

Effect of Personal Branding on Perceived Employability: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy and the Moderating Role of Career Adaptability among Final-Year Students

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Abstract

In an era of intensifying labor market competition and widespread degree inflation, understanding the psychological and strategic factors that shape graduates' perceived employability has become a critical scholarly concern. This study investigates the role of personal branding in predicting perceived employability among final-year undergraduate students, with self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism and career adaptability as a moderating boundary condition. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed, with data collected from 400 final-year students at a Universitas Negeri Padang in West Sumatra, Indonesia, using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. Hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares. The results demonstrate that personal branding exerts a significant positive influence on both perceived employability and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, in turn, significantly predicts perceived employability and fully mediates the personal branding–employability relationship. Furthermore, career adaptability positively moderates this pathway, amplifying the effect of personal branding on perceived employability among students with higher adaptive capacity. These findings extend Social Cognitive Career Theory by elucidating the sequential and conditional mechanisms linking self-presentation strategies to employability perceptions. Practically, the results highlight the importance of integrating personal branding development and self-efficacy enhancement into university career preparation programs.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Self-Efficacy, Career Adaptability, Perceived Employability, Labor Market.

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1. Introduction

The contemporary labor market has undergone profound structural transformation driven by the convergence of digitalization, globalization, and rapid shifts in industrial organization [1]. These forces have fundamentally redefined employer expectations, elevating the premium placed on adaptive competencies, digital fluency, and professional agility over traditional academic credentials alone [2]. Against this backdrop, the transition from higher education to the workforce has emerged as one of the most consequential and increasingly precarious junctures in an individual's career trajectory.

A particularly salient manifestation of this structural shift is the phenomenon of degree inflation, wherein the proliferation of university graduates has progressively outpaced the availability of commensurate employment opportunities [3]. In many emerging economies, including Indonesia, the structural mismatch between graduates' qualifications and labor market demands continues to widen, rendering academic achievement a necessary but increasingly insufficient condition for labor market entry [4]. Consequently, fresh graduates find themselves competing not only with peers possessing equivalent credentials, but also with more experienced workers displaced by economic restructuring and technological disruption.

This competitive pressure is particularly acute for final-

year students, who occupy a distinctive liminal position in the education-to-work transition, navigating between the relative structure of academic life and the volatility of the open labor market [5]. Compounded by limited professional experience, students at this stage frequently confront uncertainty regarding career direction, job search efficacy, and the translation of academic competencies into occupationally relevant skills [6]. These challenges collectively heighten the risk of protracted school-to-work transitions and early career underemployment.

Beyond these objective structural barriers, the education-to-work transition exerts considerable psychological pressure on graduating students. Confronting an environment characterized by ambiguity, students must recalibrate their professional self-perceptions and frequently report heightened career anxiety, diminished self-confidence, and epistemic uncertainty regarding available occupational pathways [7] [8] [9]. Crucially, empirical evidence suggests that individual heterogeneity in responses to identical labor market conditions implicates subjective, psychological factors as significant determinants of career outcomes distinct from, though interacting with, objective structural variables [10].

This observation directs scholarly attention toward the construct of perceived employability, defined as an individual's subjective assessment of their capacity and opportunity to obtain and sustain meaningful

employment [11]. Unlike objective employability, which concerns verifiable skills and market conditions, perceived employability operates as a cognitive-evaluative lens through which individuals interpret their career prospects [13]. Research consistently demonstrates that individuals with elevated perceived employability exhibit greater career proactivity, resilience, and optimism, whereas those with diminished perceived employability are susceptible to career disengagement and anxiety [12] [13]. As such, perceived employability constitutes a critical psychological resource in the education-to-work transition and warrants systematic scholarly investigation.

A number of studies show that perceived employability is influenced by personal and psychological factors such as professional identity, self-confidence, and readiness to face career dynamics [14] [15] [16]. Professional identity reflects how individuals perceive themselves in relation to their chosen field, including their understanding of roles, competencies, and career goals. A strong and well-developed professional identity enables individuals to position themselves more clearly in the labor market and to align their skills with industry expectations.

In addition, self-confidence plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals evaluate their own employability. Individuals with higher levels of confidence tend to believe more strongly in their ability to obtain and maintain employment, adapt to new environments, and overcome workplace challenges. This confidence often translates into proactive behaviors such as seeking opportunities, networking, and continuously improving skills. Furthermore, readiness to face career dynamics such as technological changes, evolving job requirements, and uncertain labor market conditions also significantly contributes to perceived employability. Individuals who are adaptable, open to learning, and resilient in the face of change are more likely to perceive themselves as employable and capable of sustaining long-term career success.

A growing body of literature has identified personal branding as a significant antecedent of perceived employability. Personal branding refers to the deliberate and strategic process through which individuals articulate, communicate, and manage their professional identity, values, and distinctive competencies to target audiences [17]. By cultivating a coherent, differentiated, and visible professional image, particularly across digital platforms, individuals can enhance their perceived competitiveness and professional credibility in the labor market [18] [19] [20] [21]. However, the relationship between personal branding and perceived employability is unlikely to be direct and unmediated; rather, its magnitude and direction are theorized to be contingent upon the psychological and dispositional resources individuals mobilize in the process.

Among the most theoretically pertinent of these

psychological resources is self-efficacy, an individual's generalized belief in their capacity to execute the behaviors required to produce desired outcomes [24]. Self-efficacy has been shown to shape career cognitions, influencing the goals individuals set, the persistence they demonstrate in the face of adversity, and the optimism with which they appraise occupational opportunities [25]. Accordingly, it is theorized that self-efficacy functions as a critical psychological mechanism through which the identity-affirming effects of personal branding are internalized and subsequently translated into elevated perceptions of employability, thereby positioning self-efficacy as a plausible mediator in this relationship [22] [23] [31].

Equally relevant to this theoretical framework is the construct of career adaptability, conceptualized as a psychosocial resource encompassing an individual's readiness and capacities for coping with current and anticipated vocational development tasks, transitions, and career-related uncertainties [26]. Operationalized through four interrelated dimensions concern, control, curiosity, and confidence career adaptability reflects the degree to which individuals can flexibly adjust their career strategies in response to dynamic labor market conditions. Prior research suggests that career adaptability may amplify the effectiveness of proactive career behaviors, including personal branding, by enabling individuals to strategically leverage their professional identity in shifting environmental contexts [27] [32]. This moderating role, however, has yet to be rigorously examined within an integrated structural model.

Despite growing scholarly interest in these constituent constructs, an integrated empirical examination of personal branding, self-efficacy, career adaptability, and perceived employability within a unified structural framework remains notably limited. This gap is particularly pronounced in the Indonesian higher education context, where the intersection of accelerating digitalization, a rapidly expanding graduate population, and a structurally segmented labor market creates unique empirical conditions that may not be fully captured by findings derived from Western or more economically developed samples. Furthermore, the majority of extant studies examine these constructs in isolation or in partial configurations, leaving the joint mediating and moderating mechanisms insufficiently theorized and empirically underspecified.

To address these theoretical and empirical gaps, the present study advances three interrelated research objectives to examine the direct effect of personal branding on perceived employability among final-year undergraduate students; to investigate the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between personal branding and perceived employability; and to assess the moderating role of career adaptability in strengthening this relationship. By integrating social cognitive theory [33], personal branding scholarship, and vocational career development frameworks within a single explanatory model tested via Structural

Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) among final-year students at Universitas Negeri Padang this study seeks to contribute both theoretical refinement and practical guidance to the career development literature in emerging economy contexts.

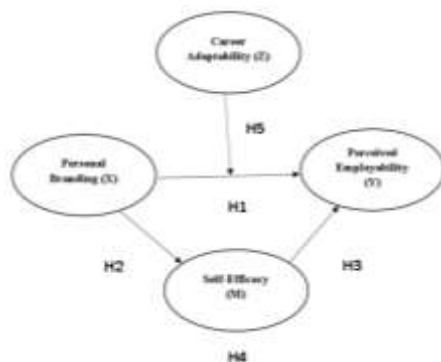


Figure 1. Research Model

2. Research Method

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design [28]. The population of this study consists of final-year students (8th semester) of Universitas Negeri Padang, class of 2022. However, not all members of the population had an equal chance of being selected, as the sampling was conducted purposively. The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling, which is categorized as a non-probability sampling method. This technique was chosen to ensure that the selected respondents meet specific criteria, namely final-year students who are preparing to enter the workforce [29]. This approach is appropriate because the study focuses on a specific group with particular characteristics relevant to the research objectives. A total of 400 respondents were included in this study.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale, intentionally designed without a neutral option to minimize central tendency bias and encourage respondents to provide more definitive responses. The research instruments were adapted from previous studies that have been tested for validity and reliability. Personal branding was measured using three dimensions: brand appeal, brand differentiation, and brand recognition [21]. Brand appeal reflects how attractive and valuable an individual is perceived, brand differentiation emphasizes uniqueness compared to others, and brand recognition indicates how well an individual is known by relevant audiences. Self-efficacy was measured as a general construct reflecting an individual’s belief in their ability to perform tasks and overcome challenges [31]. This belief influences confidence, persistence, and the ability to handle difficulties.

Career adaptability was measured through four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence [26]. These dimensions represent future orientation, responsibility in career decisions, exploration of opportunities, and belief in achieving career goals.

Perceived employability was measured using indicators such as confidence in obtaining employment, knowledge of the labor market, and the ability to transfer skills [33]. These indicators reflect how individuals assess their chances and readiness to succeed in the job market. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS 3 [28]. The analysis includes evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to assess convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability, as well as evaluation of the structural model (inner model) to examine the relationships among variables and test the proposed hypotheses using the bootstrapping method.

The structural model in this study describes the relationships among variables, including the direct effect of personal branding on perceived employability, as well as the mediating role of self-efficacy and the moderating role of career adaptability. This model explains how personal branding not only directly influences perceived employability but also indirectly affects it through self-efficacy, while career adaptability strengthens or weakens these relationships.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of data analysis and discussion based on the research objectives. The analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS 3 [28]. The evaluation includes testing of the measurement model (outer model), the structural model (inner model), and hypothesis testing through bootstrapping.

The evaluation of the measurement model was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the research constructs. Based on the analysis results, all indicators meet the criteria for convergent validity with outer loading values exceeding 0.70. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for all constructs are greater than 0.50, indicating that each variable is able to explain more than 50% of the variance of its indicators [28]. The detailed results of validity and reliability testing are presented in Table 1. Furthermore, the reliability test shows that the Composite Reliability and Cronbach’s Alpha values for all variables are above 0.70. These results indicate that the research instruments have a good level of internal consistency and are suitable for further analysis [28]. Next Validity and Reliability Results on Table 1.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Results

| Variable | AVE | Composite Reliability | Cronbach’s Alpha |
|------------------|-------|-----------------------|------------------|
| X ² Z | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| X | 0.608 | 0.925 | 0.908 |
| Y | 0.599 | 0.913 | 0.888 |
| Z | 0.591 | 0.958 | 0.953 |
| M | 0.558 | 0.918 | 0.899 |

The evaluation of the structural model was conducted

to examine the model’s ability to explain the relationships among variables. As shown in Table 2, the R-Square values of the endogenous variables fall within the moderate to strong category, indicating that the independent variables in this study are able to explain the variation of the dependent variables well [28]. Next R-Square Results on Table 2.

Table 2. R-Square Results

| | R Square |
|---|----------|
| M | 0.360 |
| Y | 0.542 |

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping method to determine the significance of the relationships among variables in the research model [28]. This method allows for more robust estimation by repeatedly resampling the data, thereby providing more reliable results in assessing the strength and significance of the proposed relationships. The results of the analysis, as presented in Table 3, indicate that.

Table 3. Path Coefficient Results

| Path | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics ((O-STDEV)/V) | P Value | Result |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------|-----------|
| X → Y | 0.269 | 0.267 | 0.053 | 5.052 | 0.000 | Supported |
| X → M | 0.600 | 0.603 | 0.038 | 15.853 | 0.000 | Supported |
| M → Y | 0.309 | 0.311 | 0.052 | 5.937 | 0.000 | Supported |
| Z → Y | 0.339 | 0.341 | 0.035 | 9.628 | 0.000 | Supported |
| X → M → Y | 0.185 | 0.188 | 0.034 | 5.525 | 0.000 | Supported |
| X → Z → Y | 0.136 | 0.138 | 0.035 | 3.897 | 0.000 | Supported |

The results indicate that personal branding has a positive and significant effect on perceived employability. Furthermore, personal branding also has a positive and significant effect on self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on perceived employability. In addition, self-efficacy mediates the relationship between personal branding and perceived employability. Moreover, career adaptability moderates the relationship between personal branding and perceived employability.

The results of this study indicate that personal branding has a positive and significant effect on perceived employability. This shows that students who are able to build and communicate their professional identity effectively tend to have higher perceptions of their employment opportunities. This finding confirms and extends previous studies which state that personal branding plays a role in increasing individuals visibility and competitiveness in the labor market [18] [19] [20] [21]. In addition, personal branding is also proven to have a positive effect on self-efficacy. This indicates that the better students manage their personal branding, the higher their confidence in facing career challenges. These results reinforce that personal branding not only functions as an external tool but also affects individuals’ psychological aspects [22] [23]. Self-efficacy in this study is proven to have a significant effect on perceived employability. Students who have a high level of self-confidence tend to perceive themselves as more prepared and having better employment opportunities. This finding is consistent with previous studies which state that self-efficacy is an important factor in shaping perceptions of employment

opportunities [24] [25].

Furthermore, self-efficacy is proven to mediate the relationship between personal branding and perceived employability [30]. This indicates that personal branding does not directly increase perceived employability, but rather through increasing students’ self-confidence first. In other words, self-efficacy acts as a psychological mechanism that bridges the relationship [31]. Moreover, career adaptability is proven to moderate the relationship between personal branding and perceived employability. Students with higher levels of career adaptability are better able to utilize personal branding in facing the labor market. This shows that career adaptability strengthens the effectiveness of personal branding in increasing perceived employability [26] [27] [32].

4. Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the effect of personal branding on perceived employability, examine the mediating role of self-efficacy, and investigate the moderating role of career adaptability among final-year students at Universitas Negeri Padang. The results of this study indicate that personal branding has a positive and significant effect on perceived employability. In addition, personal branding also has a positive effect on self-efficacy, which shows that students’ ability to build professional identity can increase their confidence in facing the labor market. Self-efficacy is proven to have a significant effect on perceived employability and also acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between personal branding and perceived employability. This indicates that the increase in perceived employability is not only influenced by external factors such as personal branding, but also through psychological mechanisms in the form of individual self-confidence. Furthermore, career adaptability is proven to moderate the relationship between personal branding and perceived employability. Students with higher levels of career adaptability tend to be better able to utilize personal branding optimally in increasing their perceived employment opportunities. Overall, this study confirms that personal branding, self-efficacy, and career adaptability are important factors that are interrelated in shaping the perceived employability of final-year students. This study contributes to the literature by providing an integrated model that explains the interplay between personal branding, self-efficacy, and career adaptability in shaping perceived employability. Therefore, efforts to improve students’ career readiness should be carried out comprehensively by considering both professional and psychological aspects simultaneously. However, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution, as the use of non-probability sampling may limit the generalizability of the results.

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