
The Influence of Start-up Capital on Building a Personal Brand

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Abstract:

Purpose: The objective of the article is to discuss the results of the study concerning the impact of start-up capital and the specific profession a person practices upon the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The review of literature was conducted in order to identify the components of the start-up capital and to establish the relationship between the personal brand building process and the start-up capital. The empirical study employed the survey method with the use of a questionnaire. The study examined a representative sample of Polish Internet users in May 2021.

Findings: The authors proposed to view the start-up capital of the personal brand as a sum of the cultural, social and economic capital. The results of the study suggest that the higher the sum, the more personal branding activities are undertaken. People pursuing professions characterized by creativity, a broad scope of decision-making, and dependent on individual performance manifest a higher activity concerning personal brand building.

Practical Implications: The article contributes to the discussion regarding the viability of the practical application of the personal brand concept among various social and professional groups.

Originality/Value: The results of the analysis and theoretical considerations discussed in this article complement existing research concerning the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building.

Keywords: Personal brand, start-up capital, cultural capital, economic capital, social capital.

JEL codes: M12, M31.

Paper Type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

The personal brand constitutes a concept which has been developed under such a label since the end of the 21st century (Peters, 1997). However, certain practices in the field can be traced back to the antiquity (Scheidt, 2020). The literature features certain terminology and concepts which seem approximate, related to or termed in a similar manner, personal branding (inter alia: Lair *et al.*, 2005; Shepherd, 2005; Harris and Rae, 2011; Dumont and Ots, 2020), human branding (Thomson, 2006; Close *et al.*, 2011), self-branding (Hearn, 2008; Gandini, 2016) and self-marketing (Shepherd, 2005; Shuker, 2014). This proves the necessity for a further examination of the subject matter. The concept of the personal brand has been developed based upon economic, marketing, sociological and psychological theories (Scheidt, 2020; Gorbатов *et al.*, 2018). The literature offers that taking appropriate actions in personal brand building can make any person a brand in any field (Rein *et al.*, 2005). However, the following two questions should be considered: For whom the personal brand constitutes a useful concept? and What enables people to undertake activities in developing the brand? The two questions became the inspiration for the present work. The study was also conducted with a view to establishing answers to these questions.

2. Theoretical Background

The subject matter of the personal brand is not a novel one. However, it remains a relevant and valid topic. The literature of the subject puts forward various interpretations of the term. The term personal brand may apply to a person who knowingly undertakes activities aimed at identifying, creating and communicating values which a particular audience may consider as those which meet their needs to the fullest extent possible (de Chernatony, 2003; Walczak-Skałeczka, 2018). Such a definition is based upon the premise that activities related to personal brand building are intentional.

Building a personal brand is a continuous process. It encompasses several stages whose final step constitutes a beginning for the consecutive cycle. The model of "authentic personal branding" runs in a loop and pertains to the following four aspects of the human life: internal, external, financial and learning (Rampersad, 2010). The Brand Your Name model does not seem to dwell deeply into the operationalization of the process. It focuses on the main phases and cyclicity as one of the most significant characteristics (Malinowska-Parzydło, 2015). In addition, the literature offers other approaches which are not directly based on the cyclicity (Wojtaszczyk and Maszewski, 2014; Khedher, 2015). The model proposed by M. Khedher employs the field theory developed by P. Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984; 1986).

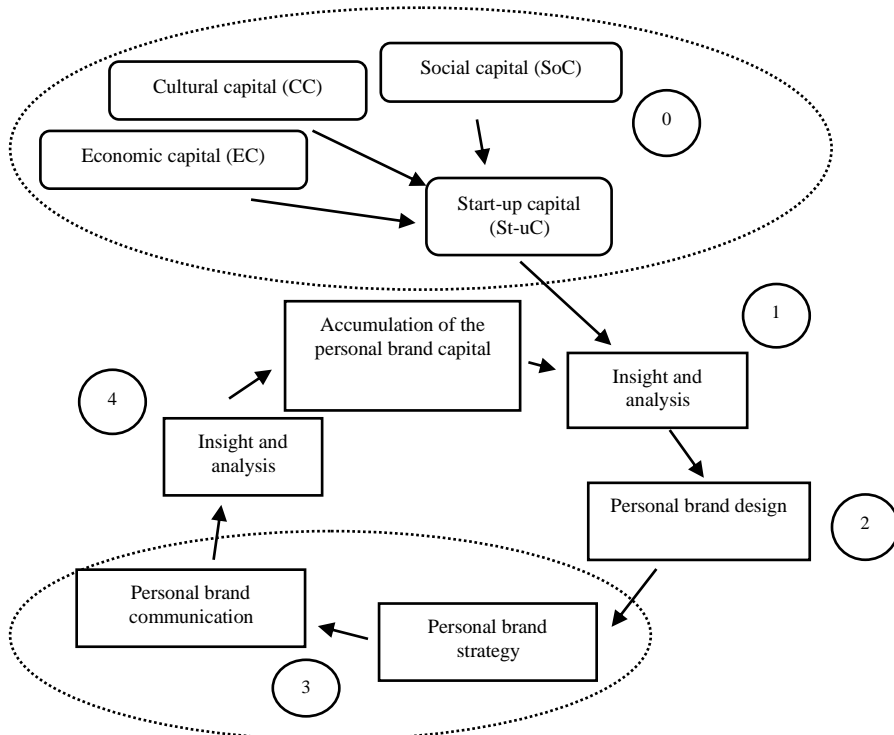
The field should be viewed as a section of the social structure aggregating people and groups characterized by similar aspirations and competing against one another for a position within the field. The concept of the field is inextricably linked with

various forms and types of the field-specific capital. P. Bourdieu distinguished the following: (a) economic capital: financial resources and tangible goods, general state of ownership which may offer a basis for further development, manufacture of goods and provision of services, (b) cultural capital: knowledge, skills, customs, habits, lifestyles, attitudes, dispositions, (c) social capital: resources in the form of networks of relationships, mutual acquaintance and recognition, (d) symbolic capital: symbols legitimizing other forms of the capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

In the personal branding model proposed by M. Khedher, the cultural and social capital are regarded as specific resources whose availability is expected for a particular field and, at the same time, help an individual to distinguish themselves. In such a perspective, the acquisition of adequate cultural and social capital constitutes a prerequisite for success in a specific field of activity, e.g. professional life. In each of such fields, there exists a relatively shared understanding of characteristics and qualifications people who fare well in certain roles possess (Parmentier *et al.*, 2013). The understanding of the field of activity is thus similar to the category of the field in Bourdieu's theory.

The start-up capital constitutes something more than a mere opportunity to fit into a certain industry standard or to distinguish oneself among competing personal brands. On the one hand, the start-up capital constitutes a significant factor in building the identity of an individual, which is linked to the identity of a personal brand (Wojtaszczyk and Maszewski, 2014), and which has become, virtually out of necessity, a reflective project in the world of late modernity (Giddens, 2010). On the other hand, it constitutes a barrier for entering the path of a conscious personal brand building. When the barrier is overcome, or alternatively, becomes irrelevant due to the level of the start-up capital, the capital becomes one of the success factors in the particular field. In a way, such a point of view falls back on the original idea of P. Bourdieu. The concept offers that the accumulated capital may become a tool of exclusion in a particular field (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2006).

A general concept of the proposed research model was outlined in Figure 1. The process of personal brand building is based upon the analysis of the capital at one's disposal, objectives and environment (1), conceptual design of the brand by means of tools offered by, inter alia, the spheres of personal development, communication, career management, and others (2), adoption and employment of a specific strategy in response to the diagnosed challenge (3), analysis of activities undertaken in relation to their effectiveness, mental well-being of the individual and other extra-financial costs incurred by an individual undertaking activities associated with personal brand building (4). The starting point for the process is the level of the start-up capital at disposal (0).

Figure 1. Personal brand building in relation to the capital at disposal

Source: Based upon Walczak-Skalecka, 2018; Khedher, 2015.

Personal brand building activities can be grouped into the following: (a) self-cognition, (b) analysis and strategic planning, (c) continuous targeted development, (d) delivery of value as promised by the brand, (e) personal brand communication. Structured activities in each of these aspects should result in a stable and uninterrupted growth of the brand, in the accumulation of the cultural, social and economic capital, and in the synergy effect.

The review of literature revealed that social media constitutes a research field which is frequently explored in the context of personal branding (Niedźwiedziński *et al.*, 2016; Modzelewska-Stelmach, 2018). In certain cases, social media may constitute the most effective platform for communicating with various stakeholder groups.

However, the authors of the article believe that the media should not be considered as the most significant tool of personal brand communication. In addition, the media should not constitute an exclusive tool for compiling information employed in strategic analyses or other activities conducted at the individual stages of personal brand building. In light of the foregoing, the present study was conducted among Internet users without narrowing the sample down exclusively to social media users.

Questions in the study pertained not only to communication but to a variety of activities undertaken in the personal branding process. The review of literature also revealed that the following professional groups emerge the most frequently with regard to personal branding activities, athletes, professors, politicians, visual artists (e.g., painters, sculptors), actors, musicians, comedians, models, medical staff, CEOs, entrepreneurs, consultants, journalists, authors, influencers, bloggers (Scheidt *et al.*, 2020). It only seems natural to highlight professional groups in which the success of individuals is largely determined by their own creativity and individual performance. However, the assumption that creative professions and those associated with the necessity of building high personal effectiveness imply the pursuit of a broader exploitation of the personal brand concept should be verified.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were posed in consideration of the adopted assumptions positing that the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building is affected by the start-up capital and the practiced profession, and that the start-up capital should be viewed as a sum of the cultural, social, and economic capital:

H₁: There exists a positive relationship between the start-up capital at disposal and the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building.

H₂: No significant differences exist in the impact of individual capitals (cultural, social and economic) upon the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building.

H₃: People pursuing creative professions, with a wide range of decision-making capacity, undertake more intensive activities in personal brand building.

3.2 Research Sample and Research Methods

The study was conducted on a representative sample of 1000 Polish Internet users. Gender distribution was even (499 men and 501 women). Age distribution was as follows: 13% – respondents aged 18-24, 24% – those aged 25-34, 26% – 35-44, 17% – 45-54, 14% – 55-64, and 7% – 65 and above.

The survey method with the use of a questionnaire was employed in order to verify the hypotheses. An original survey questionnaire was employed as the research tool. The following parameters were applied in order to measure the economic capital: declared earnings and the subjective assessment of the respondents' financial condition. Elements of the Measurement of Individual Social Capital Questionnaire were used in the assessment of the social capital (Styła, 2009). The level of the cultural capital was measured by means of indexes pertaining to the readership of books, journals and magazines in print and electronic version, taking

into account the subject matter of the publication, primary and supplementary education of respondents, and selected elements of the following scales of measurement, sense of control (Drwal, 1979), M. Rosenberg's SES self-assessment (Polish adaptation) (Łaguna *et al.*, 2007), future orientation, need to achieve, openness to change, creativity (Broszkiewicz, 2010). The intensity of activities in personal brand building was surveyed at various stages of the process with the use of the Likert scale where 1 denoted no activity taken, and 5 denoted activities taken regularly.

In order to verify whether it is possible to conduct aggregation for a specific block of questions (sum up results for particular answers), the Cronbach's alpha was determined. In the cases where the coefficient equals 0.7, the block of questions may be considered consistent. The Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship among aggregated questions. The Cohen scale, relevant in social sciences, was used in the analysis of the strength of the relationship. When the absolute value of the Pearson's correlation coefficient is below 0.1, it indicates no relationship. For 0.1 to 0.3, the correlation is low, for 0.3 to 0.5, the correlation is moderate, and for 0.5 to 1, the correlation is strong.

The Cronbach's alpha for questions related to the intensity of actions in personal brand building (PBB) amounted to 0.94. As a consequence, it can be argued that the PBB question block is consistent.

3.3 Assessment of the Influence of Start-up Capital on Building a Personal Brand

Verification of hypothesis H₁: Cronbach's alpha for questions pertaining to the start-up capital (St-uC) equals 0.94. This denotes very high consistency and the possibility of aggregating questions concerning St-uC. In order to establish the relationship between St-uC and PBB, answers to questions linked to St-uC were ranked.

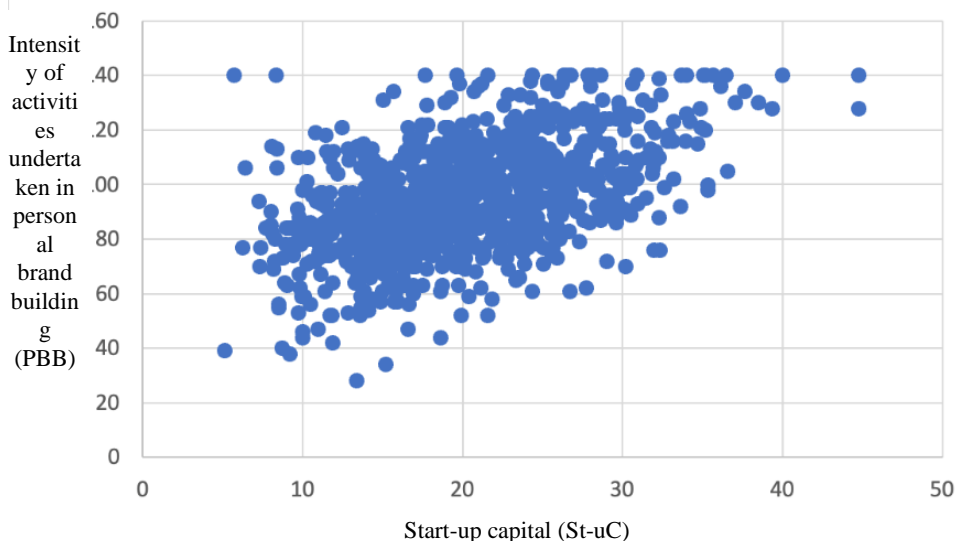
For question "How many books did you read in 2020? Report only completed readings" (CCR1), the following ranks were adopted: *0-5*: 0 points; *6-10*: 1 point; *11-15*: 2 points; *16-20*: 3 points; *21 and above*: 4 points. For the blocks of questions concerning the diversity of the subject matter of the reading (CCR2 and CCR4), the following were adopted: negative and neutral answers- 0 points, *yes* answers- 1/6 point, *definitely yes* answers- 2/6 (the score was set so that in the case if all the answers were positive, a maximum of 4 points for the whole block was recorded). For question "How often do you read journals and magazines (in print or electronic version)?" (CCR3), the following ranks were adopted: *every day*: 3, *several times a week*: 2, *several times a month*: 1, *less often than that*: 0. For the question concerning the level of education (CCE1), the following were adopted: *primary or secondary general*: 2, *vocational*: 4, *bachelor's*: 6; *master's*: 8, *PhD or higher*: 10. The following ranks were adopted for the question concerning

supplementary education (CCE2): 0-2 supplementary studies: 1 point, 3-5 supplementary studies: 4 points, above 5: 6 points. For courses and trainings- 0-2: 0.5 point, 3-5: 1 point, above 5: 2 points. Questions concerning attitudes were grouped into blocks CCA1-CCA6.

The blocks corresponded to the sense of control, self-esteem, future orientation, need to achieve, openness to change, and creativity, respectively. The following ranks were adopted: -2 (none) to 2 (the highest value) according to the intensity of the particular characteristic. For each block, the sum of answers was divided by the number of questions so as to obtain 2 points in the block for a set of positive answers. For question "Do you know somebody who..." (SoC), the following ranks were adopted: *I do not know anybody*: 0 points, *I know but poorly*: 1 point, *I know well*: 2 points, *I know very well*: 3 points. The sum of points from the questions was divided by the number of questions (16) so that the complete set of "I know very well" answers received 3 points in the block. The following ranks were adopted for the question concerning earnings (EC1): *up to PLN 5000*: 1 point; *PLN 5000-7000*: 2 points; *PLN 7000-9000*: 2.5 points and *above PLN 9000*: 3 points. For question "How do you assess your financial situation?" (EC2) the following ranks were adopted: *very bad*: -2; *bad*: -1; *average*: 0; *good*: 1; *very good*: 2.

The responses were summed up and the start-up capital index was obtained. For questions in the PBB block, all answers recorded on the 1-5 scale were summed up. The relationship between the start-up capital at disposal and the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building is outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The relationship between the start-up capital at disposal and the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building



Source: Own study.

The Pearson's correlation coefficient was determined for the above indexes. The value amounted to $r=0.504$. Such a value on the Cohen scale applied in social sciences delineates the relationship verging between the high and moderate correlation. As a consequence, the level of the start-up capital, viewed as a collective level of the social, economic and cultural capital, exerts a positive impact (0.504) upon the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building. Therefore, there are no grounds for hypothesis 1 to be rejected.

Verification of H₂: Cronbach's alpha for the SoC question block amounted to 0.94. This denotes a high consistency of questions. A collective coefficient for questions pertaining to the social capital was determined (ranked as in H₁). The Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between SoC and PBB. The value equaled 0.51. The value verges upon the moderate and strong relationship. Cronbach's alpha for the EC question block amounted to 0.507. As a consequence, questions pertaining to the economic capital do not indicate sufficient consistency to be considered jointly. The correlation coefficient for the EC and PBB relationship amounted 0.25. This denotes a weak relationship. For the CC question block, Cronbach's alpha equaled 0.66. This value is not entirely satisfactory. However, it can be conditionally accepted. The correlation coefficient for the relationship between CC and PBB amounted to 0.45. The value suggests that the relationship is moderate. This means that the impact of CC upon PBB is lower than in the case of SoC. The results presented above prove that the hypothesis concerning the lack of significant differences in the impact of individual capitals (cultural, social and economic) upon the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building was partially confirmed.

All three components of the start-up capital exert a positive impact upon the intensity of activities. However, the impact is diversified in relation to the individual capitals. It amounts to (a) impact of SoC upon PBB – 0.51, (b) CC upon PBB – 0.45, (c) EC upon PBB – 0.25.

Verification of H₃: ANOVA analysis was performed in order to establish whether there exist statistically significant differences between the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building and the type of profession. The following professions were included in the study: designer, artist, lawyer, doctor, marketer, manager, entrepreneur, scientist (1), psychologist, psychotherapist, coach, trainer (2), engineer, service worker, sales representative, specialist other than those mentioned above (3), official, teacher, uniformed services personnel (4), farmer, gardener, forester, fisherman, salesman, laborer (5). Due to the lack of normality in group 5 ($p=0.0027$), the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was performed. The results revealed that at least two means significantly differ from each other ($p=0.0001$). Post-hoc Dunn tests with the Bonferroni correction were employed in order to concretize the differences. Table 1 presents p-values from the post-hoc tests.

Table 1. P-values from the post-hoc tests

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1.		1.000	0.028	0.001	0.000
2.	1.000		1.000	0.756	0.501
3.	0.028	1.000		1.000	1.000
4.	0.001	0.756	1.000		1.000
5.	0.000	0.501	1.000	1.000	

Source: Own study.

The p-values in the table suggest that groups 3, 4 and 5 significantly differ from groups 1 and 2. However, they are not significantly different from one another. As a consequence, the professions can be divided into the following two categories: (a) 1 and 2 – with higher average ranks, and (b) 3, 4 and 5 – with lower averages. Professions from groups 1 and 2 require high creativity, are dependent on individual performance, and at the same time, are characterized by a broad range of decision-making: designer, artist, lawyer, doctor, marketer, manager, entrepreneur, scientist, psychologist, psychotherapist, coach, trainer. The remaining groups encompassed professions representing a lower intensity of the aforementioned characteristics. Therefore, it can be argued that hypothesis 3 was confirmed.

4. Conclusions

The present study confirmed that the level of start-up capital, consisting of the social, economic and cultural capital, exerts an impact upon the intensity of activities associated with personal branding. The higher the start-up capital, the greater the intensity of the activities. Among the three components of the capital, the impact of the social capital is the strongest, and the impact of the economic capital is the lowest. Such a conclusion may offer a departure point for more in-depth analyses pertaining to the relationships. The individual capitals were measured by means of a variety of indices. Further studies aimed at determining their quantitative and qualitative values may be worthwhile. The establishment of the synergy effect emerging among the components of the start-up capital seems a viable further research avenue as well.

The study confirmed the assumption concerning the impact of the profession practiced by an individual upon the intensity of activities undertaken in personal brand building. Stronger activity in this respect is manifested by people pursuing professions dependent on individual performance, requiring creativity, linked with strong decision-making capacity concerning the content and manner in which work is performed.

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