sections B-E	(Wong & Law, 2002; Gorbatov et al., 2018; Weng et al., 2010)

2.1 Sample

The study was conducted using a quantitative research design and included a sample of 108 professionals employed in various organizational settings. Participants represented different educational backgrounds, business sectors, organizational positions, age groups, and levels of professional experience (Takona, 2024). Specifically, the sample consisted of 57 male and 51 female participants. Respondents were employed in one of the sectors below: finance, retail, consulting, education, healthcare, and technology. Furthermore, participants occupied different organizational positions, ranging from regular employees and supervisors to managers and senior managers. The average age of the participants was 40.69 years, while the average working experience was 10.02 years.

2.2 Research Instrument

The data for this study were gathered through a questionnaire where participants answered close-ended questions. It was designed specifically to answer the research questions. The questionnaire consists of five different sections.

The first part included background demographic information such as gender, age, education level, industry, current job role, years of work experience, and whether participants work directly with customers.

The second part measured Emotional Intelligence using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS). It contained 16 statements covering self-emotion awareness, awareness of others' emotions, use of emotions, and emotion control. Answers were given

on an agreement - disagreement scale that has five points scaling from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree) (Wong & Law, 2002).

The third part measured Personal Branding with 10 items about professional image, visibility, credibility, communication style, reputation, and its role in career success. The same five - point Likert scale was used (Gorbatov et al., 2018).

The fourth part measured Customer Experience and Customer Trust with 10 statements about satisfaction, trust, credibility, communication, authenticity, competence, loyalty, and professional behavior, also using the same five - point Likert scale (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The fifth part measured Career Growth and Organizational Impact with 10 items covering career development, organizational support, recognition, leadership chances, skill development, promotions, and how personal branding affects career progress (Wickramasinghe & Premachandra, 2021).

For parts two to five, higher scores show stronger agreement with each corresponding area. Composite scores for the four main variables were created by averaging the related items in each scale.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted electronically using the platform Google Forms from 10 to 20 May of 2026. The questionnaire link was distributed through online communities, professional networking groups, social media platforms, and professional discussion forums. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the research at any stage without consequences. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring participants' privacy and anonymity. The online data collection method, allowed for easier access to professionals from different industries and locations while completing the process within a relatively short period of time.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0 (IBM Corp., 2017), which is widely used for statistical analysis in social science research. The selection and application of the

statistical procedures followed standard guidelines for quantitative data analysis using SPSS (Field, 2018).

Initially, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and responses to all questionnaire items. Frequencies and percentages were used for categorical variables, whereas means, standard deviations, minimum values, and maximum values were calculated for continuous variables and scale scores. The internal consistency reliability of the study scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Composite scores for the four main constructs were subsequently computed by averaging the corresponding item scores. The assumption of normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Since several variables demonstrated statistically significant deviations from normality, non-parametric statistical procedures were selected for the inferential analyses.

Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (ρ) was used to examine the relationships among the four principal study variables, as well as the associations between the study variables and continuous demographic characteristics, including age and years of professional experience. Differences between two independent groups, such as gender and direct customer interaction, were examined using the Mann-Whitney U test. Differences among variables consisting of more than two categories, including educational level, business sector, and current organizational position, were investigated using the Kruskal-Wallis H test. For all hypothesis testing, the level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

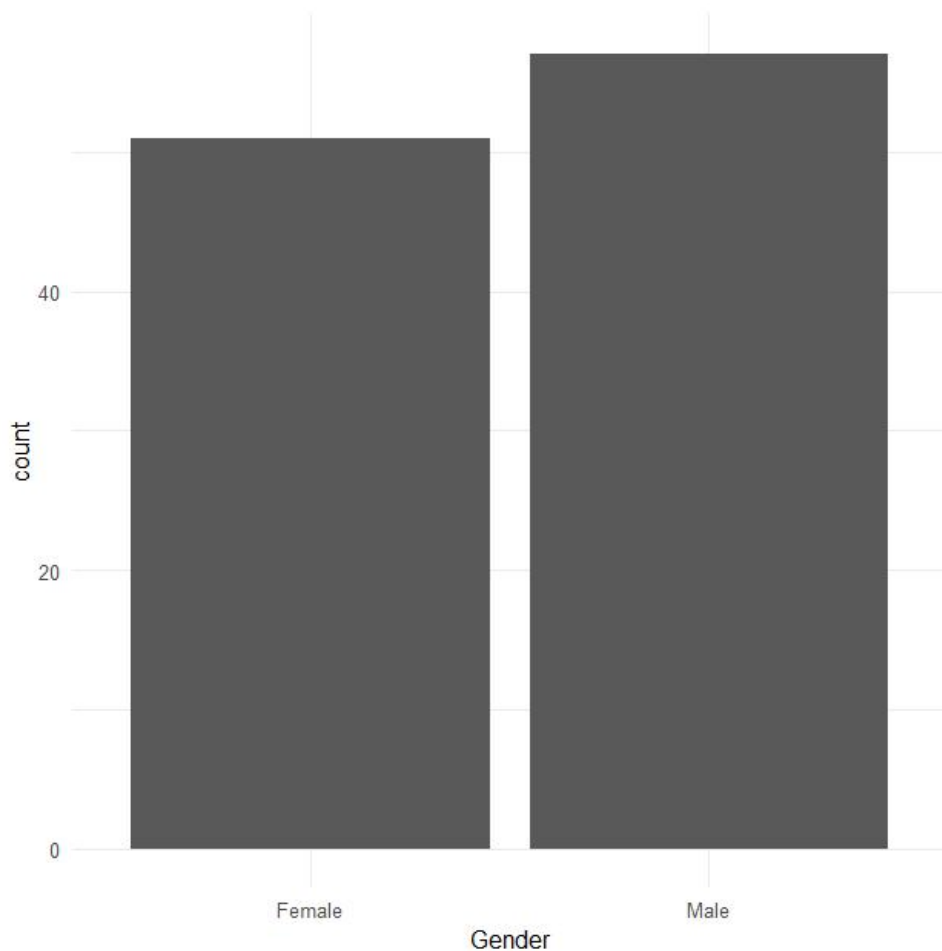
Chapter 3: Results

A total of 108 people participated in this study. Table 2 and Figure 1 show the distribution of participants by gender. There were a total of 57 males (52.8%) and 51 females (47.2%).

Table 2. Distribution of Participants by Gender

Gender	n	%
Male	57	52.8
Female	51	47.2

Figure 1. Distribution of Participants by Gender



In Table 3 and Figure 2, the educational background of respondents is presented. The largest groups were participants holding a Bachelor's degree (33.3%) and a Master's degree (33.3%). Furthermore, MBA holders accounted for 24.1%, while PhD holders represented 9.3% of participants.

Table 3. Educational Level of Participants

Educational Level	n	%
Bachelor	36	33.3
Master	36	33.3
MBA	26	24.1
PhD	10	9.3

Figure 2. Educational Level of Participants

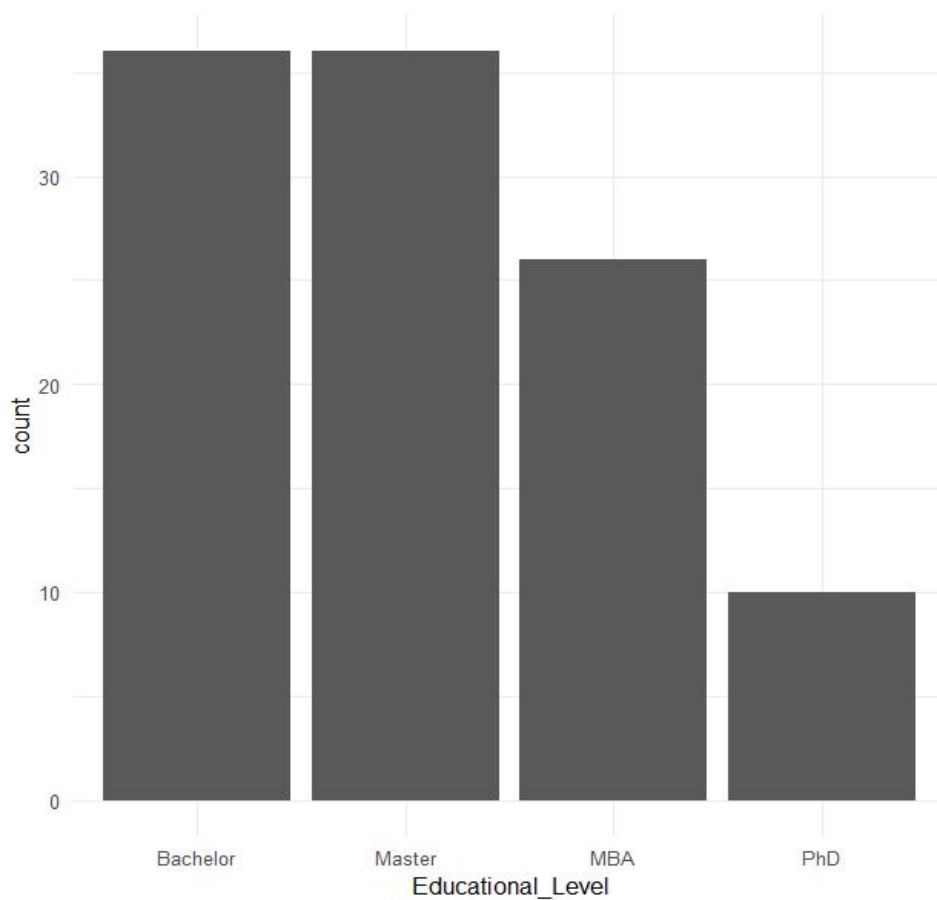


Table 4 and Figure 3 present the business sectors that participants are working in. Most participants belong in the finance sector (23.1%), followed by retail (22.2%), Consulting (13.9%), education (13.9%), healthcare (13.9%) and lastly in the technology sector (13.0%).

Table 4. Business Sector of Employment

Business Sector	n	%
Finance	25	23.1
Retail	24	22.2
Consulting	15	13.9
Education	15	13.9
Healthcare	15	13.9
Technology	14	13.0

Figure 3. Business Sector of Employment

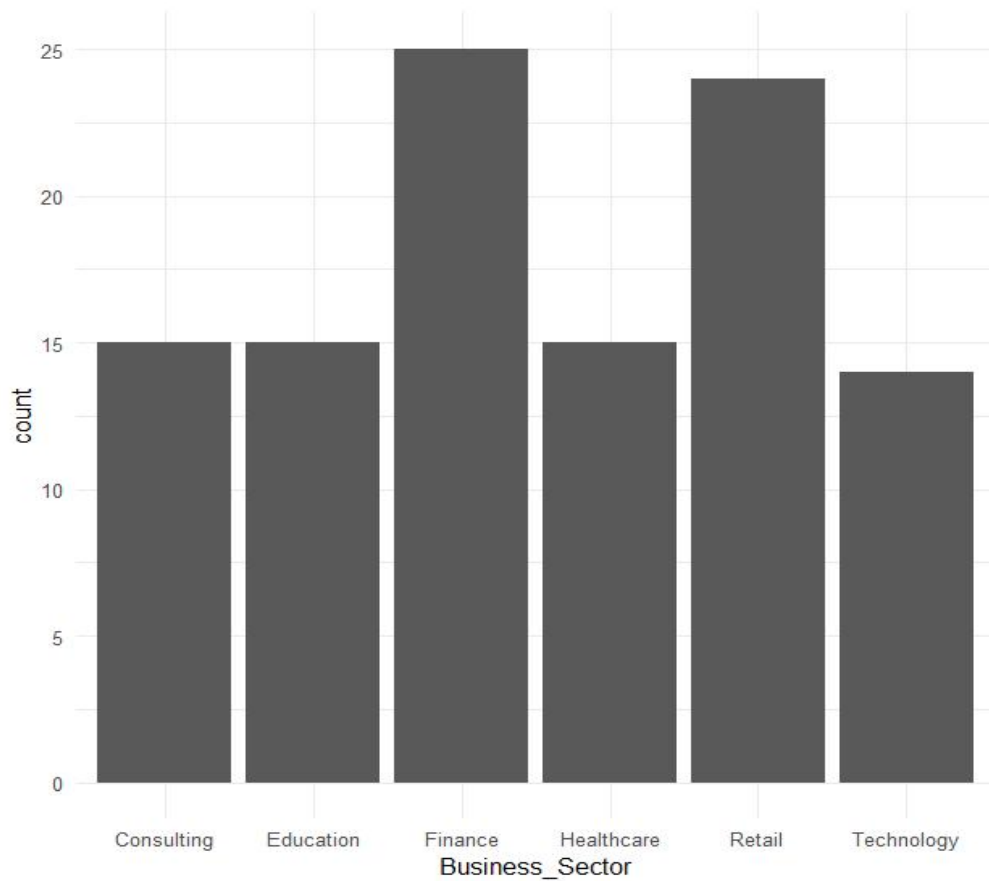


Table 5 and Figure 4 summarize participants' organizational positions. Most participants are regular employees (53.7%), followed by managers (21.3%) and supervisors (17.6%), while only a few are senior managers (7.4%).

Table 5. Current Position of Participants

Current Position	n	%
Employee	58	53.7
Manager	23	21.3
Supervisor	19	17.6
Senior Manager	8	7.4

Figure 4. Current Position of Participants

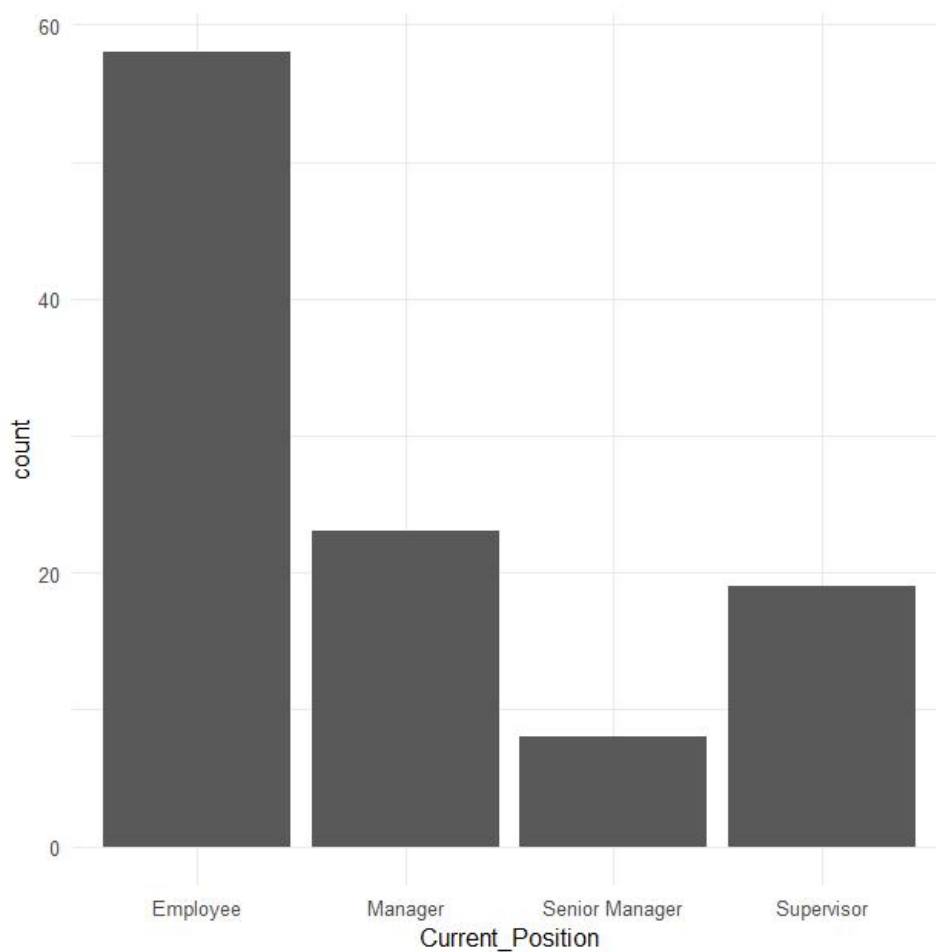
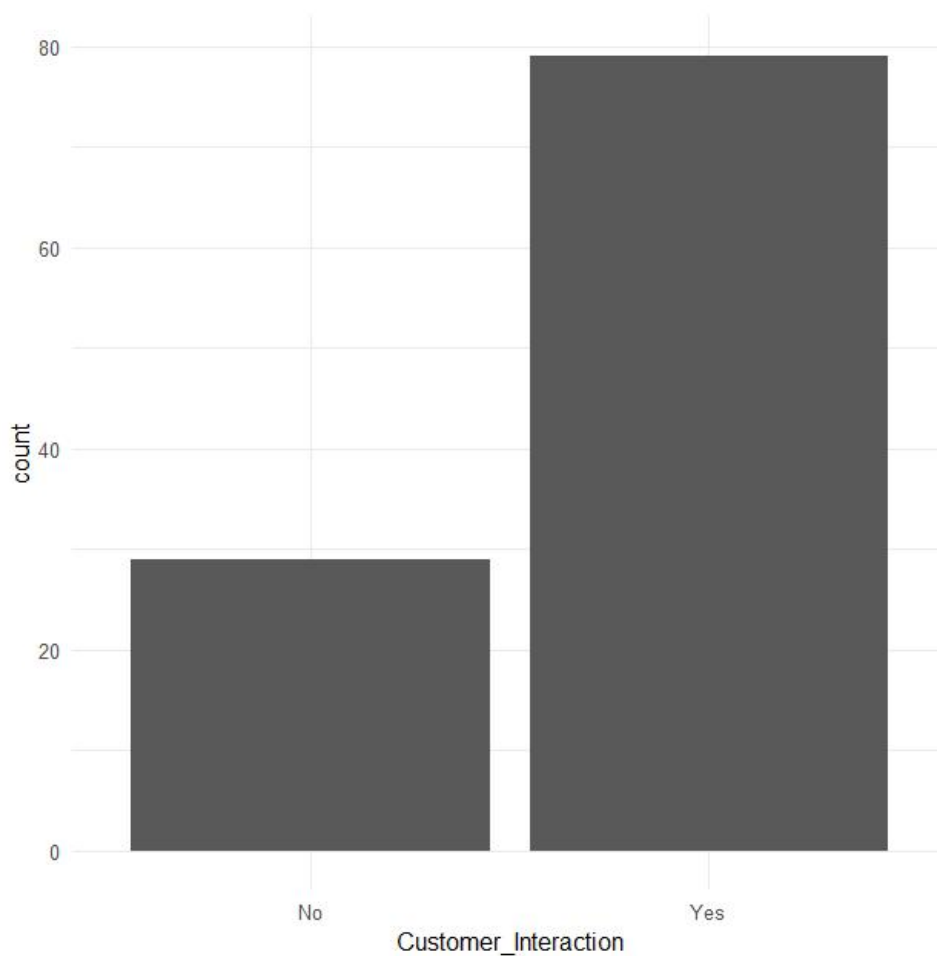


Table 6 and Figure 5 shows the percentages of participants' that are involved in direct customer interaction. Most respondents reported that they interact directly with customers as part of their work (73.1%), followed by those who do not (26.9%).

Table 6. Direct Customer Interaction

Customer Interaction	n	%
Yes	79	73.1
No	29	26.9

Figure 5. Direct Customer Interaction

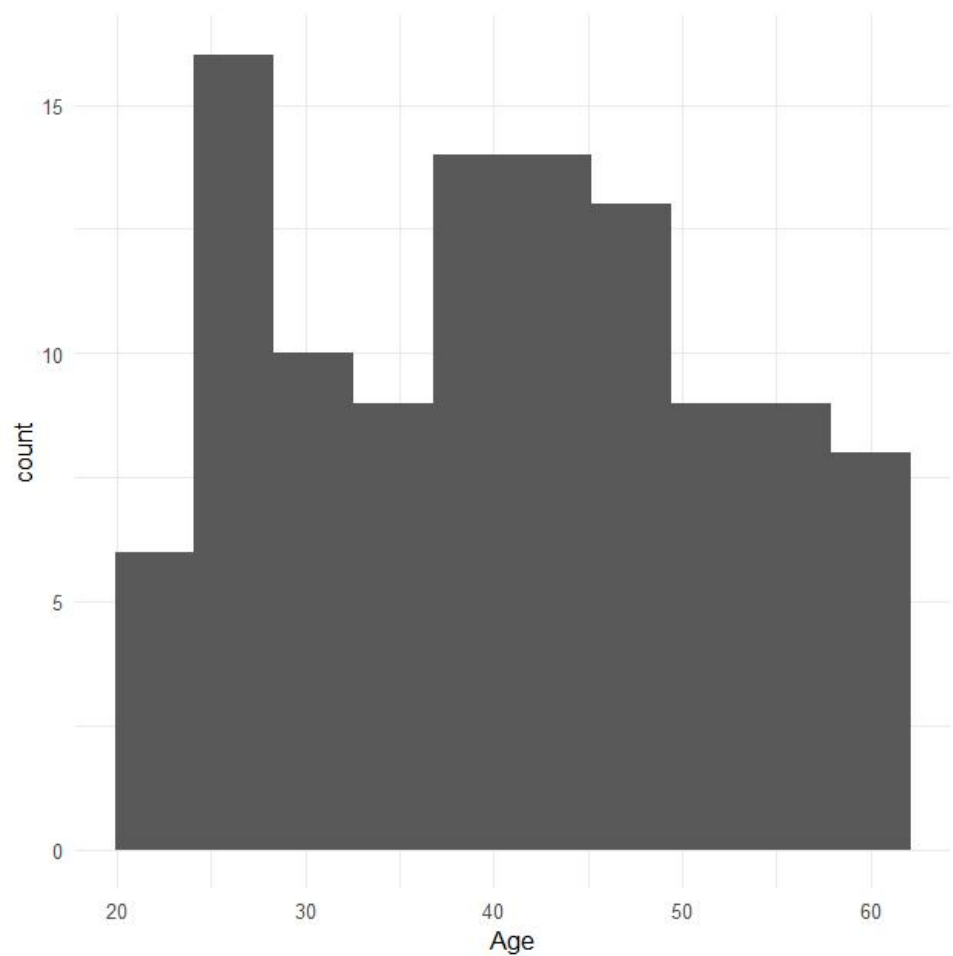


Furthermore, the age of respondents is presented in Table 7 and Figure 6. The average age was 40.69 years ($SD = 10.80$), with participants ranging from 22 to 60 years old. The histogram shows that the age distribution appears more balanced, as it includes almost equal numbers between young and older people.

Table 7. Age of Participants

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Age	40.69	10.80	22	60

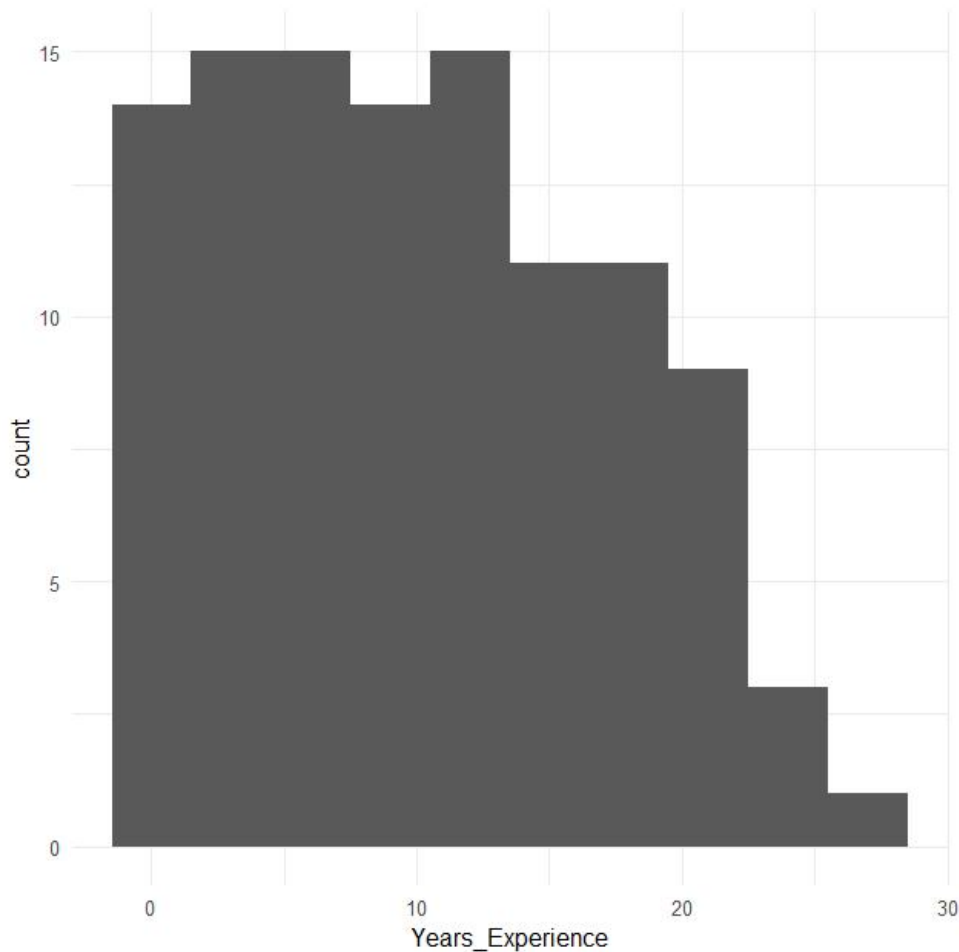
Figure 6. Distribution of Participants' Age



The descriptive data for the working experience of participants is presented in Table 8 and Figure 7. The average working experience was 10.02 years (SD = 7.06), with values ranging from 0 to 27 years. It can be seen from the histogram below, that the distribution of working experience has a slight positive skew, with fewer participants having more than 20 years of experience.

Table 8. Years of Professional Experience

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Years of Professional Experience	10.02	7.06	0	27

Figure 7. Distribution of Professional Experience

The descriptive statistics for a wide range of questions related to Emotional Intelligence are shown in Table 9. The highest levels of agreement is observed for the statement “I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them” ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.82$), followed by the statements “I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions” ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.84$) and “I would always encourage myself to try my best” ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.82$). Furthermore, agreement was also found relatively high for the statements: “I have good understanding of my own emotions” ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.89$), “I really understand what I feel” ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.90$), and “I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time” ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.87$). Lastly, participants tended to agree less

regarding the statements: “I am a self-motivating person” ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.84$) and “I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry” ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.87$).

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Intelligence

Statements	M	SD
I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.	3.89	0.82
I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions.	3.86	0.84
I would always encourage myself to try my best.	3.80	0.82
I have good understanding of my own emotions.	3.78	0.89
I really understand what I feel.	3.78	0.90
I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time.	3.77	0.87
I always know whether or not I am happy.	3.77	0.88
I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me.	3.77	0.84
I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.	3.76	0.81
I have good control of my own emotions.	3.75	0.81
I am a good observer of others' emotions.	3.74	0.86
I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.	3.74	0.89
I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior.	3.72	0.87
I always tell myself I am a competent person.	3.72	0.91
I am a self-motivating person.	3.69	0.84
I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry.	3.69	0.87

Additionally, the means and standard deviations for questions regarding Personal Branding are presented in Table 10. The highest agreement is observed for the statement “I try to differentiate myself professionally from others” ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.94$), followed by “I believe my personal image influences how customers perceive me” ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.91$) and “My professional reputation creates opportunities for career development” ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.84$). Participants also tend to agree with statements such as “I consider personal branding important for professional success” ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.92$), “People perceive me as credible in professional settings” ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.03$), and “My communication style positively influences my professional reputation” ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.93$). Lastly, lesser agreement was found in the statements “I consciously manage my professional image” ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.96$), “I actively promote my professional

strengths” (M = 3.74, SD = 1.02), “I maintain consistency between my values and professional behavior” (M = 3.69, SD = 0.90), and “I intentionally develop my visibility in professional environments” (M = 3.69, SD = 0.98).

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics for Personal Branding

Statements	M	SD
I try to differentiate myself professionally from others.	3.86	0.94
I believe my personal image influences how customers perceive me.	3.84	0.91
My professional reputation creates opportunities for career development.	3.84	0.84
I consider personal branding important for professional success.	3.83	0.92
People perceive me as credible in professional settings.	3.81	1.03
My communication style positively influences my professional reputation.	3.79	0.93
I consciously manage my professional image.	3.78	0.96
I actively promote my professional strengths.	3.74	1.02
I maintain consistency between my values and professional behavior.	3.69	0.90
I intentionally develop my visibility in professional environments.	3.69	0.98

The descriptive statistics for questions about Customer Experience and Customer Trust are reported below, in Table 11. The highest agreement was found for the statement “Customers trust professionals who communicate clearly” (M = 4.04, SD = 0.91), followed by statements “Professional behavior influences customer loyalty” (M = 4.03, SD = 0.83) and “A positive professional image improves customer trust” (M = 3.98, SD = 0.85). Participants also tended to agree with statements such as “Customers are more confident when interacting with professionals who appear competent” (M = 3.94, SD = 0.86), “Employees’ communication skills influence organizational reputation” (M = 3.94, SD = 0.85), and “Professional credibility positively affects customer satisfaction” (M = 3.93, SD = 0.86). Additionally, some agreement was found for statements: “Customers value professionals who demonstrate integrity” (M = 3.92, SD = 0.95), “Customer experience is influenced by employees’ emotional intelligence” (M = 3.90, SD = 0.95), and “Authenticity strengthens customer relationships” (M = 3.89, SD = 0.94), while the

lowest levels of agreement was found for the statement “Strong interpersonal communication improves customer experience” ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.86$).

Table 11. Descriptive Statistics for Customer Experience and Customer Trust

Statements	M	SD
Customers trust professionals who communicate clearly.	4.04	0.91
Professional behavior influences customer loyalty.	4.03	0.83
A positive professional image improves customer trust.	3.98	0.85
Customers are more confident when interacting with professionals who appear competent.	3.94	0.86
Employees’ communication skills influence organizational reputation.	3.94	0.85
Professional credibility positively affects customer satisfaction.	3.93	0.86
Customers value professionals who demonstrate integrity.	3.92	0.95
Customer experience is influenced by employees’ emotional intelligence.	3.90	0.95
Authenticity strengthens customer relationships.	3.89	0.94
Strong interpersonal communication improves customer experience.	3.83	0.86

Table 12 presents the descriptive data for statements regarding Career Growth and Organizational Impact. The highest agreement was reported for the statement “My present job encourages me to continuously gain new knowledge” ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.67$), followed closely by “My present job provides me with opportunities for career advancement” ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.70$) and “My organization recognizes employees with strong professional reputations” ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.74$). Relatively high agreement was also found for “My communication skills positively influence my career growth” ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.77$), “Personal branding contributes to leadership opportunities” ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.75$), and “My present job moves me closer to my career goals” ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.71$). Participants also tended to agree with statements such as: “Employees with strong professional reputations are more likely to succeed” ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.71$), “My organization provides opportunities for promotion” ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.69$), and “I believe professional visibility positively affects promotion opportunities” ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.77$), while the lowest mean is recorded for “My present job encourages me to continuously develop my skills” ($M =$

4.13, SD = 0.84). In general, participants tended to agree more with these questions as all mean scores are above the value of 4, which corresponds to “I agree” in the 5-point scale.

Table 12. Descriptive Statistics for Career Growth and Organizational Impact

Statements	M	SD
My present job encourages me to continuously gain new knowledge.	4.30	0.67
My present job provides me with opportunities for career advancement.	4.29	0.70
My organization recognizes employees with strong professional reputations.	4.26	0.74
My communication skills positively influence my career growth.	4.26	0.77
Personal branding contributes to leadership opportunities.	4.24	0.75
My present job moves me closer to my career goals.	4.21	0.71
Employees with strong professional reputations are more likely to succeed.	4.20	0.71
My organization provides opportunities for promotion.	4.19	0.69
I believe professional visibility positively affects promotion opportunities.	4.17	0.77
My present job encourages me to continuously develop my skills.	4.13	0.84

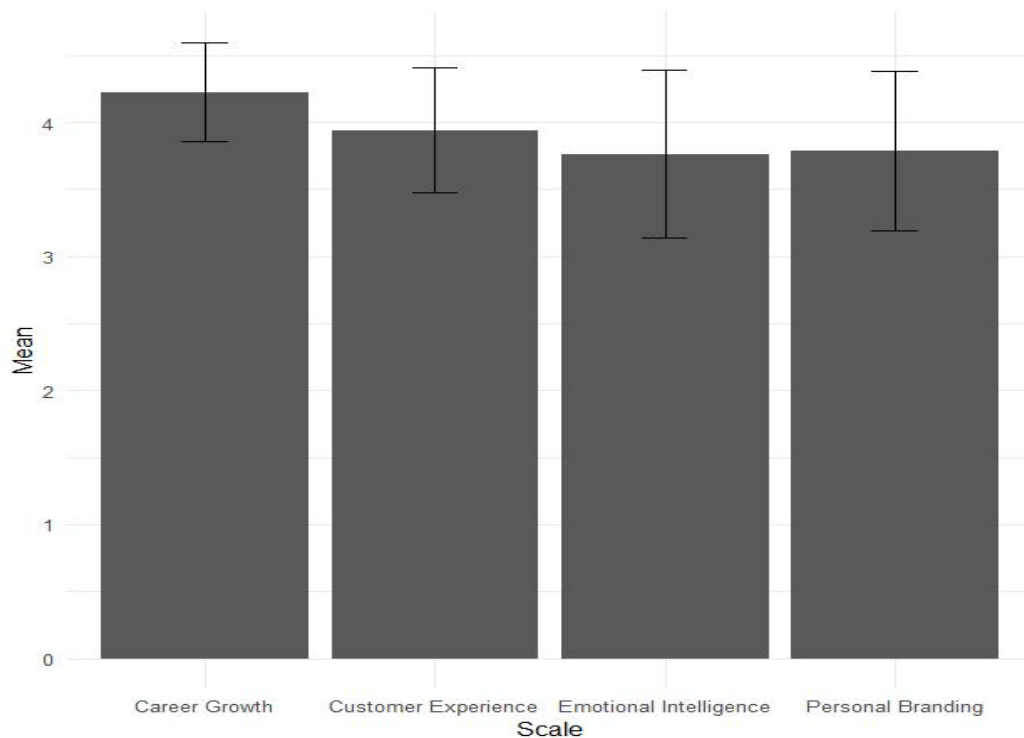
Continuing, Table 13 and Figure 8 present overall scores for the four main constructs that were created by averaging the questions of each corresponding group of questions. Career Growth and Organizational Impact has the highest score (M = 4.23, SD = 0.37), followed by Customer Experience and Customer Trust (M = 3.94, SD = 0.47), Personal Branding (M = 3.79, SD = 0.59), and Emotional Intelligence (M = 3.76, SD = 0.63). The results show that all four constructs were evaluated positively by the participants, who tended to value career related outcomes more positively than the rest.

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics of the study’s main variables

Variables	M	SD
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	4.23	0.37
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	3.94	0.47
Personal Branding	3.79	0.59

Variables	M	SD
Emotional Intelligence	3.76	0.63

Figure 8. Descriptive Statistics of the study's main Variables



Normality tests were run on the four main variables. Table 14 presents the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test. Results showed that the dimensions of Emotional Intelligence ($W = 0.973$, $p = .029$) and Personal Branding ($W = 0.972$, $p = .021$) deviate significantly from normality ($p < .05$). Furthermore, Career Growth and Organizational Impact also deviates the most from normality ($W = 0.877$, $p < .001$). Lastly, there was not enough evidence to reject the normality hypothesis for the Customer Experience and Customer Trust dimension ($W = 0.986$, $p = .295$).

Since three of the four main study variables deviated significantly from normality, it was decided that subsequent analyses use non-parametric statistical procedures for hypotheses testing.

Table 14. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test for the study's main variables

Variables	W	p
Emotional Intelligence	0.973	0.029

Variables	W	p
Personal Branding	0.972	0.021
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	0.986	0.295
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	0.877	< 0.001

Note. A p-value greater than .05 indicates that the distribution does not significantly deviate from normality.

In order to test the relationships among the study's main variables, many Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficients were calculated. Spearman's rho was selected because the normality hypothesis was rejected for most of the study's variables. The results presented in Table 15 indicate the strength and direction of the associations among Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact.

Results showed a statistically significant positive correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding ($\rho = .51$, $p < .001$), meaning that participants reporting higher levels of emotional intelligence also tended to report stronger personal branding characteristics. Emotional Intelligence was also positively associated with Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\rho = .20$, $p = .034$), although this relationship is considered "weak". Furthermore, a moderate positive relationship was identified between Emotional Intelligence and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .39$, $p < .001$), suggesting that emotionally intelligent individuals were more likely to perceive positive career development outcomes.

Personal Branding demonstrated statistically significant positive correlations with all other study variables. Specifically, a moderate positive association was observed between Personal Branding and Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\rho = .39$, $p < .001$), indicating that stronger personal branding was related to more favorable perceptions of customer interactions and trust. It was also found that Personal Branding was moderately related with Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .47$, $p < .001$), which means that those with stronger professional branding perceptions are more positive towards career growth.

Customer Experience and Customer Trust showed a positive relationship with Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .26$, $p = .006$). The relationship is weak but

positive, meaning that better views of customer relations and trust tend to go together with slightly better views of career development.

All the above correlations were positive and statistically significant, indicating that higher levels of emotional intelligence, personal branding, customer trust, and career growth tend to coexist. The strongest relationship was reported between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding, while the weakest relationship was found between Emotional Intelligence and Customer Experience / Customer Trust.

Table 15. Spearman Correlations among the study's main variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional Intelligence	-			
2. Personal Branding	.51***	-		
3. Customer Experience and Customer Trust	.20*	.39***	-	
4. Career Growth and Organizational Impact	.39***	.47***	.26**	-

Note. Spearman's rho coefficients are reported. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The relationship between demographic characteristics and the study's main variables was further examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient. Specifically, the analysis investigated whether participants' age was associated with Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact. The results are presented in Table 16.

The findings indicated that age was not significantly correlated with Emotional Intelligence ($\rho = .10$, $p = .281$), Personal Branding ($\rho = -.01$, $p = .923$), or Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\rho = .07$, $p = .498$). However, a statistically significant positive relationship was identified between age and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .22$, $p = .024$). Although the coefficient indicates a "weak" correlation, results showed that older participants tended to report slightly more positive perceptions regarding career growth opportunities and organizational support.

Table 16. Spearman Correlations between Age and the study's main variables

Variables	Spearman's ρ	p
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Variables	Spearman's ρ	p
Emotional Intelligence	.10	.281
Personal Branding	-.01	.923
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	.07	.498
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	.22*	.024

Note. Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (ρ) was used. * $p < .05$.

Additionally, the relationship between years of professional experience and the study's variables was examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient. Results indicate that professional experience was not significantly correlated with Emotional Intelligence ($\rho = .05$, $p = .583$), Personal Branding ($\rho = -.03$, $p = .781$), Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\rho = .10$, $p = .306$), or Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .05$, $p = .584$).

Table 17. Spearman Correlations between Years of Professional Experience and the study's main variables

Variables	Spearman's ρ	p
Emotional Intelligence	.05	.583
Personal Branding	-.03	.781
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	.10	.306
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	.05	.584

Note. Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (ρ) was used.

Furthermore, it was examined using Mann-Whitney U test, whether the four main study variables differed between the two genders and between employees who had direct customer interaction. The results are presented in the Tables 18 and 19, below.

The results showed that there were no statistically significant gender differences in any of the main study variables. Specifically, men and women have similar reported levels in Emotional Intelligence ($W = 1353.50$, $p = .540$), Personal Branding ($W = 1647.00$, $p = .234$), Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($W = 1649.50$, $p = .228$), and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($W = 1189.00$, $p = .102$). Although the lowest p-value

was observed for Career Growth and Organizational Impact, this difference did not reach statistical significance. Therefore, results suggest that gender was not associated with meaningful differences in the examined constructs.

Table 18. Mann-Whitney U Tests for Gender Differences in the Main Study Variables

Variables	W	p
Emotional Intelligence	1353.50	.540
Personal Branding	1647.00	.234
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	1649.50	.228
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	1189.00	.102

Note. Mann-Whitney U tests were used because several study variables deviated from normality.

The analysis also examined whether participants who directly interacted with customers differed from those who did not. Test results showed that direct customer interaction was not significantly associated with any of the four variables. More specifically, no statistically significant differences were found for Emotional Intelligence ($W = 1212.00$, $p = .647$), Personal Branding ($W = 1034.50$, $p = .443$), Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($W = 994.00$, $p = .294$), or Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($W = 1173.00$, $p = .851$). These results indicate that participants with and without direct customer contact reported similar levels of emotional intelligence, personal branding, customer experience, and career growth.

Table 19. Mann-Whitney U Tests for Differences Based on Direct Customer Interaction

Variables	W	p
Emotional Intelligence	1212.00	.647
Personal Branding	1034.50	.443
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	994.00	.294

Variables	W	p
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	1173.00	.851

Note. Mann-Whitney U tests were used because several study variables deviated from normality.

Next, the influence of educational level on the four main variables was investigated, using the Kruskal-Wallis test, (once again a non parametric test was used while most variables are not normal), and educational levels has more than two groups. As shown in Table 20, educational level was not significantly associated with Emotional Intelligence ($\chi^2(3) = 3.81$, $p = .283$), Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\chi^2(3) = 1.26$, $p = .738$), or Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\chi^2(3) = 2.07$, $p = .558$), but a statistically significant result was found for Personal Branding ($\chi^2(3) = 8.42$, $p = .038$). More specifically, it was revealed that participants with different educational qualifications reported different levels of personal branding.

Table 20. Kruskal-Wallis Tests for Differences According to Educational Level

Variables	χ^2	df	p
Emotional Intelligence	3.81	3	.283
Personal Branding	8.42*	3	.038
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	1.26	3	.738
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	2.07	3	.558

Note. Kruskal-Wallis tests were used because several study variables deviated from normality. * $p < .05$.

The relationship between business sector and the four main study variables was also investigated using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The results revealed that no statistically significant differences were observed among participants employed in different business sectors. Emotional Intelligence did not differ significantly across sectors ($\chi^2(5) = 3.03$, $p = .695$), nor did Personal Branding ($\chi^2(5) = 7.17$, $p = .209$), Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\chi^2(5) = 4.68$, $p = .457$) and Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\chi^2(5) = 10.59$, $p = .060$).

Table 21. Kruskal-Wallis Tests for Differences According to Business Sector

Variables	χ^2	df	p
Emotional Intelligence	3.03	5	.695
Personal Branding	7.17	5	.209
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	10.59	5	.060
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	4.68	5	.457

Note. Kruskal-Wallis tests were used because several study variables deviated from normality.

Lastly, Kruskal-Wallis was used in order to examine if current position affect the main study constructs. As shown, 2 statistically significant results were revealed, related to Personal Branding ($\chi^2(3) = 8.56$, $p = .036$) and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\chi^2(3) = 9.21$, $p = .027$). More specifically, employees occupying different hierarchical positions reported different perceptions regarding their professional image and career development opportunities.

In contrast, no statistically significant differences were observed for Emotional Intelligence ($\chi^2(3) = 0.91$, $p = .823$) or Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\chi^2(3) = 2.32$, $p = .508$).

Table 22. Kruskal-Wallis Tests for Differences According to Current Position

Variables	χ^2	df	p
Emotional Intelligence	0.91	3	.823
Personal Branding	8.56*	3	.036
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	2.32	3	.508
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	9.21*	3	.027

Note. Kruskal-Wallis tests were used because several study variables deviated from normality. * $p < .05$.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Results

4.1 Discussion of the Main Findings

This chapter aims to examine the key findings of the study and analyze these findings in connection to the role of personal branding in customer experience and customer perception and career development. The findings offer a holistic view of personal branding as a valuable work tool positively linked to both individual career results and customer perceptions. The number of participants was 108 with relatively equal gender distribution, 52.8% male and 47.2% female. The educational profile of the respondents was also relatively high, a third of them having a Bachelor's degree, a third a Master's degree, 24.1% an MBA, and 9.3% a PhD. This indicates that, for the most part, the participants were well-educated and thereby had the potential to truly understand professional development, workplace reputation, and career advancement. Some sectors were also represented in the sample, primarily finance, retail, consulting, education, healthcare and technology, adding to the relevance of the findings in a variety of workplace settings.

The key finding is that all four of the key constructs of the study were assessed as positive by participants. Career Growth and Organizational Impact had the highest overall mean score ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.37$), followed by Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.47$), Personal Branding ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.59$), and Emotional Intelligence ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.63$). This trend suggests that there was high level of agreement with career development and organisational support items and positive perception of customer experience, personal branding and emotional intelligence items. The high mean score for Career Growth and Organizational Impact is noteworthy as it indicates that the respondents regard the workplace not only as a place of employment but also as a place where reputation, communication skills and learning and growth opportunities are inextricably linked to advancement. This finding aligns with the idea of sustainable careers that posits that career development is influenced by the interplay of individual agency and organisational context (De Vos, Van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2020).

Descriptive results also indicate that personal branding was perceived by the participants as a useful factor in the success of the professional. The three most highly rated personal branding statements were: "I try to differentiate myself professionally from others" ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.94$), "I believe my personal image influences how customers perceive me" ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.91$) and "My professional reputation creates opportunities for career

development” ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.84$). These results indicate that personal branding is not a shallow and insignificant concept to the respondents. Instead, they understand how it can be used to differentiate and be seen by the customer and professionals. This is an argument that personal branding is not only a concern for public figures, artists or digital influencers but has also become pertinent for ordinary professionals who live in competition in the job market and in front of customers (Gorbatov et al., 2018; Scheidt et al., 2020).

The correlation analysis gives more solid evidence to the relationship between the study variables. Personal Branding had a positive and significant relationship with both Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\rho = .39$, $p < .001$), and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .47$, $p < .001$). These two relationships are most important in the study as they suggest that those who had a greater sense of personal branding also had a greater sense of customer trust and career growth. There was a moderate and statistically significant relationship between Personal Branding and Career Growth, implying that Personal Branding can be a professional tool for employees to make themselves more visible, credible and feel more opportunities in their careers. This is very much in line with Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova (2019) who posited that personal branding is a way for individuals to “get noticed” and could have a positive impact on their career. Likewise, Khedher (2019) states that personal branding has a significant impact on employability since it enables individuals to convey themselves and their worth in a more unique manner.

An interesting result is that the highest correlation ($\rho = .51$, $p < .001$) was found between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding. This correlation indicates that higher emotional intelligence scores correlate with higher personal branding scores. This finding is significant since personal branding is more than just being visible. It involves being aware of oneself, managing emotions, social awareness and communicating appropriately with others. The emotional intelligence results indicated high degree of agreement between statements like setting personal goals, controlling emotions, understanding the emotions of others and understanding one's own feelings. These attributes directly relate to building a personal brand that is credible. This finding is also consistent with the research results which indicate that emotional intelligence is positively related to employee outcomes and career-related outcomes (Doğru, 2022; Pirsoul, Parmentier, Sovet, & Nils, 2023).

The demographic analyses give more depth to the discussion. There was no significant difference between the main variables of the study and gender, so that males and females gave comparable results in relation to emotional intelligence, personal branding, perceptions of customer experience and career growth. However, direct customer interaction was not found to be statistically significant, although 73.1% of the respondents claimed that they interact directly with customers. This indicates that not all employees who work directly with customers may be the only ones who see themselves as having a brand, nor may they be the only ones who see their role as a brand ambassador. Rather, these perceptions may be woven more broadly into the culture of the workplace. Education was only significantly associated with Personal Branding ($\chi^2(3) = 8.42$, $p = .038$), and current position was significantly associated with Personal Branding ($\chi^2(3) = 8.56$, $p = .036$) and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\chi^2(3) = 9.21$, $p = .027$). Only the main findings are available, however, without post-hoc tests, so these findings should be interpreted with caution. They show some variation in the level of education and position in hierarchy but not exactly which groups vary from which ones.

4.2 Personal Branding and Career Development in the Workplace

The findings strongly suggest that personal branding is positively connected with career development in the workplace. The medium correlation between the Personal Branding and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .47$, $p < .001$) suggests that the individuals who have more positive perceptions of Personal Branding also have more positive perceptions of career growth, organisational recognition and professional growth. This is one of the key study results as it backs-up the point that career development is not just about job performance or years of experience and formal qualifications. Instead, it is also influenced by how people express themselves professionally, how they control their image and make themselves visible in organisations. Thus, personal branding seems to be a resource for the career which can be used by employees to convert their talents into acknowledged professional value.

This interpretation is supported by the descriptive results. Participants strongly agreed that their present job encourages them to continuously gain new knowledge ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.67$), provides opportunities for career advancement ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.70$), and moves them closer to their career goals ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.71$). Moreover, they said their organization acknowledges employees with good professional reputation ($M = 4.26$, $SD =$

0.74), communication skills have a positive impact on career growth ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.77$) and personal branding leads to job opportunities in leadership. ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.75$). These findings indicate that the participants see a significant link between career development and professional reputation, communication and visibility. That is, employees are not necessarily being advanced due to their performance of tasks but because their competence is seen as credible and recognised by others.

This is very much in line with the personal branding and career success literature. Gorbatov et al. (2019) state that personal branding can aid with being noticed and having career benefits. Likewise, Khedher (2019) states that personal branding is a tool that can help with the employability of individuals seeking to stand out in crowded labour markets. The current results corroborate these arguments in that participants report a link between personal reputation and career opportunities. This finding is particularly significant because there was a high level of agreement with the statement “Employees with strong professional reputations are more likely to succeed” ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.71$), showing that respondents believe that reputation is a valuable career asset. This isn't to say that reputation takes the place of skill. Instead, it implies that competence is more professionally relevant when clearly expressed and acknowledged by insiders and outsiders of the organisation.

It's important to highlight the strong correlation between current position and personal branding as well. The Kruskal–Wallis test showed that participants in different hierarchical positions reported different perceptions of Personal Branding ($\chi^2(3) = 8.56$, $p = .036$) and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\chi^2(3) = 9.21$, $p = .027$). Notwithstanding the inability to interpret the finding in depth due to the lack of post-hoc testing, the present study still indicates that there may be an impact of the hierarchy of the organisation on the experience of personal branding and career development of employees. However, managers and senior managers may be more aware of the importance of strategic value of reputation, visibility and professional identity, as managers often have to communicate, manage their credibility and manage stakeholders more heavily. This interpretation aligns with the findings of Venciute, Yue and Thelen (2024) who conducted a study on personal branding and communication of leaders on professional social media platforms, where the relevance of personal branding is growing in leadership contexts where visibility, communication and perceived credibility are important.

An additional interesting aspect is the finding that age was weakly but significantly related to Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .22$, $p = .024$). There were some indications of greater positive career growth and organisational supports perceptions among older participants. However, there was no significant relationship between age and Personal Branding, Emotional Intelligence and Customer Experience and Customer Trust. This indicates that perceptions of careers are likely to be more positive across the age groups, perhaps because older workers have a greater level of knowledge about the organisation, confidence about their careers or access to career opportunities. Meanwhile, there does not seem to be an age dependence to personal branding. It's significant as it indicates that personal branding is not just for the younger generation of professionals or digital-native workers.

Self-awareness is also closely related to personal branding. To build a viable professional image, it is important that workers become familiar with their strengths and weaknesses, values and professional aspirations. The emotional intelligence results in the study corroborate this, as the actors indicated that they have a rather high level of goal setting, emotional control and self-understanding. Carden, Jones and Passmore (2022) state that the development of self-awareness is an important factor in the development of adults as it enables individuals to understand themselves and their effects on others. This means that personal branding starts with reflection before it includes communication—especially in the field of career development. The better you know what you have to offer, the more able you will be to articulate and make strategic choices regarding your career.

Based on the results of all the items, it is observed that personal branding helps in career development through the higher level of professional differentiation, visibility, reputation and perceived leadership potential. It cannot be interpreted as self-promotion, but as a structured process which involves the employees' alignment of their skills, values and actions to the way they want to be seen professionally. Therefore, in today's employment environment, where both career progression and performance are based on communication, credibility and stakeholder perception, personal branding is an essential part of career management.

4.3 The Effect of Personal Branding on Customer Experience

The results indicated there was a meaningful relationship between personal branding with customer experience. There was a positive, moderate and significant correlation between Personal Branding and Customer Experience ($\rho = .39, p < .001$) as well as Personal Branding and Customer Trust ($\rho = .39, p < .001$). This means that there is a correlation between the strength of personal branding characteristics and customers' perceptions of customer experience and customer trust. The connection is at the heart of the study in that it reflects that personal branding is not limited to the personal career development of employees. Its impact is also external, e.g. customers perception of professionalism, communication and service quality.

The descriptive results for Customer Experience and Customer Trust were very good. This construct had the three highest-rated items: “Customers trust professionals who communicate clearly” ($M = 4.04, SD = 0.91$); “Professional behavior influences customer loyalty” ($M = 4.03, SD = 0.83$); and “A positive professional image improves customer trust” ($M = 3.98, SD = 0.85$). These results show strong recognition among the participants on the importance of communication, professional behavior and appearance to influence customer trust. Customer experience theory suggests that customers do not just consider the technical aspects of a service, but also how the service is delivered. Becker and Jaakkola (2020) define customer experience as a multi-dimensional phenomenon which is determined by the customers' reactions to various interactions with the company. The current results confirm this opinion; in the present study, the quality of employees is seen within the context of overall customer experience.

This is especially pertinent as 73.1% indicated they have direct contact with customers in their job. This indicated that a majority of participants have hands-on experience in customer-facing situations, and were thus able to assess the role of employee behaviour in customer experience. Interestingly, however, the Mann–Whitney U test did not reveal any significant differences between the groups with direct customer interaction and those without direct customer interaction in terms of their perception of Customer Experience ($W = 994.00, p = .294$), Personal Branding ($W = 1034.50, p = .443$), Emotional Intelligence ($W = 1212.00, p = .647$), or Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($W = 1173.00, p = .851$). This finding indicates that the connection between personal branding and customer experience is not only acknowledged by those employees that are in direct

contact with customers. Rather, it can be a cultural awareness within the organisation that customer experience is influenced by the professional behaviour throughout the organisation.

The most significant mechanism that seems to tie together personal branding and customer experience is communication. Respondents' high mean score for clear communication and customer trust highlights that communication is an integral aspect of professional credibility. This aligns with the concept of customer experience literature that advocates for meaningful customer interaction and touchpoints during the customer journey (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). Clear communication increases customer's confidence and sense of being informed and respected. If the communication is unclear, impersonal or inconsistent, customers might not be satisfied or feel confident even if the service itself does fine, because of poor communication. So, personal branding is not just a means for the employees to look good, but it is a way for them to communicate in a way that eases uncertainty and increases trust for the customer.

Emotional intelligence is also a factor. There was a weak correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\rho = .20$, $p = .034$). While this correlation was not as strong as the correlation between Personal Branding and Customer Experience, a correlation does exist between emotional competencies and customer related perceptions. They also agreed that the emotional intelligence of employees ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.95$) is a factor that defines customer experience. This finding is significant as customer experience frequently depends on emotional responses, particularly when regarding dealing with complaints, uncertainty, dissatisfaction or decision-making. Said employees with higher emotional intelligence may possess the ability to understand customer emotions, respond suitably and maintain a professional behavior under pressure. This is in line with Doğru's (2022) meta-analysis which shows positive associations with emotional intelligence and employee outcomes.

Personal branding also has an impact on customer experience because it boosts consistency. Personal branding is the key to conveying trust. Customers who have contact with an employee who is competent, credible and consistent will find the service experience more trustworthy. This aligns with the result that the customers are more confident when they feel that the professionals are competent ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.86$), and that professional credibility has a positive impact on customer satisfaction ($M = 3.93$, SD

= 0.86). Personal branding in this way would be a kind of assurance. It assists customers to see the employee as able, serious, and reliable. This is particularly useful in a service environment where customers are unable to truly assess the technical quality and must judge the service based on the communication, behaviour and professional image.

The results can also be analyzed in terms of the digital customer experience. While the study is not purely about the online realm, personal branding is so prevalent today that it's often done in both offline and online. Trust, relevance and design of interaction are essential for effective online customer experiences, according to Bleier, Harmeling and Palmatier (2019). Hoyer et al. (2020) also demonstrate that new technologies are changing the customer experience, and how customers interact with firms and professionals. In this context, employees' personal brands can mold the expectations of their customers even before they have had any direct interaction. Proper use of digital profile, believable communication and online presence can help increase customer trust, but the lack of these or unprofessional digital profile can reduce trust. Thus, it is important to consider how personal branding and customer experience work across various touchpoints such as face-to-face, organisational and digital.

4.4 The Effect of Personal Branding on Customer Perception

The results indicate that the concept of personal branding does indeed affect the view and perception of customers, especially regarding professional image, credibility, communication and trust. Among the best rated Personal Branding statements was “I believe my personal image influences how customers perceive me” ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.91$). This finding supports directly the notion that employees are aware of the relationship between their image and customer's perception of the image. It also shows that the respondents perceive personal branding as a process in relationship. Personal branding doesn't only occur when people tell themselves who they are, but also when others tell themselves who they see you as. In this context, customer perception is crucial for the process of personal branding.

Trust is closely related to customer perception. The findings reveal that there is a high level of agreement with statements like “A positive professional image improves customer trust” ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.85$), “Customers value professionals who demonstrate integrity” ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.95$) and “Authenticity strengthens customer relationships” ($M = 3.89$,

SD = 0.94). The results show that respondents don't consider personal branding solely a visual or promotional idea. Instead, they value it for its trustworthiness, integrity and authenticity. This is significant because customers will judge employees by what they say, as well as how they act, and whether it seems sincere and consistent. In this regard, the results are consistent with research on behavioural integrity, which emphasizes the importance of congruence between words and deeds for building trust and outcomes of work performance (Choi, Yoon, & Kim, 2020; Ete et al., 2022).

The connection between personal branding and customer perception can also be comprehended in the light of human brands. Osorio, Centeno and Cambra-Fierro (2020) explain that human brands are those that, like corporate brands, carry meanings, associations and reputational value. At work situations, employees can assume the roles of human representatives of the organisation. Behaviour, communication and professionalism of employees are often cues to customers about the quality of the organisation. For instance, someone who is well-informed and seems knowledgeable can reinforce the customer's sense of the organisation's reliability. On the other hand, if your employees seem unprofessional, inconsistent or disinterested, it can make your products or services look weak, even though they aren't.

These results also indicate that credibility contributes to customers' perceptions. They felt that participants believe that they have credibility in the workplace ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.03$) and that professional credibility has a positive impact on customer satisfaction ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.86$). Credibility is an integral part of personal branding, as it enables customers and stakeholders to trust the individual's abilities and intentions. Although not specific to influencers, the literature on influencer credibility is useful here and within the context of this study, workplace employees. Lou & Yuan (2019) proved that credibility and message value are factors that affect consumer trust. Likewise, Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget (2020) stress the significance of identification, credibility and fit in contexts of endorsement. In a work role people may react favorably to the employees who are communicating in a way that seems believable and appropriate to the service environment.

A second key finding is that business sector did not significantly impact Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\chi^2(5) = 10.59$, $p = .060$) but this was close to significance. The p value was not below the conventional .05, thus it should not be interpreted as a statistically significant sectoral difference. But, the outcome may indicate that in different

sectors, the perception of customers may be slightly different and this can be explored further in future with larger sample size. The lack of significant inter-sectoral differences also suggests that the perceived importance of professional image, communication and trust might be universally relevant in the sectors of finance, retail, consulting, education, health care and technology. This confirms the notion that personal branding does not belong to a specific industry, but can be a phenomenon that exists in the workplace in general.

Also notable was that there was no significant impact on perceptions from direct customer interaction. One might have thought that the employees directly exposed to customers would express greater attitudes towards customer experience and towards trust. But this assumption proved to be incorrect. A possible interpretation is that customer perception is now a concern for the organisation and not just the front-line staff. In today's organisations, back-office workers, managers, technical experts, and digital communicators can all have a secondary, but still, impact on customer experience. According to Holmlund et al. (2020), customer experience management needs a strategic context and knowledge of customer-related interactions and data across the board. So, customer perception shouldn't simply be left up to sales and service personnel. It reflects professional conduct of staff members in the different roles and the broader organisational system.

The overall results suggest that personal branding has an impact on customer perception through influencing customer evaluation of credibility, competence, authenticity and trust. A strong personal brand can boost the customer's trust in the employee and any organisation he or she represents. But this effect relies on the consistency between image and behaviour. Personal branding, without integrity and professional behavior, can prove ineffective in building trust. Hence, the best personal branding is not hyperbole – it's authentic working practices, which customers can first-hand.

4.5 Connection Between the Findings and the Literature Review

This study's results are significantly in line with the literature of personal branding, the career development and the customer experience. Firstly, the findings are in line with the idea that personal branding is an interdisciplinary and multidimensional concept. The term personal branding has been coined by Gorbato et al. (2018) as a process related to identity, reputation, career management and perceptions of stakeholders. According to

Scheidt et al. (2020) personal branding is also an old practice yet it is a relatively young research area, thus individuals have always managed their professional identities, albeit without systematic research. The present results corroborate this literature as participants related personal branding with differentiation, professional image, reputation, credibility, communication style and visibility.

The findings also validate the literature on personal branding and career success. The importance of the relationship between Personal Branding and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .47, p < .001$) aligns with Gorbatov et al. (2019) who state that Personal Branding can provide career benefits by increasing visibility and recognition. The results also align with Khedher's (2019) claim that personal branding has an impact on employability and the creation and communication of a professional identity. Participants strongly agreed that professional reputation opens up career development opportunities, and that employees with strong professional reputations have a better chance of success, for the purposes of the current study. This suggests that personal branding is viewed as a communication practice, as well as a real-life determinant in the advancement of one's career.

The results are also related to the literature on self-awareness and emotional intelligence. The highest correlation obtained in the study was Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding ($\rho = .51, p < .001$). This is evidence of the need to know oneself, to regulate one's emotions and be aware of the social environment when creating a good personal brand. The importance of self-awareness in adult development is highlighted by Carden et al. (2022) as it allows individuals to know themselves and their influence on others. Likewise, the literature on emotional intelligence indicates that emotional intelligence, which is understanding and managing emotions, is linked to positive outcomes of employees and careers (Doğru, 2022; Pirsoul et al., 2023). The results of the current research thus indicate that personal branding is not only about outward appearance. It is basis in psychological and interpersonal abilities which allow people to build up a believable professional identity that is effective in social situations.

The results also reflect the literature on customer experience. Becker and Jaakkola (2020) consider customer experience as a multi-faceted phenomenon, which is created by the interactions between customer and companies. McColl-Kennedy et al. (2019) point out that it is critical to obtain customers experience insights that are meaningful in terms of

interactions. The above-mentioned views are supported with the present study which revealed that communication, professional behaviour, positive image, competence, credibility, integrity and emotional intelligence are important aspects of customer trust and customer experience. Further, the positive correlation between Personal Branding and Customer Experience with Customer Trust ($\rho = .39, p < .001$) was also found to be moderate, suggesting that personal branding might be one of the factors that influence customer experience at the employee level.

The results are also linked to the literature of social dynamics and relationship among stakeholders in personal branding. Dumont and Ots (2020) state that personal branding is a result of the relationships among various stakeholders. This is substantiated by the current results as personal branding was related with employees' perception of career as well as customers' trust and perception. This also implies that personal brand is not completely in the control of the individual. Constructed socially within the interaction with managers, co-workers, customers and organisations. Thus personal branding should be recognised as a relationship process and not just an individual process.

Despite the results being largely focussed on perceptions of the workplace, the digital dimension of the literature is still relevant. Personal branding has been proven to have an impact on career outcomes (Chen et al., 2021) and professionals are becoming brands in online environments (Jacobson, 2020). Smith and Fischer (2021) also note that person brand building occurs in the 'attention economy online' in which visibility and attention are valued in economic and reputational terms. Venciute et al. (2024) also demonstrate that leaders employ professional social media to develop their personal brand and connect with stakeholders. The current results, especially the ones concerning visibility, reputation & communication, are in line with the literature. But they also argue that personal branding is not just about being online. It is very much tied to day-to-day working practices and dealing with customers.

Finally, results confirm literature on behavioural integrity and authenticity. Participants concurred that customers appreciate integrity and authenticity helps to build customer relationships. These findings support those of Choi et al. (2020) and Ete et al. (2022) which highlight the significance of behavioural integrity for workplace outcomes. In terms of personal branding, it translates to: Credibility is the congruence between the image and the behaviour. A personal brand that's inconsistent or exaggerated without substantiation

through actions could not build trust. Thus, the results suggest that there is a more ethical and behaviour-based conception of personal branding that requires the establishment of a reputation through authentic professional practice.

4.6 Practical Implications for Employees

The research has several implications for the workplace. For one, employees need to know that there is value in building a personal brand as part of career development. The correlation between Personal Branding and Career Growth and Organizational Impact is 0.9, suggesting that a higher score on Personal Branding tends to be associated with a higher score on Career Growth and Organizational Impact. But it doesn't mean that personal branding is a foolproof strategy. Instead, it requires that workers understand how to effectively communicate their worth, how to establish professional credibility and how to make their skills known in the workplace. In today's career world, skills need to be coupled with recognition. Individuals who excel at their jobs but lack the ability to articulate their own strengths may not be offered the same opportunities as people who can communicate well, and have a good reputation and are visible.

Second, personal branding should be done by employees as a process of continuous and genuine branding. According to the results, credibility, communication, professional image and consistency are important things to the respondents. Thus, it is important for employees to avoid using personal branding as a method of self-promotion. Rather, they should start with being aware of themselves. They should be aware of their strengths, values, goals and areas for improvement. Personal branding is directly related to self-awareness, which is a crucial aspect of adult development as highlighted by Carden et al. (2022). Self-aware employees can build a brand that aligns with what they are really capable and do, as opposed to what they are not.

Third, staff should build up emotional intelligence in terms of their personal brand. There is a strong correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding which indicates that emotional competence is conducive to professional identity. Those who are attuned to their own feelings, who can control their responses, who can drive themselves and who can detect the feelings of others are likely to be more effective communicators and to have better relationships in the workplace. This is especially crucial for customer-facing positions where emotional regulation and empathy can impact service interactions.

There are positive relationships between emotional intelligence and employee outcomes and career outcomes, as demonstrated by Dođru (2022) and Pirsoul et al. (2023). Hence, every employee should consider the emotional intelligence as a fundamental aspect of professional branding and career development.

Fourthly, employees need to listen to communication. The conclusions clearly indicate that communication is essential to a career and for customer trust. The participants strongly agreed that communication skills positively impact their career growth and customers believe in professionals who can communicate. This indicates that staff should be actively working to grow their skill in expressing ideas, listening attentively, communicating clearly and adjusting communication to the target audience. Communication isn't simply a technical ability, it's a reputational message. It gives an indication to others about the level of organisation, competence, respect and trust of an employee.

Fifth, staff need to be aware that their own brand has an impact on customers. In fact, customers make judgements on employees' behaviour, language, professionalism and tone, even if they are not thinking about their own personal brand. Personal branding can have a positive effect on customer confidence and trust, and lack of professional behaviour can have a negative effect on the customer's perception. Hence, workers should do what they want, keeping in mind the professional image they want to project. This includes demonstrating integrity, reliability, competence and authenticity. As proposed by Choi et al. (2020) and Ete et al. (2022), the behavioural integrity is critical as others assess if actions are aligned with words. For staffers, this translates to personal branding that is demonstrated by behaviour.

Lastly, workers need to be aware of their professional presence and act responsibly. The results indicate that visibility relates to promotion and career development. But don't mistake visibility for self promotion. Visibility is making an impact, communicating results properly and engaging in professional networks. Digital platforms might be used to facilitate this process, particularly when showing expertise and professional values. Venciute et al. (2024); Jacobson (2020); and Chen et al. (2021) demonstrate that DPB has the potential to shape career and stakeholder perceptions. Staff should therefore take care to ensure that their online identity is professional, consistent and in line with their own identity in the workplace.

4.7 Practical Implications for Organisations

The results also have significant consequences for organisations. In the first place, organisations need to understand that employee personal branding can be done to aid either their employee's career or the customer experience. The findings indicate that there is a positive correlation between personal branding and career development and customer trust. This would imply that the organisations should not think of personal branding just as an individual's level of concern. The professional identity of employees shapes the experience of the organisation for customers and is a way of valuing talent. Whether it is service-oriented or knowledge-based, employees in such a setting are no longer just work deliverers, they also become a reflection of organisational values, credibility and service quality.

Secondly, organisations ought to offer development opportunities to support the creation of genuine professional identities. The study revealed that perceptions of career growth and organisational support were positive and strong, and so organisations can build upon these perceptions by providing career growth training in communication, emotional intelligence, professional visibility, leadership readiness and customer interaction. This kind of training can educate workers on how their conduct affects their job growth along with customer trust. This aligns with the idea of sustainable careers also highlighting the shared responsibility of individuals and organisations to support long-term career development (De Vos et al., 2020). Those that invest in and train their employees could potentially have a more confident, credible and customer-focused workforce.

Third, it's time for organisations to put personal branding into customer experience strategy. They found that professional behavior, clear communication, positive image, credibility, integrity and emotional intelligence all are seen as important in customer's trust. So, the customer experience management shouldn't be about processes, technologies or service design. It should also take into account the appearance and attitude of the staff to the customers. Becker and Jaakkola (2020) and McColl-Kennedy et al. (2019) highlight that customer experience is influenced by various interactions and touchpoints. One of these touchpoints is employees. It is therefore important for organisations to nurture their employees to build their own brands that resonate with the experience they want their customers to have.

Fourth, organisations can establish a culture that puts a premium on the value of credibility and professional reputation. The results indicate that there is a high level of agreement with the statement that organisations recognise employees with strong professional reputations. This indicates that reputation has already got a role in organisational advancement. But organisations need to make sure that the recognition is based on a genuine contribution, and not superficial visibility, which is fair and transparent. With personal branding rewarding without regard to true performance and integrity, it can foster impression management over true professional growth. So organisations need to link recognition to performance and integrity of behavior. This aligns with the findings of the study that integrity and consistency impact employee and follower outcome (Choi et al., 2020; Ete et al., 2022).

Fifth, organisations need to consider hierarchical differences. There were significant differences by current position for Personal Branding and Career Growth and Organizational Impact. This indicates that the personal branding and career growth experiences of employees at different levels could vary, albeit personal branding and career growth must be examined in greater detail through post-hoc tests. It is important for organisations, therefore, not to take for granted that everyone has the same chance of visibility, professional recognition and professional promotion. Some of the lower level employees might need more assistance to become more confident, to communicate and establish a professional identity, and some of the managers might need some assistance to build their leadership brand and communicate with stakeholders. Venciute et al. (2024) demonstrate that leaders' personal branding plays a vital role, especially in professional social media, while maintaining its importance at all levels within the organisation is beneficial.

Sixthly, organisations need to give advice on digital professionalism. Personal branding is happening more and more online where employees can be in front of customers, other employees and future employers. Smith and Fischer (2021) call it an attention economy, which means that person brands are established through visibility and engagement with the audience. While it is not advisable for organisations to attempt to control employees' personal identities, ethical guidelines on professional communication, online behaviour and a correlation of employee presence and organisational values can be given. This is

especially relevant as digital behaviour can have an impact on how customers see the organisation and therefore on its reputation.

Lastly, organisations need to be aware of the value that can be created through personal branding, if it is done in an authentic and strategic way. It is advantageous for employees as they can develop confidence, gain visibility and opportunity for professional growth. This helps customers as they engage with professionals who look credible, competent, and trustworthy. Organisations gain because employee professionalism enhances customer experience and builds the organisation's reputation. But, this is only when personal branding is linked to actual behavior, emotional intelligence, quality of communication, integrity. The findings of this research thus indicate that it is advisable to consider personal branding as part of a larger strategy for organisations with regards to staff development, customer trust and future professional success.

Conclusions

This chapter presented the results of the study on the area of personal branding, customer experience, customer perception and career development. In general, the findings show that for the participants, personal branding is not seen as a minor, ancillary aspect of their work, but one that has substance and is relevant to development and performance in the workplace, and to the customer. The result indicates that all of the major constructs were rated positively overall with the highest scores for Career Growth, followed by Organizational Impact, Customer Experience, Customer Trust, Personal Branding and Emotional Intelligence. This indicates that career growth, organizational recognition and professional development are salient factors to the respondents and that personal branding and emotional intelligence are key in the perception of employees in professional and client environments.

One of the main findings of the chapter is that personal branding seems to be associated with career development. The statistically significant and positive correlation of Personal Branding and Career Growth and Organizational Impact indicates that participants who perceive themselves as more personally branded are also more likely to believe that there are better career opportunities, organisational recognition, and professional advancement. This is significant as it proves that career advancement is linked to experience, education or formal role, reputation, visibility, communication and perceived credibility. Translation: workers who can distinguish themselves in the workplace, describe their assets and foster a believable professional identity, could be better equipped to take advantage of employment prospects. This relation should not be taken as proof that personal branding is a direct catalyst for career success, however. The results indicate association, not causation. So, although personal branding is an important aspect to consider with regard to one's career, it must be recognized as part of a larger professional development initiative.

The chapter also finds that there is a significant relationship between personal branding and customer experience and customer trust. The participants strongly agreed with the presence of customer trust in professionals who communicate clearly, with the impact of professional behavior on customer loyalty and with the fact that a positive professional image leads to customer trust. The results indicate that the professional qualities of the employees that the customers contact, in addition to the product/service they receive, will influence them. These seem to be the signals that operate and through which customers

judge both employee and organisation: Communication, Credibility, Competence, Integrity and Authenticity. This is notable as the majority of those surveyed said they had direct contact with customers, and that many respondents were likely to be able to assess these issues from first-hand experiences in their workplace. Meanwhile, the lack of a statistic difference between the groups with and without direct customer contact indicates that personal branding for customer experience does not apply just to front-line staff. It could also be a general appreciation that the overall professionalism of the organisation has an impact on customer experience.

Another significant finding has to do with emotional intelligence. In the study, the most significant correlation was found between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding. This indicates that personal branding is not just about ‘what happens to me on the outside’ – image and/or visibility. Rather, it is closely connected with self-awareness, emotional control, motivation and understanding of others. However, those who are more aware of themselves and who can better deal with interpersonal situations may also be more able to develop their professional identity and make it credible and consistent. It is a key element, as it is the very nature of personal branding to not be about self promotion. The results indicate that the ability to have a good personal branding requires more personal and interpersonal skills. Trust is unlikely to be achieved if a professional image is not backed up by emotional maturity, integrity and consistent behavior.

The demographic results offer a more conservative interpretation of the results. No significant differences were found on the main variables based on gender; indicating no significant difference between males and females in perception of emotional intelligence, personal branding, customer experience and career growth. Similarly, years of professional experience were not significantly related to any of the main constructs. This is significant as it undermines the notion that the more experience one has, the more likely they are to express a strong personal brand or strong perceptions about their careers. There was only a weak relationship between age and Career Growth / Organizational Impact suggesting that older participants may experience marginally better career and organisational impact, but the effect was small. These results indicate that personal branding and career development perceptions are not solely determined by the demographic attributes.

Care should be exercised when interpreting the findings on education and position. Educational level had a significant relationship with Personal Branding; and current position had a significant relationship with Personal Branding and Career Growth and Organizational Impact. This implies that there might be a link between educational qualifications and status to the perception of professional image, reputation and career opportunities. However, no post-hoc were reported and it has therefore not been possible to determine exactly which education and/or position groups differed from each other. Hence, the results should be used as indicative and not as conclusive. These indicate possible differences of importance but more in-depth analyses would be necessary to make stronger statements.

Most importantly, as the chapter demonstrates, personal branding is a relational and organisational phenomenon, rather than a strategy of only one person. Whilst employees can develop their own professional identity, the value of an employee's identity is determined by their recognition from managers, colleagues, customers and organisations. This implies that personal branding is a matter of personal effort and organisational context. Whilst it's important that employees communicate their value clearly and act in a consistent way, it's also crucial that organisations develop an environment where professional reputation, communication and credibility are fairly recognised. Personal branding can become superficial if organisations only recognise visibility, but not substance. However, when it comes to genuine professional development, personal branding can help build employee development and customer trust.

To conclude, the results of this chapter show that there is a positive relationship between personal branding and career development, customer experience and customer perception. Not only does it make employees more visible, but it enables them to build a credible, consistent and trustworthy professional identity. The findings, however, should be interpreted with caution as this study is self-perceived and correlational. The results do not necessarily show direct causal links but they do show that personal branding is an important concept in the workplace with practical implications for employees and organisations. Based on these arguments, the chapter can be said to agree with the idea that personal branding can make a difference in professional development and customer trust through authenticity, emotional intelligence, communication quality and behavioural consistency.

Integrated Conclusions Based on the Research Questions

In order to present the conclusions more clearly, the following table connects the research questions, the working hypotheses, the literature approach, the research results and the practical proposals that arise from the study. This structure also helps to show how the empirical findings are connected with the theoretical framework of personal branding, customer experience, human resource development and organizational value.

Table 22. Integrated Summary of Research Questions, Hypotheses, Literature Basis, Results and Proposals

Research Question	Working Hypothesis	Literature Approach	Research Result	Proposals
RQ1. What are the levels of Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact among professionals?	The main constructs are expected to be evaluated positively by professionals.	The literature presents personal branding as a strategic, relational and developmental process connected with employability, credibility, soft skills and organizational value.	All constructs were evaluated positively. Career Growth and Organizational Impact had the highest mean score ($M = 4.23$), followed by Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($M = 3.94$), Personal Branding ($M = 3.79$) and Emotional Intelligence ($M = 3.76$).	Organizations should treat personal branding as part of employee development and not only as personal promotion.
RQ2. What relationships exist among the main study variables?	Positive relationships are expected among Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience/Trust and Career Growth/Organizational Impact.	The literature supports the idea that personal branding is strengthened by emotional intelligence, credibility, communication, trust and professional reputation.	All main correlations were positive and statistically significant. The strongest relationship was between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding ($\rho = .51$, $p < .001$), while Personal Branding was also related to Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .47$, $p < .001$) and Customer Experience and Customer Trust ($\rho = .39$, $p < .001$).	Personal branding programmes should include emotional intelligence, communication, credibility and trust-building.
RQ3. Are the main variables associated with age and years of professional experience?	Age and professional experience may be positively associated with the main variables.	Career development theory suggests that professional identity and career growth are shaped by individual agency, experience and organizational context.	Age was weakly but significantly related only to Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\rho = .22$, $p = .024$). Years of professional experience were not significantly related to any main variable.	Organizations should not assume that career growth and personal branding develop automatically through years of experience.
RQ4. Do the main variables differ according to gender and direct customer interaction?	Differences may exist according to gender and direct customer interaction.	Customer experience and organizational behaviour literature suggests that employees in different roles may perceive branding and customer trust differently.	No statistically significant differences were found according to gender or direct customer interaction. This means that perceptions of personal branding and customer experience are not limited only to a specific gender or to front-line employees.	Personal branding development should be offered broadly to employees, not only to customer-facing staff.

Research Question	Working Hypothesis	Literature Approach	Research Result	Proposals
RQ5. Do the main variables differ according to educational level, business sector and current organizational position?	Educational level, business sector and current position may influence perceptions of personal branding and career growth.	The literature links employability, visibility, professional identity and organizational recognition with education, hierarchy and career opportunities.	Educational level was significantly related to Personal Branding ($\chi^2 = 8.42, p = .038$). Current position was significantly related to Personal Branding ($\chi^2 = 8.56, p = .036$) and Career Growth and Organizational Impact ($\chi^2 = 9.21, p = .027$). Business sector did not show statistically significant differences.	Organizations should create fair opportunities for visibility, recognition and development across different educational and hierarchical groups.

Factor-Based and Categorical Interpretation of the Findings

The empirical analysis of the study was based mainly on composite scale scores and non-parametric statistical procedures, because several variables deviated from normality. However, the findings can also be used to form a set of categorical variables for further statistical interpretation. This is particularly useful if the researcher wishes to apply a chi-square test of association. The chi-square test is suitable when the variables that are examined are measured on a nominal or categorical scale, because it compares the observed frequencies with the expected frequencies and examines whether there is a statistically meaningful association between categories.

For this reason, the four main factors of the study can be transformed into categorical variables, such as low, moderate and high levels of Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact. These categories may then be tested against demographic or organizational categories, such as educational level, current position, business sector or direct customer interaction. In this study, the Kruskal-Wallis tests already provided chi-square-type statistics for differences across educational level, business sector and current position. A future extension of the analysis could use Pearson's chi-square test and an association index, such as Cramer's V, after transforming the scale scores into categorical variables.

Table 23. Factor-Based Categorical Variables and Recommended Chi-Square Association Framework

Study Factor	Suggested Categorical Variable	Possible Grouping	Suitable Statistical Test	Interpretive Purpose
Emotional Intelligence	Low / Moderate / High Emotional Intelligence	Categories can be created from composite or factor scores using tertiles or defined Likert score ranges.	Pearson chi-square test; Cramer's V as association index.	To examine whether emotional intelligence categories are associated with personal branding or organizational groups.
Personal Branding	Low / Moderate / High Personal Branding	Categories can be compared with education, current position, business sector or customer interaction.	Pearson chi-square test; Cramer's V; Spearman or regression may also be used with the original scale scores.	To show whether observed frequencies of stronger personal branding differ from expected frequencies across groups.
Customer Experience and Customer Trust	Low / Moderate / High Customer Experience and Trust	Categories can be compared with Personal Branding levels or business sector categories.	Pearson chi-square test if both variables are categorical; regression if scale scores are retained.	To examine whether customer-related perceptions are stronger among participants with stronger personal branding.
Career Growth and Organizational Impact	Low / Moderate / High Career Growth and Organizational Impact	Categories can be compared with Personal Branding levels, education and current position.	Pearson chi-square test and Cramer's V for categorical data; regression for factor scores.	To examine whether personal branding categories are associated with perceived career and organizational outcomes.

This factor-based categorical interpretation does not replace the correlations and non-parametric tests that were already reported. Instead, it provides a clearer way to connect the conclusions with the professor's suggested statistical logic: the constructs of the study can be interpreted as factors, transformed into categorical variables and examined through association tests. Such an approach would make it possible to draw additional conclusions about how the observed distribution of responses differs from the expected distribution across professional or demographic categories.

Overall Proposals for Personal Branding Formation

Based on the findings of the research, personal branding should be developed as a structured organizational and professional practice. The following table summarizes the main practical proposals that arise from the study.

Table 24. Overall Proposals for the Formation and Development of Personal Branding

Proposal Area	Action	Purpose	Expected Outcome
Self-awareness and professional identity	Introduce workshops or self-assessment tools that help employees identify strengths, values, skills and development needs.	To make personal branding more authentic and connected with real professional capabilities.	Clearer professional identity and stronger credibility.
Emotional intelligence development	Provide training in emotional regulation, empathy, listening, feedback and interpersonal communication.	To support the strongest empirical link found in the study, namely the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Personal Branding.	Improved communication, trust and professional behaviour.
Communication and visibility	Encourage employees to communicate their expertise, achievements and professional value in a consistent and ethical way.	To strengthen visibility without turning personal branding into superficial self-promotion.	Better recognition, employability and professional reputation.
Trust, integrity and credibility	Connect personal branding with ethical behaviour, consistency between words and actions and customer-oriented professionalism.	To ensure that the personal brand is supported by behaviour and not only by image.	Higher customer trust and stronger organizational reputation.
Human resource development	Integrate personal branding into mentoring, coaching, training, performance feedback and career planning.	To treat branding as part of employee development and organizational value creation.	Stronger career growth, talent development and organizational impact.
Customer experience	Train customer-facing and non-customer-facing employees to understand how professional image, communication and credibility affect customer trust.	To connect personal branding with the customer experience process.	More consistent customer experience and stronger service quality.
Evaluation and statistical monitoring	Use repeated surveys, factor scores, categorical variables and association tests such as chi-square or regression where appropriate.	To monitor whether branding-related practices are connected with measurable employee and customer-related outcomes.	More evidence-based personal branding and HR development policies.
Fair organizational recognition	Create equal opportunities for employees in different hierarchical levels and educational groups to develop and display their professional value.	To respond to the significant differences found for education and current position.	More inclusive recognition, career development and internal mobility.

Overall, the study concludes that personal branding has business value because it connects the employee's professional identity with customer trust, career development, human resource development and organizational impact. The findings show that personal branding is associated with emotional intelligence, customer experience and career growth, but these relationships should be interpreted as associations and not as direct causal effects. The additional tables in this chapter show that the conclusions can be organized more systematically through research questions, working hypotheses, literature, empirical results and proposals. They also show that the study can be extended through categorical factor variables and chi-square association testing, provided that the relevant data are prepared in categorical form. Therefore, personal branding should be viewed as both an

individual career practice and an organizational development tool that can strengthen credibility, communication, trust and value creation in the workplace.

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Appendix : Research Questionnaire

Questionnaire Cover Letter

Dear participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study that examines the relationships among Emotional Intelligence, Personal Branding, Customer Experience and Customer Trust, and Career Growth and Organizational Impact among professionals working in different organizational environments.

The questionnaire includes questions about your demographic and professional background, as well as statements related to emotional intelligence, professional image, customer trust and experience, and career development. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer honestly, based on your own views and professional experience.

Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. The information collected will be used only for academic and research purposes, and no personally identifiable information will be collected. You may withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences.

By continuing with the questionnaire, you confirm that you have read the above information and agree to participate in the study

Validated Questionnaire - The Business Value of Personal Branding

This questionnaire consists of validated and literature-based scales used without item reduction, in order to preserve reliability and construct validity. All responses are anonymous and will be used exclusively for academic purposes.

Response Scale for Sections B-E:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Section A - Demographic Information

Gender

Age

Educational Level

Business Sector

Current Position

Years of Professional Experience

Do you interact directly with customers in your work?

Section B - Emotional Intelligence (WLEIS)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have good understanding of my own emotions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I really understand what I feel.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I always know whether or not I am happy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am a good observer of others' emotions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I always tell myself I am a competent person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am a self-motivating person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would always encourage myself to try my best.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have good control of my own emotions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C - Personal Branding

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I consciously manage my professional image.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I actively promote my professional strengths.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I try to differentiate myself professionally from others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People perceive me as credible in professional settings.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My communication style positively influences my professional reputation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I maintain consistency between my values and professional behavior.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe my personal image influences how customers perceive me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My professional reputation creates opportunities for career development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I intentionally develop my visibility in professional environments.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I consider personal branding important for professional success.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section D - Customer Experience and Customer Trust

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Customers trust professionals who communicate clearly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Professional credibility positively affects customer satisfaction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Authenticity strengthens customer relationships.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Customers value professionals who demonstrate integrity.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strong interpersonal communication improves customer experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Professional behavior influences customer loyalty.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Customers are more confident when interacting with professionals who appear competent.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A positive professional image improves customer trust.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employees' communication skills influence organizational reputation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Customer experience is influenced by employees' emotional intelligence.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section E - Career Growth and Organizational Impact

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
My present job moves me closer to my career goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My present job encourages me to continuously gain new knowledge.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My present job encourages me to continuously develop my skills.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My present job provides me with opportunities for career advancement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My organization provides opportunities for promotion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My organization recognizes employees with strong professional reputations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My communication skills positively influence my career growth.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Personal branding contributes to leadership opportunities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe professional visibility positively affects promotion opportunities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employees with strong professional reputations are more likely to succeed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Author's Statement:

I hereby expressly declare that, according to the article 8 of Law 1559/1986, this dissertation is solely the product of my personal work, does not infringe any intellectual property, personality and personal data rights of third parties, does not contain works/contributions from third parties for which the permission of the authors/beneficiaries is required, is not the product of partial or total plagiarism, and that the sources used are limited to the literature references alone and meet the rules of scientific citations.