


Is Digital Personal Branding the Ticket to Executive Employability? Exploring Bourdieusian Capital in Latin America

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Abstract

This study analyzes the influence of digital personal branding on the employability of Peruvian and Colombian executives, who are active on social media. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach and Bourdieu's theory of capital as a conceptual framework, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore how executives experience and manage their digital personal brand. Data analyzed with ATLAS.ti shows that strategic digital branding enhances professional visibility and positioning. Findings reveal that social capital facilitates access to opportunities, cultural capital sustains performance through knowledge and skills, and symbolic capital reinforces legitimacy through prestige and academic credentials. This study offers theoretical and practical insights and shows that digital personal branding strengthens employability by amplifying, not replacing, core professional competencies in highly competitive labor markets.

Keywords: digital personal brand; employability; cultural capital; social capital; symbolic capital.

¿Es la marca personal digital la clave para la empleabilidad ejecutiva? estudio fenomenológico desde la perspectiva de Bourdieu en Latinoamérica

Resumen

Este estudio explora cómo la marca personal digital influye en la empleabilidad de ejecutivos peruanos y colombianos activos en redes sociales. A través de un enfoque cualitativo y fenomenológico, y usando la teoría del capital de Bourdieu como marco conceptual, se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad. El análisis con ATLAS.ti revela que la marca personal digital estratégica potencia la visibilidad y el posicionamiento profesional. Los resultados revelan que el capital social facilita el acceso a las oportunidades, el capital cultural sostiene el rendimiento a través del conocimiento y las habilidades, y el capital simbólico refuerza la legitimidad a través del prestigio y las credenciales académicas. Este trabajo aporta implicancias teóricas y prácticas para líderes y profesionales en América Latina.

Palabras clave: marca personal digital; empleabilidad; capital cultural; capital social; capital simbólico.

A marca pessoal digital é a chave para a empregabilidade executiva? Um estudo fenomenológico sob a perspectiva de Bourdieu na América Latina

Resumo

Este estudo explora como a marca pessoal digital influencia a empregabilidade de executivos peruanos e colombianos ativos nas redes sociais. Por meio de uma abordagem qualitativa e fenomenológica, e utilizando a teoria do capital de Bourdieu como marco conceitual, foram realizadas entrevistas em profundidade. A análise com o software ATLAS.ti revela que uma marca pessoal digital estratégica potencializa a visibilidade e o posicionamento profissional. Os resultados indicam que o capital social facilita o acesso a oportunidades, o capital cultural sustenta o desempenho por meio do conhecimento e das habilidades, e o capital simbólico reforça a legitimidade através do prestígio e das credenciais acadêmicas. Este trabalho oferece implicações teóricas e práticas para líderes e profissionais na América Latina.

Palavras-chave: marca pessoal digital; empregabilidade; capital cultural; capital social; capital simbólico.

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1. Introduction

With the advancement of the digital age, job opportunities are mainly disseminated through informal channels, such as social media (González, 2024). Recent research highlights the influence of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn on the visibility of personal brands (Heriberta et al., 2024). Studies highlight how these digital platforms have become an essential tool for shaping the personal brands of job seekers (Geva et al., 2019) and how new practices strongly influence the labor market (Chen et al., 2021). Evidence shows that social media has been essential to the rise of personal branding. Its impact is expected to grow due to its effects on people's employability (Chen et al., 2021; Muszyńska, 2021).

Digital personal branding has evolved as an extension of traditional personal branding, influenced by corporate strategies in the late 1990s (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). It is understood as the set of representations and expectations of others about an individual's competencies and qualities, differentiating and positioning them in the professional sphere (González, 2024). However, social media's emergence has profoundly transformed how people construct and project their identity (Fieseler et al., 2015), thus leading to the growing importance of online reputation management in determining professional success (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2014). In this context, several studies highlight the usefulness of digital tools for marketing an effective personal brand and strengthening professional relationships (Dutta, 2010). Therefore, social media facilitates professional visibility and can boost careers and reinforce public trust when professionals generate thoughtful, high-quality content in their areas of expertise (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015).

Employability, understood as the ability to take advantage of job opportunities over time (Forrier et al., 2009), is central to career management (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017). It requires adaptability, identifying meaningful opportunities, and a balance between personal and professional life (Bailey et al., 2019). In this sense, digital personal branding is not only a proactive strategy for building a public image (Cederberg, 2017) but also allows professionals to synthesize and package their identity in an attractive way on social media to capture the attention of potential employers (Peters, 1997; Trepanier & Gooch, 2014).

Although digital personal branding does not guarantee employment, its impact on employability creates a favorable perception, thus leading to better job opportunities (Minor-Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2020). As a result, it has become a key means for professionals to communicate their skills and achievements to potential employers (Rangarajan et al., 2017; Vallas & Christin, 2018), consolidating as part of a fundamental career management strategy (Gorbatov et al., 2019). However, despite its relevance, digital personal branding has been criticized. Some authors argue that its commercial focus may be linked to unethical practices (Cederberg, 2017) and tends to favor persuasion strategies

(Gershon, 2024). Others maintain that it is a disorganized and overly optimistic construct (Conley, 2008). However, growing evidence supports its impact on professional trajectories (Gorbatov et al., 2021), which helped position it as a key resource for contemporary employability (Minor-Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2020).

Likewise, recent studies, such as that by Kedher (2019), suggest that greater effort in building a personal brand contributes significantly to improving an individual's employability. Along these lines, Gorbatov et al. (2024) highlight that the perceived value of personal branding is an essential mediator in the relationship between personal branding and employability.

Moreover, cultural and social capital have been identified as dimensions of personal branding that impact professionals' employability significantly (Khedher, 2019). Symbolic capital appears as a form of reputation and credibility (Tandoc, 2014).

Cultural capital encompasses formal and informal knowledge, such as skills, general culture, diplomas, language skills, specific attitudes, and personal style (Bourdieu, 1983). In turn, social capital is built through interpersonal relationships and participation in associative networks (Arruda & Dixon, 2007), and symbolic capital is associated with recognizing professional excellence through awards or praise (Willig, 2013).

Despite various studies on the factors that influence employability (Marr & Cable, 2014; Krings et al., 2021), there is a knowledge gap regarding the influence of personal branding on the employability of executives who are active on social media (Gorbatov et al., 2024; Khedher, 2019).

Furthermore, literature still debates whether the way professionals present their personal brands to employers and other stakeholders impacts hiring decisions (Trang et al., 2023). To address this gap, this study aims to explore, from a phenomenological design, the influence of digital personal branding on the employability of directors and executives who are active on social media, based on their own experiences.

This study provides new empirical evidence from Latin America, where research on digital personal branding and executive employability remains scarce. It contributes by integrating Bourdieu's theory of capital and digital personal branding. Therefore, it offers a novel sociological perspective that bridges the cultural, social, and symbolic forms of capital and contemporary professional dynamics.

The research seeks to answer the following questions through exploratory qualitative interviews and understand these dynamics better.

RQ 1: How do executives experience managing their digital personal brand on social media, and how does it impact their employability?

RQ 2: How do Latin American executives perceive the impact of digital exposure of their personal brand on their professional reputation and job opportunities?

RQ 3: What digital personal branding strategies can executives use to strengthen their positioning and attractiveness in the job market?

The study was conducted with executives from Peru and Colombia because the influence of digital personal branding on employability can vary depending on sociodemographic factors (Trang et al., 2023) and the cultural environment (Rosen et al., 2010; Rui & Stefanone, 2013). It also adds empirical evidence in a context that has not been previously explored. According to Rosen et al. (2010), audience characteristics and individual cultural identity influence online presentation; participants in individualistic cultural environments tend to present themselves on social media and be more connected. Furthermore, collectivism can affect how individuals construct and perceive information about their environment, including through social media (Ittefaq et al., 2022).

In the case of Peru and Colombia, personal interactions and the bond between social groups are fundamental, given that they are characterized as collectivist societies (Hofstede Insights, 2024). Varela and Premeaux (2008) highlighted that in countries with high levels of collectivism, such as Colombia and Peru, there is a higher incidence of behaviors linked to well-being, such as cooperation and loyalty. Results of this study provide insight into the influence of digital personal branding on the employability of managers and executives in Latin America. In addition, findings offer theoretical contributions on the relationship between digital personal branding on social media and employability.

2. Literature review

2.1 Digital personal branding

Literature agrees that digitization has fostered new ways of building professional identity, including digital personal branding, understood as a resource for widely promoting and communicating a brand through different digital platforms, generating brand value centered on the individual (Wijaya & Nasution, 2022). Digital personal branding is considered more effective and efficient because, with numerous channels available, the message is amplified when it goes viral. Furthermore, interaction with the audience distinguishes a brand from the rest and establishes better connections (Lambert, 2018).

Regarding employability, digital personal branding is highly relevant, as technology allows employers to find more efficient talent according to their requirements through search engines or digital platforms (Wijaya & Nasution, 2022). Likewise, it is attractive to employers to be a professional with digital confidence and at the forefront of technology in today's digital age (Riley, 2017). As a result, professionals who strategically create digital personal brands exercise control over their digital personas, which makes messages associated with their brands more impactful (Dutta, 2010).

Not only are professionals responsible for managing and developing a digital personal brand, students also need to gain visibility and break into their professional careers (Chen, 2013). This is especially true for those focused on

their professional future once they finish their studies (Dewanto, 2016). As a result, students are increasingly aware that they need to develop their personal brand to communicate their values and excellence, especially those who do not have adequate work experience (Johnson, 2017).

2.2 Bourdieu's capital theory

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory (1983) helps explain personal branding through cultural and social capital (Zamudio et al., 2013), which enable individuals to distinguish themselves and excel in their field (Parmentier et al., 2013). This theory holds that "the investment of any form of capital that people accumulate over time reduces the influence of 'chance' in employment and other areas of social life" (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 46). Bourdieu (1985) compares actors seeking success to card players, since "types of capital, like aces in a card game, are powers that define the possibilities of winning in a particular field" (p. 724). The capital perceived by competitors, collaborators, and employers strengthens access to additional resources, including economic capital (Parmentier et al., 2013). For Bourdieu (1993), the field "is both the space of position and the space of taking position" (p. 30).

Similarly, symbolic capital confers legitimacy on dominance, which often manifests itself "in the form of credibility or good reputation" (Tandoc, 2014, p. 562) and is usually based on professional experience (Schultz, 2007). Symbolic capital is also associated with recognizing professional excellence through awards or praise (Willig, 2013). In this sense, it is closely interrelated with social capital linked to networking (Khedher, 2019). According to Bourdieu (1996), social relations strengthen the advantages provided by cultural and economic capital.

Likewise, Bourdieu's theory suggests a division between individuals who possess a strong personal brand and those who do not consider it relevant to acquire and develop cultural and social capital (Khedher, 2019). Therefore, according to Gorbatov et al. (2019), people dedicated to managing their personal brand have high social capital (Bourdieu, 1993), given that they engage in activities such as communicating their value proposition or informing others of their achievements. Social capital is the creation of networks, business, and personal relationships with others, as well as gathering references and information to obtain support (Khedher, 2014). Similarly, Seibert et al. (2001) demonstrated how greater social capital in access to information, access to resources, and professional sponsorship leads to greater professional satisfaction. Furthermore, social capital is positively related to professional success (Caro Castaño, 2017; Parmentier et al., 2013).

3. Methodology

Qualitative research seeks to deepen understanding of the phenomenon by learning how Peruvian and Colombian executives experience digital personal branding and

the relationship it has with increased employability opportunities (cite). The chosen design is interpretive phenomenological because this perspective allows us to understand the experiences of managers and executives in various sectors regarding the influence of digital personal branding on the employability of executives (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is based on describing participants' experiences about a common phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the phenomenon of interest has been professionals' experiences and the effect of digital personal branding on the employability of executives. The phenomenological approach was chosen for several reasons: first, it allows us to understand, describe, and interpret the phenomenon from the executives' knowledge, meanings, and experience; second, it will enable us to reconstruct events from the experiences lived by the individuals themselves; finally, it allows us to "capture the voice" of professionals to understand their experience.

3.1 Participants

The study population consisted of 18 executives, nine Colombian and nine Peruvian, with different levels of involvement in managing their digital personal brand. Participants belonged to the following sectors: marketing, technology, nutrition, consulting, fertilizers, and mining (Table 1). They all held a graduate degree and agreed to participate voluntarily in the study. Inclusion criteria were being within an age range of 40 to 55 years old and having a graduate degree because it fits the profile of Latin American executives. According to data from Page Executive, in Latin America, more than 50% of executives are 41-50 years old. Likewise, according to a Global Research Marketing (GRM) study, 58% of Peruvian executives have graduate or master's degrees. As for exclusion criteria, individuals without experience in personal brand management, those under

40 or over 55 were excluded from the sample. A stratified (Robinson, 2014) and intentional sampling was chosen to achieve group representativeness in sample design.

3.2 Information gathering tools

Participants were interviewed through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes and was conducted via Zoom. Interviews were semi-structured, guided by a set of questions. The interview guide was developed based on a prior literature review and the script was constructed from a categorization matrix based on the research objectives and questions. This matrix allowed the questions to be structured to comprehensively address the key dimensions of the study, ensuring consistency and depth in data collection. It also ensured consistency with the objectives and the main question.

In addition, the script was divided into thematic sections that flexibly guided the conversation, allowing us to capture participants' subjective experiences and specific strategies to manage their digital personal brand. Semi-open questions were prioritized to encourage detailed responses and avoid researcher-induced bias, thus ensuring the richness and authenticity of the testimonies collected.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, 128 pages of information were obtained. These were stored on a virtual hard drive as a chain of evidence. All interviewees gave verbal consent to be recorded and were assured that neither their identities nor the names of the companies they work for would be revealed in this research.

3.3 Procedures

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, inclusion and exclusion criteria were met. They were approached by telephone and email, sometimes

Table 1. Participants' descriptive data.

Participant	Pseudonym	Country	Gender	Sector	Position	Age range
1	1XP	Peru	Male	Graduate Education	Executive Director	43-50
2	2XP	Peru	Male	Commercial	CEO	51-55
3	3XP	Peru	Male	Mining	VP	51-55
4	4YP	Peru	Female	Commercial	Manager	43-50
5	5YP	Peru	Female	Wellness Nutrition and health	Executive Director	43-50
6	6XP	Peru	Male	Graduate Education	Executive Director	43-50
7	7XP	Peru	Male	Graduate Education	Executive Director	43-50
8	8YC	Colombia	Female	Graduate Education	Director	43-50
9	9XP	Peru	Male	Fertilizers	Manager Director	51-55
10	10YC	Colombia	Female	Wellness Nutrition and health	Executive Director	43-50
11	11XC	Colombia	Male	Wellness Nutrition and health	Manager	43-50
12	12XC	Colombia	Male	Nutrition and health	Executive Director	43-50
13	13XC	Colombia	Male	Technology	Manager	43-50
14	14YC	Colombia	Female	Nutrition and health	Manager	43-50
15	15YC	Colombia	Female	Nutrition and health	Scientific Director	43-50
16	16YC	Colombia	Female	Consultancy	Executive	51-55
17	17YC	Colombia	Female	Nutrition and health	Product Manager	43-50
18	18XP	Peru	Male	Graduate Education	General Director	51-55

Source: own elaboration.

researchers and executives were acquaintances, which made the process easier. The purpose of the study was explained to them, their informed consent was obtained in writing, and the confidentiality of their responses was guaranteed. No incentives or financial compensation were offered for their participation.

Interviews were conducted remotely, via Zoom, and in person depending on the participants' availability. Each session lasted approximately 50 minutes between April and November 2022. Transcripts were done manually to make sure that data was recorded accurately. To keep participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used in all the transcripts and analysis. There were no cases of people refusing to participate or dropping out during the data collection process.

3.4 Data analysis

Data collection and analysis were completed when saturation was reached, and no new insights were found.

Data were analyzed following the process suggested by Moustakas (1994). First, interview transcripts were reviewed to understand informant experiences; second, significant statements related to the digital personal brand effect on employability were identified; third, a new review was conducted, and the identified phrases were filtered and eliminated. This process was carried out with each interview until the thematic grouping based on informants' responses was complete. Codes were used to group the identified experiences, which were previously discussed among researchers until consensus on the results was reached. Finally, textual and structural descriptions were identified and integrated to explain the essence and meaning of experiences related to digital personal branding and employability.

Various strategies were used to ensure the study's credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Regarding credibility, fieldwork was carried out directly by the study's authors. Results were discussed at various stages of the study and compared with the literature to assess whether they were consistent with previous studies. Regarding transferability and reliability, a detailed description of the phenomenon under study and the ATLAS.ti software were used to analyze the data. Finally, protocols were used to collect information to ensure verifiability, and a database was generated with the information collected.

This was accomplished by developing a semantic map, with the relationships and interactions among its components established by prior consensus among the three researchers, a procedure akin to analyst triangulation or peer debriefing to enhance the credibility of qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2015).

4. Findings

4.1 Experience of digital personal branding in executive employability

Digital personal branding management boosts employability but does not replace professional skills.

Many participants believed that a well-managed digital personal brand could open doors in the labor market and access to professional opportunities. However, it does not guarantee employment, which depends exclusively on the candidate's skills. In this regard, participant 3XP commented:

"I believe that a good personal brand gives you access to opportunities, which does not mean you will get a job. You must differentiate between the two, as it is easy to get there but difficult to stay."

In other words, they do not consider personal branding the only factor in getting a job because candidate's skills and talents must complement it. In this regard, participant 6XP commented:

"I believe that managing your personal brand is an important element in boosting employability, but it is a mistake to think that it is enough. There must be other important additional elements: studying, associating with people you did not have contact with before, who can generate value for you, and opening different doors. I would assign a 30% value to the brand."

Participants 4YP, 5YP, 9XP, and 12XC also agreed that personal branding can increase employability to the extent that it gives you visibility, but it does not guarantee that you will get the job.

Participant 5YP commented on this:

"Like everything in life, if you don't talk about things and there is no visibility, there is less relevance or positioning in people's minds. The fact that you are actively showing what you do and that people see you makes you visible to the public, and when an opportunity arises, your name can come up much more easily."

Participant 12XC commented:

"I believe that employability can be increased as you make yourself known. However, as I tell many friends

who are active on social media and unfortunately don't have a job, even though they are very valuable professionals, social media does not guarantee you a good job; it only helps you be more visible."

Similarly, participant 3XP commented:

"You can't win the lottery if you don't buy a ticket. No matter how lucky you are, if you don't buy a ticket, you can't win. In that sense, personal branding is your ticket to getting in. If you're not up to the task, that's another story. Having a good personal brand and being in a certain circle is essential."

Along the same lines, participant 5YP commented:

"You have to be realistic and keep your feet on the ground, because while it is true that personal branding helps you with visibility, it will not necessarily make you more employable. The most important thing, regardless of the best packaging, the best showcase, the best location, or the best corner with the most traffic, is the content. Personal branding only gets you to the interview, but if you do not have content, you won't go any further."

In turn, only two of the 18 interviewees said they were not sure they could establish a positive relationship between personal branding efforts and employability, since if personal branding efforts are not well-targeted, they will detract from the brand rather than add value to it. Participant 18XP commented:

"I am not sure I can establish a correlation. If I make the same connection as in marketing, it is assumed that the higher the positioning or the more advertising, the greater the purchase, but that is not always true. Given that, if the positioning is not right, it can end up saturating the audience and not generating purchases."

Furthermore, recall is not necessarily persuasion. Participant 18XP also commented:

"I believe that a good personal brand can help you become more desirable, since you have put yourself in the spotlight and exhibited yourself, and if everything is positive, you can become more attractive. However, there are many other variables, such as industry knowledge, fees, etc., so I would not say categorically that personal branding guarantees employability."

Research also found that personal branding will help increase employability for certain professions, while it may be less relevant for others. Participant 3XP commented on this:

"For example, an engineer is not hired to be the face of the company; they are hired to perform their job. So, in their case, personal branding is probably not as relevant to their job as their analytical skills or their ability to apply what they have learned. Whereas for a public relations professional, or someone who works in marketing, who needs to be the face of a company, personal branding will be essential, beyond their knowledge."

4.2 Perceptions of personal brand exposure on social media and employability

According to participants' experience, excessive exposure of personal branding on social media generates adverse reactions from the audience.

Research on how executives experience digital personal branding suggests that excessive social media posting does not enhance an individual's personal brand. It creates the perception that the individual is unemployed and looking for work, which is why they are overexposed and spend so much time managing their personal brand. In this regard, participant 17YC commented:

"When they post a lot on social media, I think, 'oh look, they're looking for a job'."

By constantly posting and sharing on social media, the individual only conveys their anxiety and desperation to be employed, which is not attractive to the audience or potential employers. Participant 5YP commented on this:

"I think that any extreme is bad, because spending 3 or 4 hours a day on social media means that you don't have a job and you have nothing to do, and that your mental health is not very good."

Likewise, this excessive management of personal branding on social media by professionals is perceived negatively because it gives the impression that the individual is only concerned with their personal brand, thus neglecting their primary job, as participants 6XP and 5YP commented. In addition, constant posts on social media lead to audience fatigue and saturation. Participants 3XP and 10YC commented on this:

"If you post every day, you'll probably reach a saturation point, which isn't necessarily because the content is bad; the content may be good, but it gets tiring." "Some people post excessively, which is boring, and people don't like it."

Audience saturation due to excessive posting can make them feel overwhelmed and lead them to block or unfollow the brand, as participant 18XP commented:

"The user has the option to block you and not see your content when they get tired of seeing too many posts."

It was also found that the symbolic capital of an executive, based on their power and influence, generates greater tolerance or acceptance of any shared content, regardless of its intrinsic quality. In other words, when the brand subject has a good or high hierarchical position in an organization, they will enjoy greater acceptance by the audience regardless of what they posts on social media. This can often be due to a particular interest on the followers' part and the belief that they can obtain some future benefit or favor from the brand subject. Participant 1XP commented on this:

"If you are an important manager in a large company, you will have a new army of sycophants who will 'LIKE' whatever you post. This is because people often believe they can gain some benefit, such as getting a job."

4.3 Executives' strategies to be more attractive in the job market

Many participants stated that a professional's employability can increase through a properly updated personal brand and being visible on social media by publishing achievements. Participant 8YC commented on this:

"I think keeping your social media up to date helps people get new jobs, even if they already have one. It allows you to keep moving forward and growing professionally. And any achievement or anything relevant you obtain should be posted immediately to generate interest in others."

Similarly, participant 13XC commented:

"A while ago, I decided to organize my social media, such as my LinkedIn profile, and I set out to update it and keep it so. I noticed how this started to lead to calls for me to participate in some hiring processes. I also noticed that some people wanted to add me to their contact network, so updating social media undoubtedly greatly favors professional growth and development."

It was also found that you must be visible and show yourself to your audience at the right time, besides updating your social media profile. Participant 5YP commented:

"Social media is a showcase for your personal brand, and that showcase must be super shiny and transparent, with no curtains covering it, so that we can show ourselves when we need to."

Participant 8YC also commented:

"Every time I start or finish a course, I post it. If I have a professional qualification or an award, I upload it to social media. I need to do this because headhunters are looking at my profile."

Likewise, it was found that cultivating oneself through studies, having a good network of contacts, and being truthful with the information on one's profile can help a professional's employability, as participant 6XP commented. Similarly, networking was found to be essential for enhancing employability. Participant 3XP commented:

"Being in a certain circle, sharing with key people, is essential to being more employable."

Similarly, participant 6XP said:

"You have to expand your network of contacts, associate with people who add value or open doors for you to be more employable."

It was also found that professionals can make themselves more attractive in the job market when they share valuable information with their audience, which makes them leaders in their sector. Participant 10YC commented:

"An individual's employability increases when they become visible and recognized in networks by sharing their expertise on a particular topic."

Similarly, participant 12YC commented:

"The fact that you are actively sharing about relevant topics makes others see you and keep you in mind, and when a job opportunity arises, your name may come up more easily."

It was also found that sharing information in English provides greater reach and openness, which makes the brand subject more attractive to employers, as participant 11XC commented.

Key findings of our study are summarized in [Figure 1](#).

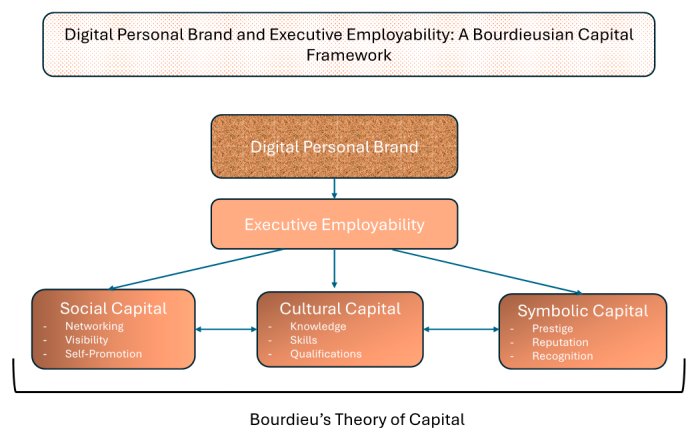


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Digital Personal Branding and Executive Employability, through Bourdieu's Theory of Capital
Source: own elaboration.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Discussion

Given that personal branding consists of planning actions to make others aware of who you are, what you can do, and to give you the recognition you deserve (González, 2024), proper management of your digital personal brand will serve as a showcase for professionals who want to present themselves in an attractive light to potential employers. This finding aligns with the research by Gorbatov et al. (2024), who argue that, with the advance of the digital age and remote working in many organizations, additional efforts are needed to make the work of professionals visible. In addition, developing the ability to navigate social media, access privileged information that is inaccessible to others (Batistic & Tymon, 2017), and build a solid reputation (Arqués, 2019) is the best way to receive job offers (Fernandez-Salinerio & Garcia Alvarez, 2020).

Likewise, it was found that the planned and strategic construction of social and cultural capital significantly influences personal branding and success in the labor market through the symbolic capital of the individual. For this reason, in the strategic development of personal branding, it is essential to build social and cultural capital organizationally (Khedher, 2019; Tomas & Bajs, 2023). The interaction between the two constitutes the basis on which symbolic capital is built. It is understood as the recognition and social legitimacy that reinforce the individual's professional positioning in their field of action.

According to Gorbatov et al. (2019), individuals who deliberately manage their personal brand tend to accumulate social capital (Bourdieu, 1993) by articulating a value proposition and signaling achievements. Such capital, built through networking, strategic self-presentation, and affiliation with key contacts, facilitates access to job openings, often serving as the "ticket" to interviews and applications (Khedher, 2019). In the same vein, Rein et al. (2006) and Parmentier et al. (2013) argue that public-relations activity and visible professional affiliations underpin career advancement. Interpersonal networks provide information flows and referrals that place candidates (Zamudio et al., 2013), explaining the positive association between social capital and professional success (Caro Castaño, 2017).

Moreover, having solid cultural capital will help individuals be more attractive to employers, given their knowledge and qualifications, talents and academic background. This will facilitate their hiring and permanence in the position. This finding is in line with the research of Khedher (2019), who found that cultural capital influences the employability of professionals, as individuals invest in education, training, and other activities to increase their professional success and future income. In other words, cultural capital is a distinctive resource and a differentiating asset that meets market demands, making individuals highly attractive in the professional world (Parmentier et al., 2013).

By possessing good social capital that facilitates access to strategic spaces and cultural capital based on valued qualifications and knowledge, individuals strengthen their symbolic capital, which allows them to position themselves with legitimacy and prestige within their professional field. This is in line with the findings of Ellersgaard et al. (2012), who found that an executive's career path does not depend solely on their qualifications (cultural capital), but also on other forms of capital, such as social and symbolic capital.

Findings also show that individuals with a brand may engage in digital overexposure to maintain an active presence on social media. Far from strengthening their position, excessive self-promotion can lead to audience saturation, diminish their appeal to potential employers, and, in some cases, create the perception that the individual is unemployed due to the time and energy they devote exclusively to their online visibility. This result coincides with Huang et al. (2015), who warn that repeated contact with the same personal brand can cause saturation and generate negative perceptions in the audience.

The study identified key digital personal branding strategies for enhanced employability. First, continuous cultivation of new knowledge and skills increases market attractiveness; this aligns with previous research emphasizing a comprehensive self-inventory for professional development (Lair et al., 2005; Rigopoulou & Kehagias, 2008). Second, social media visibility through achievement sharing encourages sustained activity and strategic showcasing to attract employers and maximize perceived brand value (Whitmer, 2019). Finally, sharing relevant and valuable information positions professionals as thought leaders, enhancing their appeal to potential employers. This reinforces the idea that strategic social media use facilitates influence through value-generating messages, building trust and engagement (Carr, 2021).

5.2 Conclusions

Strategic management of digital personal branding is a key tool for professionals to increase their visibility and attractiveness to potential employers by intentionally projecting their professional identity in highly competitive environments. This visibility is built on three interrelated forms of capital that operate as complementary mechanisms in entering and consolidating the labor market.

First, social capital, the ability to establish and maintain links with a network of strategic contacts, acts as an entry ticket that facilitates access to opportunities, interviews, and selection processes. However, this access alone does not guarantee job security or professional advancement.

This is where cultural capital, composed of knowledge, qualifications, technical skills, and previous experience, allows the individual to occupy the position and generates sustained value over time.

Finally, symbolic capital, associated with social recognition derived from credentials, academic degrees, or membership in prestigious institutions, provides a form

of external validation that enhances both the perception of authority and professional's credibility.

Together, these three types of capital form an interdependent ecosystem that shapes professional positioning in the digital age, where personal branding is no longer an accessory but a strategy for legitimizing and projecting identity in complex work environments.

5.3 Limitations and recommendations

The study has certain limitations. Analysis is based exclusively on the experiences of executives in Peru and Colombia, without considering the perspectives of other actors involved in the phenomenon, which could omit vital elements related to personal branding on social media in the Latin American context. Another limitation was related to the interview method. Although some were conducted in person, most were conducted remotely via Zoom, especially for Colombian executives. The lack of face-to-face interaction may have limited the capture of nuances in nonverbal communication, which could have influenced the interpretation of some responses.

Despite these limitations, results offer relevant insights into the personal brand management of executives and lay the foundations for future research addressing these methodological constraints. Considering the different contexts, it is recommended to explore the digital personal brand management of Latin American executives on social media because cultural differences may influence interaction and brand-building activities. Similarly, it would be interesting to analyze the differences in digital personal brand management experience between executives of different genders and generations to identify possible variations in their perspectives and their impact on the public. Finally, quantitative studies are suggested to explore the relationship between the identified constructs of digital personal branding and their effect on the audience.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence

The authors used Grammarly software for minor grammar and style adjustments in English and an automatic translation tool to produce the Portuguese version of the abstract. No generative artificial intelligence tools were used for idea generation or content drafting.

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