

Impact of Digital Personal Branding on Employee Performance: Evidence from Startup Ecosystems

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Abstract

Personal branding has become an essential factor in professional success, especially in startup ecosystems and the quickly changing digital economy. This study examines the impact of digital personal branding on employee performance in startups in Hyderabad, specifically those affiliated with T-Hub. The study used a quantitative method, collecting primary data from 300 employees using a structured questionnaire. Correlations, regression, and SEM were used to examine relationships among digital personal branding, digital platform usage, organisational support, employee engagement, and employee performance. The results indicate that employee performance is strongly influenced by digital personal branding. Also, the use of digital platforms and organisational support was identified as having a significant impact on personal branding practice, and employee engagement partially mediates the relationship between personal branding and performance. The research mentions the role of organisational support in promoting personal branding among employees. It concludes that digital personal branding is a strategic resource that adds value to individual and organisational performance within startup ecosystems.

Keywords: Digital Personal Branding, Employee Performance, Startup Ecosystem, T-Hub, Employee Engagement, Digital Platforms, Organisational Support

Introduction

Personal branding has become more than a niche career strategy in the modern, digital economy and an imperative professional skill, especially in fast-moving, innovation-intensive settings like the startup ecosystem. As digital platforms expand worldwide, such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram, so do the opportunities for individuals to design and share their professional identity, capabilities, and accomplishments with an international audience. The change has altered classic concepts of career development, placing greater emphasis on self-presentation, visibility, and the management of digital reputation (Gorbatov et al., 2018).

Digital personal branding is the strategic process by which individuals manage, create, and market their professional identities in cyberspace. It combines aspects of self-presentation, digital presence, and audience engagement to turn individuals into brands, achieving value, experience, and authority in competitive labour markets. Research indicates that digital identity is developed not only through individual work but also through platform algorithms, perception, and interaction, and thus personal branding is evolving and ongoing (Smolarek & Dvisendziora, 2022; Demirel, 2021).

The increased applicability of personal branding is also visible, especially in startup ecosystems with comparatively flat organisation, fluid roles, and the ability of employees to bring more than just the job description. Under these conditions, employees usually become brand ambassadors and can represent the organisation online, among their friends, and in their professional networks. It has been discovered that employee-driven branding can increase organisational reputation, engagement, and competitiveness, as well as improve personal job satisfaction and career opportunities (Kanasan & Rahman, 2024; IJFMR, 2025). Such a twofold advantage underscores the strategic significance of employee personal branding aligned with the company's.

Moreover, empirical findings indicate that personal branding strongly influences work-related policies, such as perceived employability and career satisfaction. People who develop personal branding will become more aware of existing career opportunities and make the most of them, thereby improving their performance and professional growth (Gorbatov et al., 2019). The idea of digital personal branding can catalyse improved employee performance in startups, where performance is directly correlated with innovation, visibility, and networking.

Although the significance of digital personal branding continues to expand, little has been done to date to understand why and how organisations are actively promoting or facilitating its development. This is especially applicable in start-up centres like Hyderabad, which are rapidly developing into major technological centres and entrepreneurial hubs in India. T-Hub is one of the most popular startup incubators in India, significantly

influencing organisational culture, providing resources, and enhancing the professional growth of startups' employees. To gain insight into the concept of digital personal branding in relation to boosting employee performance, the perception and promotion of such brands in start-ups operating within such ecologies can be interesting to examine.

Though literature has already studied personal branding in business contexts of entrepreneurs, executives, and job seekers, there is an observable gap when it comes to empirical studies of employees in a startup setting (or a developing economy). Furthermore, the importance of the organisational aspect, namely, how start-up ecosystems like T-Hub promote or traditionally plan individual branding behaviour among their employees, has received minimal attention as well. To fill this void, the current study will explore the same benefit of the digital personal branding effect on employees' performance within startup ecosystems, with particular reference to Hyderabad. It will also highlight the importance of organisational support in promoting this.

Literature Review

In response to the growing digitisation of the professional milieu, digital personal branding has become a strategic choice. It is a process of intentionally producing, sharing, and administering a person's professional identity through digital media. Gorbato et al. (2018) suggest that personal branding is a combination of identity construction, differentiation, and signalling of value, enabling a person to find a strong competitive niche in the labour market. Personal branding has increasingly become a dynamic, two-way process, shaped by the growing significance of digital platforms and by audience interaction and online presence (Khedher, 2019).

Shepherd (2005) conceptualised personal branding as the commodification of the self, in which people position themselves strategically like other commodities. This has also been extended into the digital world, where social media presence, content creation, and network building are part of personal branding, making it an obligatory competency in knowledge-based economies (Labrecque et al., 2011).

There is considerable literature indicating a beneficial connection between personal branding and career-related outcomes. Gorbato et al. (2019) found that the impact of personal branding on perceived employability is strong and that, in turn, perceived employability facilitates greater career satisfaction. On the same note, one of the first theorists of personal branding, Peters (1997), highlighted that people need to engage in lifelong marketing of their talents and successes to compete in dynamic labour markets.

Recent empirical research also shows that personal branding leads to career success by making a person more visible in a profession, credible, and able to develop business and career connections (Khedher, 2019). Additionally, personal branding has been linked to career self-management behaviours, enabling people to manage their career paths and achieve better professional outcomes proactively (Lair et al., 2005).

Online social media like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram have been utilised as the focus of personal branding. These sites offer people the means to build and express their professional identity to the entire world. Labrecque et al. (2011) suggest that online portrayals enable individuals to manage their self-presentation and thus affect employees' perceptions of employers and others.

Moreover, the concept of digital identity has emerged, in which an individual's online identity increasingly shapes his or her career prospects. Researchers suggest that the regular systematic utilisation of digital channels would increase credibility, trust, and professional acknowledgement (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This is especially true for startup settings, where networking and exposure are highly significant for performance and development.

Although previous research focused mainly on career outcomes, recent research has begun to examine the relationship between personal branding and employee performance. Personal branding increases self-efficacy, confidence and professional recognition, which leads to better job performance (Gorbato et al., 2021). Proactive behaviours, innovation, and knowledge exchange are more likely among employees who practice personal branding.

Rampersad (2008) proposed the concept of authentic personal branding, focusing on the correspondence between personal values and professional positions. This high level of alignment is known to enhance engagement and productivity, ultimately leading to better performance. Also, research indicates that employees with strong personal brands are better positioned to capitalise on opportunities, collaborate, and help organisations achieve success (Lair et al., 2005).

The importance of organisational support in facilitating personal branding is receiving increasing attention. Personal branding has traditionally been considered an individual activity, but it is now treated as a strategic organisational asset. Organisations that foster employee development of their personal brand gain greater advantages in employer branding, increased employee engagement, and marketing positioning (Khedher, 2019).

Employees in ecosystem startup worlds are often brand ambassadors because of the importance of agility, innovation, and visibility. Organisational support can also help individuals work successfully with personality branding, training, social media policies, and stimulating thought leadership, which can make a substantial contribution to the success of such projects. According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), any organisation that capitalises on social media by developing a strategic approach to its use can generate value by engaging its employees and sharing knowledge.

Nevertheless, they are still deficient in empirical research on how startup ecosystems, specifically incubators such as those in Hyderabad, actively promote and organise personal branding behaviours amongst employees.

Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on personal branding, several important gaps remain. First, existing studies have largely focused on entrepreneurs, senior executives, and job seekers, with comparatively limited attention to employees operating in startup environments. Second, although prior research has established a link between personal branding and career-related outcomes, its direct impact on employee performance has not been empirically validated. Third, the role of organisational

support in enabling and shaping digital personal branding practices remains underexplored, particularly in structured innovation ecosystems such as Hyderabad's T-Hub.

Accordingly, this study seeks to bridge these gaps by investigating the influence of digital personal branding on employee performance within startup ecosystems. It further examines how startups, especially those affiliated with T-Hub, encourage and support employees' personal branding development. Additionally, there is a notable lack of empirical research addressing the mediating effect of employee engagement in the relationship between digital personal branding and employee performance, particularly in the context of startup ecosystems in emerging economies such as India.

Objectives:

- To test the role of digital personal branding in the performance of startup ecosystems and employee performance in Hyderabad.
- To examine how digital platforms (used by people through LinkedIn and other social media) influence the formation of professional identity and visibility of employees.
- To examine how startups, especially those that are related to T-Hub, promote and facilitate the digital personal branding of their employees.
- To assess the correlation between digital personal branding and employee engagement, and the ensuing outcome on performance.

Hypothesis:

H1: Digital personal branding has a significant positive impact on employee performance in startup ecosystems.

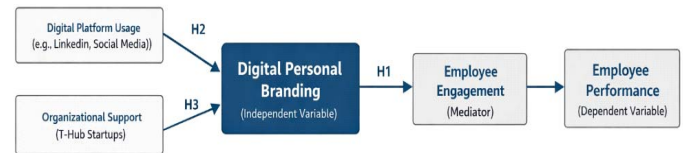
H2: The use of digital platforms (e.g., LinkedIn and social media) has a significant positive effect on employees' professional identity and visibility.

H3: Organisational support for digital personal branding (particularly in T-Hub startups) has a significant positive effect on employees' digital personal branding practices.

H4: Employee engagement significantly mediates the relationship between digital personal branding and employee performance.

Conceptual Framework

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework shows the connection between digital personal branding and employee performance in the context of the startup ecosystems, especially in Hyderabad. Digital personal branding, as the focal point of the model, is the primary independent variable that determines employees' outcomes. The employees attempt to construct and develop their professional identity in the digital realm, demonstrating their expertise, skills, and achievements.

The framework has cited two important antecedent factors affecting digital personal branding. To begin with, the use of digital platforms (LinkedIn and other social media) is an important factor that helps employees gain visibility, build professional networks, and promote their personal brand. The more strategically these platforms are used, the stronger the digital identity is created. Second, T-Hub can be supported through startups, and helping inspire others is one of the enabling factors. Whenever organisations support employees in practising personal branding by providing training opportunities, giving them opportunities to generate content, or passing policies, this goes a long way toward enhancing employees' branding behaviour.

The model also suggests that the presence of digital personal branding has a positive impact on employee engagement, which will serve as a mediator. Active employees who are more eager to develop their personal brand feel more confident, motivated, and engaged in their jobs. This increased involvement, in turn, leads to improved employee performance, including increased productivity, innovation, and overall job effectiveness.

Hence, the framework also implies a direct correlation between digital personal branding and employee performance, as well as an indirect correlation mediated by employee engagement. It also identifies the relevance of external factors, such as the use of digital platforms and

organisational support, in making personal branding practices more effective. In general, the model highlights that the process of digital personal branding within the framework of startup ecosystems, especially those initiated by organisations such as T-Hub, is a key strategic tool that enhances employee performance at both the individual and systemic levels.

Methodology

The current study employs a quantitative, descriptive and explanatory research design to analyse the effects of digital personal branding on employee performance within the startup ecosystem. The research is carried out in the Hyderabad startup ecosystem, specifically among employees of startups affiliated with T-Hub, a highly eminent innovation and incubation centre. The research uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data will be gathered using a structured questionnaire, and secondary data will be acquired from journals, research papers, and other reports that support the theoretical underpinnings.

The research uses a non-probability purposive sampling method, in which participants will be selected from startup staff members who are actively involved in digital platforms relevant to the research topic. The sample size will be 300 respondents, as it is deemed representative and statistically reliable.

The survey is well-crafted, using well-researched scales from the past. It will address all main variables, including digital personal branding, use of digital platforms, organisational enablement, employee engagement, and employee performance. The tool consists of a series of items constructed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Agree Strongly. The questionnaire will consist of two parts: the first will collect demographic information (age, experience, and job role), and the second will include statements about the study variables. Content validity is assessed with expert input, and reliability is determined using Cronbach's alpha.

To compute the data, SPSS and SmartPLS statistical software are applied in the study. The characteristics of respondents are described using descriptive statistics, and correlation and multiple regression analyses are used to

determine relationships among variables. Moreover, the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is used to establish the conceptual model, the mediating role of employee engagement and the impact of organisational support. The proposed methodological approach will provide a strong and central analysis of the proposed hypotheses.

Data Analysis

The current part is dedicated to the systematic analysis of data collected from 300 respondents involved in the start-up ecosystem in Hyderabad, specifically T-Hub-related organisations. The statistical software SPSS and SmartPLS were used to analyse the data and test the correlation between the most important variables, including digital personal branding, the use of digital platforms, organisational support, employee involvement, and employee performance. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used, including mean analysis, correlation, regression, and SEM, to test the hypotheses and assess the conceptual framework. The results are presented in tables to assess the extent to which digital personal branding impacts employee performance and the role of an organisation in supporting and engaging in this relationship.

Table 1 Demographic Details

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	168	56.0
	Female	132	44.0
Age	21–25 years	96	32.0
	26–30 years	138	46.0
	31–35 years	66	22.0
Experience	0–2 years	114	38.0
	3–5 years	132	44.0
	Above 5 years	54	18.0

Table 1 provides demographic data for the respondents, which can inform the sample breakdown. The sample population is predominantly men (56%), with women representing 44 per cent, which means the sample is fairly balanced in gender. Age-wise, the majority of respondents are aged 26-30 years (46%), 21-25 years (32%), and 31-35 years (22%), which is more characteristic of a young workforce, as is typical of startup ecosystems. Under work experience, 44/53% of respondents had 3-5 years of

experience, 38/53% had 0-2 years, and only 18/53% had more than 5 years. It implies that the sample comprises mostly early- to mid-career professionals, indicating that the start-up environment is dynamic and growth-oriented.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Digital Platform Usage	4.12	0.61
Organizational Support	3.89	0.72
Digital Personal Branding	4.05	0.65
Employee Engagement	3.97	0.68
Employee Performance	4.08	0.59

The descriptive statistics for the most important variables under study are shown in Table 2. These include the use of digital platforms, organisational support, digital personal branding, employee engagement, and employee performance. The average of all variables exceeds 3.5, indicating that respondents have a high level of agreement. The highest mean (4.12) is recorded for digital platforms, suggesting that employees use them on professional occasions. Strong positive perceptions are also evident in digital personal branding (Mean = 4.05) and employee performance (Mean = 4.08), as respondents have recognised the relevance of branding to their performance. The mean for organisational support is slightly lower (3.89), suggesting moderate support among startups. The standard deviation values are relatively low, indicating that responses within the sample are consistent.

Table 3 Correlation

Variables	DP Usage	Org Support	Branding	Engagement	Performance
Digital Platform Usage	1				
Organizational Support	0.48**	1			
Digital Personal Branding	0.62**	0.55**	1		
Employee Engagement	0.51**	0.49**	0.67**	1	
Employee Performance	0.54**	0.46**	0.71**	0.69**	1

The correlation table displays the relationships among the significant variables in the research. The outcomes show that all correlations are positive and significant at the 0.01 level. Notably, the results of digital personal branding exhibit a significant positive relationship with employee performance ($r = 0.71$), indicating that the higher the degree of personal branding, the better the performance. Equally, employee engagement correlates highly with performance ($r = 0.69$), indicating that it plays a significant role in improving employee performance. The relationships between personal branding and digital platform use ($r = 0.62$) and organisational support ($r = 0.55$) are also significantly positive. In general, the results support a very strong interrelationship among variables, providing initial evidence for the hypotheses and the rationale for proceeding with further regression analysis.

H1: Digital Personal Branding has a significant positive impact on Employee Performance

To test the above hypothesis, regression analysis has been applied; the results are as follows:

Table 4 Impact of Digital Personal Branding on Employee Performance

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Digital Personal Branding	0.52	8.74	0.000

$R^2 = 0.50$

The findings of the regression analysis aimed at determining the effect of digital personal branding on employee performance are presented in Table 4. It is found that digital personal branding positively influences employee performance, with a strong, statistically

significant impact ($b = 0.52$, $t = 8.74$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that as employees' individual branding activities increase, their performance levels increase significantly. The model accounts for 50 per cent of the variance in employees' performance ($R^2 = 0.50$), suggesting strong explanatory power. The t-value and the main p-value are high, indicating the strength of the relationship. The findings, in general, provide robust empirical evidence for the hypothesis that digital personal branding is a powerful means of improving employee performance in the startup ecosystem. Hence, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

H2: Digital platform usage significantly influences digital personal branding

To test the above hypothesis, regression analysis has been applied, and the results are as follows:

Table 5 Impact of Digital Platform Usage on Digital Personal Branding

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Digital Platform Usage	0.62	9.21	0.000

$R^2 = 0.38$

The regression analysis examining how the use of digital platforms influences digital personal branding is presented in Table 5. The findings reveal a significant positive effect of using digital platforms on personal branding ($b = 0.62$, $t = 9.21$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that employees who are actively involved with digital platforms such as LinkedIn and other social media are more likely to build their personal brand. The model explains 38% of the variance in digital personal branding ($R^2 = 0.38$), which is moderate. The beta value is high, and the p-value is significant, indicating the strength and reliability of the relationship. Given that the relationship between H2 and the variable is positive and statistically significant, H2 is accepted.

H3: Organisational support significantly influences digital personal branding

To test the above hypothesis, regression analysis has been performed, where the following results have been obtained:

Table 6 Impact of Organisational support on Digital Personal branding

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Organizational Support	0.48	7.12	0.000

$R^2 = 0.29$

Table 6 presents the regression analysis focusing on the impact of organisational support on digital personal branding. The findings indicate that organisational support is significantly and positively related to digital personal branding ($b = 0.48$, $t = 7.12$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that when startups, especially those affiliated with T-Hub, encourage people to engage in activities such as content creation, professional networking, and thought leadership, employees are more likely to build their digital personal brand actively. The model explains a significant proportion of the variation in digital personal branding ($R^2 = 0.29$), indicating moderate explanatory power. The significance of the p-value and the high level of beta indicate the strength of the association. H3 is accepted because the relationship between the two variables is positive and statistically significant.

H4: Employee engagement mediates the relationship between digital personal branding and employee performance

To test the above hypothesis, mediation analysis through SEM has been applied; the results are as follows:

Table 7 Mediation Analysis

Path	Coefficient	p-value
Branding $\rightarrow$ Engagement	0.67	0.000
Engagement $\rightarrow$ Performance	0.49	0.000
Branding $\rightarrow$ Performance (Direct)	0.36	0.000

Table 7 presents the mediation analysis investigating the role of employee engagement in the relationship between digital personal branding and employee performance. The findings suggest that the positive impact of digital personal branding on employee engagement is substantial ($b = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$), and employee performance is largely affected by employee engagement ($b = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). The direct impact of digital personal branding on employees' performance is also strong ($b = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$), regardless of the mediator. This provides evidence of partial mediation, suggesting that digital personal branding can improve performance in both direct and indirect ways by increasing employee engagement. The mediation effect was found to be highly significant, thereby supporting H4.

Table 8 presents the findings of the multiple regression analysis conducted to investigate whether digital personal branding, employee engagement, digital platform usage, and organisational support have a significant, positive impact on employees' performance together. This conversation provides a comprehensive picture of the combined effects of these variables on the ecosystem's final performance. The table includes all the important predictors in a single, contrived model, demonstrating their relative contributions and the model's overall explanatory power for predicting employee performance.

Table 8 Multiple Regression

Predictor	Beta (β)	Sig.
Digital Personal Branding	0.52	0.000
Employee Engagement	0.41	0.000
Digital Platform Usage	0.21	0.000
Organizational Support	0.18	0.002

$R^2 = 0.62$

Table 8 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis of the overall influence of digital personal branding, employee engagement, the use of digital platforms, and organisational support on employee performance. The model has high explanatory power, with an R^2 of 0.62, indicating that it explains 62% of the variation in employee performance. Among the three predictors, the strongest is digital personal branding ($b = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), followed by employee engagement ($b = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a very important initiative for increasing performance. The use of digital platforms ($b = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) and the organisational support ($b = 0.18$, $p = 0.002$) also have significant positive effects, albeit smaller. Lastly, the results indicate that individual initiatives and organisational support mechanisms have a mutual impact on enhancing employee performance within startup ecosystems.

Discussion

The hypothesised intention of this study was to analyse how the emotion of digital personal branding influences employees' performance in the startup ecosystem, specifically in Hyderabad and organisations affiliated with T-Hub. The results provide strong empirical evidence for

the suggested conceptual framework and do not contradict the broader literature, while also offering additional insights in the context of a startup setting.

The findings echo the idea that employee performance is strongly influenced by digital personal branding, suggesting that employees who actively maintain their professional identity online are more likely to perform better. This observation aligns with other studies suggesting that the concept of personal branding positively influences employability and career success (Gorbatov et al., 2019), who ultimately noted that personal branding also leads to better performance outcomes. Personal branding seems to serve as a strategic tool, enabling employees to demonstrate their capabilities and gain recognition in start-up ecosystems, where visibility, networking, and innovation are of primary importance.

Another important factor mentioned in the study is the role of digital platforms in forming personal branding. The more active employees are on platforms like LinkedIn and other social media, the greater the chance of becoming a strong professional. This observation aligns with that of Labrecque et al. (2011), who opined that digital platforms enable individuals to exert greater control over self-presentation and image at work. For startups, these platforms not only increase individual visibility but also support organisational branding.

The other significant contribution of the study is the realisation of organisational support as one of the most important determinants of digital personal branding. The results show that startups, especially those related to T-Hub, are particularly important in motivating employees to participate in branding processes. This helps advance the idea that personal branding is not exactly an individual project; rather, organisational culture and systems enhance it. Organisations that facilitate thought leadership, content creation, and online interactions create an enabling environment that complements employees' branding efforts and, in turn, improves performance.

Moreover, the authors examine the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between digital personal branding and employee performance. The findings show that personal branding has a direct and indirect positive effect on performance by boosting

employee engagement. This aligns with theories of employee motivation and engagement, which postulate that an individual who is perceived as understood and appreciated is more likely to be devoted and efficient. Engagement is a key mechanism in a dynamic, high-performance startup environment, where individual initiatives and an organisation's outcomes are closely connected.

All in all, the results imply that digital personal branding is a personal and organisational resource within startup ecosystems. As the workforce gains greater visibility and develops its careers, companies gain a stronger reputation, greater innovation, and improved performance. As an extension of the current literature, the study empirically demonstrates the aforementioned relations within the Hyderabad startup ecosystem. It highlights the effectiveness of structured support systems such as T-Hub. It highlights how startups should incorporate personal branding into their human resources and strategic objectives to realise the full potential of employees and organisational performance.

Conclusion

The research concludes that digital personal branding is a crucial, strategic component of employee performance improvement within a startup ecosystem, especially in Hyderabad. The results show that employees who actively develop their digital identities on platforms such as LinkedIn achieve higher performance, visibility, and professional effectiveness. Also, the research notes that organisational support, particularly within T-Hub startups, is critical to promoting personal branding behaviours amongst employees. The intervening effect of employee engagement also strengthens the correlation between personal branding and performance, indicating that driven, engaged employees are more likely to turn branding into action. Altogether, digital personal branding can be defined as a significant success-inducing factor that combines personal initiative with organisational support in the context of contemporary startups.

Limitations

Despite providing valuable insights, this study is subject to certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the

research uses a cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time and therefore limits the ability to establish causal relationships between digital personal branding and employee performance. Future studies may adopt a longitudinal design to understand changes and their long-term effects better.

Second, the study is geographically confined to startups in Hyderabad, particularly those associated with T-Hub. As a result, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other startup ecosystems, regions, or countries with different cultural, economic, or organisational contexts.

Third, the use of a non-probability purposive sampling technique may introduce selection bias, as the respondents were chosen based on specific criteria rather than random selection. This could affect the representativeness of the sample.

Fourth, the data collected is based on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or individual perception, potentially affecting the accuracy of the results.

Finally, while the study focuses on key variables such as digital personal branding, employee engagement, and organisational support, other relevant factors, such as leadership style, organisational culture, and individual personality traits, were not included and may also influence employee performance.

Theoretical Implications

This study extends personal branding research from individual career outcomes to employee performance within startup ecosystems. It confirms a direct link between digital personal branding and performance, and highlights the mediating role of employee engagement. Additionally, it shows that organisational support plays an important role, positioning personal branding as both an individual and organisational concept, especially in emerging economy contexts.

Managerial Implications

The findings suggest that startups should treat digital personal branding as a strategic tool to improve employee performance and organisational visibility. Organisations should provide training, clear social media guidelines, and

a supportive environment to encourage employee branding. Enhancing employee engagement and integrating personal branding into HR practices can help organisations strengthen performance and build a strong market presence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is proposed that startups should proactively incorporate digital personal branding into their human resources and organisational development policies. Organisations, especially those in T-Hub, would need to run training programs, workshops, and mentoring to motivate employees to create and manage their professional online presence. Content creation, social media engagement, and thought leadership policies should be encouraged to promote employee and organisational branding. It will also be necessary to add that employees must maintain consistent, professional digital profiles that demonstrate their expertise and success. Startups can also use employees as brand ambassadors to improve their market presence. Lastly, organisations are advised to foster an enabling culture that enhances employee engagement, as it is instrumental in ensuring personal branding initiatives deliver better performance outcomes.

Scope for Future Research

The current research offers multiple paths for future research. On the one hand, the research is confined to the Hyderabad startup ecosystem; thus, it can be extended in subsequent research to other significant startup settings, such as Bangalore, Mumbai, or international ecosystems, to allow comparison of insights. Second, the study has a cross-sectional design; longitudinal research could be used to investigate how digital personal branding evolves and its long-term effects on employee performance. Third, it can be noted that additional variables can be added to the research in the future, such as leadership style, organisational culture, and psychological variables like self-efficacy and job satisfaction, to develop a more inclusive model. Fourth, qualitative research methods, such as interviews or case studies, can be employed to gain deeper insights into the practical approaches by which startups, especially incubators such as T-Hub, promote personal branding. Finally, as the power of artificial intelligence

continues to increase, future researchers will be able to investigate how AI-powered tools can be used to develop digital personal brands and employee performance.

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